Ike's Letters to a Friend, 1941-1958

Griffith, Robert W.

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Reassured somewhat as to the state of Swede's health, Eisenhower launched into a long discussion of his own regimen and of the still unresolved question of his candidacy.

23 January 1956

Personal and Confidential

Dear Swede:

I was more than delighted to have your letter. It had been some time since you had written to me, and I had begun to grow fearful you were feeling badly and that correspondence was too much of a drain on your strength. So when I found I had two or three pages of pure "Swede," I experienced a great lift, even before I had started its reading.

From your letter I see that I must have previously mentioned some of the difficulties I have in sleeping. Let me assure you that I have no trouble at all going to sleep. For a matter of five hours or so I sleep as well as I ever did in my life. But ever since the hectic days of the North African campaign, I find that when I have weighty matters on my mind I wake up extremely early, apparently because a rested mind is anxious to begin grappling with knotty questions.
Incidentally, I never worry about what I did the day before. Likewise, I spend no time fretting about what enemies or critics have said about me. I have never indulged in useless regrets. Always I find, when I have come awake sufficiently to figure out what may be then engaging my attention, that I am pondering some question that is still unanswered.

So I think it is fair to say that it is not worry or useless anxiety about the past, but a desire to attack the future that gets me into this annoying habit.

On the whole, however, I think I do pretty well in the matter of rest. Almost every day, since my attack, I have gotten a nap ranging from a few minutes to more than an hour. In addition to this, I certainly must average (because sometimes I do go back to sleep for a while after an early awakening) some six to six and a half hours at night. A fellow my age ought to get along all right on the aggregate.

Incidentally, you might be interested in what Dr. [Paul Dudley] White has to say about mid day rest. He is very much against lying prone after lunch. He insists that I lie down at least a half hour before luncheon, and does not seem to be too much concerned whether I actually go to sleep. After lunch he insists that I take an hour’s rest in an easy chair, but I must not lie down. During this hour in the chair, he has no objection to my conversing with a friend or reading papers that are not too full of argumentative features.

My exercise is supposed to include a short swim in a warm pool each day, a walk of some half hour (this I have almost wholly neglected since returning from the south), climbing of one full set of stairs of about twenty steps, and several sessions of swinging my golf clubs even when I am not attempting to play outdoors.

I am supposed to take ten minutes each hour out of every long conference and to leave the room and either lie or sit down by myself, allowing nothing to disturb me. Likewise, I am to avoid all situations that tend to bring about such reactions as irritation, frustration, anxiety, fear and, above all, anger. When doctors give me such instructions, I say to them, "Just what do you think the Presidency is?" Finally, the instruction that I simply have not learned to keep is "eat slowly." For some reason I have never been able just to sit leisurely at a table and take my time enjoying food. I am always hungry as a bear when I sit down and I show it. For forty years I have been a trial to Mamie. She has done her best, but she still has made little impression.
As I have tried to tell so many people, I do not think it is of any great importance just what this job might do to me as an individual. I recognize that men are mortal. Moreover, during the war there were sometimes situations involving decisions compelling temporary and occasionally fairly acute personal danger. I had to become sufficiently objective to realize that great causes, movements and programs not only outlive, but are far more important than the individuals who may be their respective leaders.

But I do think people ought to give a little more thought to what the failing health of a President might do to the office and to the cause for which a whole Administration could be working.

We well know that when advancing years and diminishing energy begin to take their toll, the last one that ever appreciates such a situation is the victim himself. Consequently, he can slow up operations, impede the work of all his subordinates, and by so doing, actually damage the cause for which he may even think he is giving some years of his life. (And loyal subordinates will not break his heart by telling him of his growing unfitness—they just try to make up for it.)

Also, let us remember that at this moment we are not trying to guess how I will feel next January twentieth with respect to four future years, after I have had a full year to make my own conclusions. Right now, still only four months after the first heart attack that ever hit the Eisenhower family, I have soon to decide what is my answer with respect to the next five years.

It is all very complicated, and I could fill any number of pages with the various considerations pro and con that I think have some bearing on the matter.

In any event, it was wonderful to read about your activities and to note that you are going strong.

Give my love to Ibby and the children, and, of course, always the best to yourself.

As ever,

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Despite his frequently stated intention not to run in 1956, despite the clear absence of any threatening international emer-
gency (such as he had suggested, at one point, might cause him to reconsider), despite his advancing age (he would turn sixty-six in October), and in spite of the heart attack he had suffered the preceding fall, Eisenhower nevertheless decided to run again for the presidency, a decision that he announced in late February. This is, despite the many disclaimers, the letter of a man who fully enjoyed the power and prestige of the presidency and who, indeed, was prepared to fight, if necessary, to retain it.

2 March 1956

Personal and Confidential

Dear Swede:

The whole tough business of making up my mind to bow my neck to what seemed to be the inevitable; of then deciding how and when to make my announcement as to a second term; and finally the intensive work of preparing notes from which to speak to the American people, has so occupied my mind and days that I simply had no chance to carry out my hope of writing to you in advance to tell you all about it.

Even the giving of my consent, in 1952, to stand for the Republican nomination was not as difficult as was the decision to lay my name again before that convention. I suppose there are no two people in the world who have more than Mamie and I earnestly wanted, for a number of years, to retire to their home—a home which we did not even have until a year or so ago.

When I first rallied from my attack of September twenty-fourth, I recall that almost my first conscious thought was "Well, at least this settles one problem for me for good and all."

For five weeks I was not allowed to see a newspaper or to listen to a radio. While, within a matter of a week after I was stricken, I took up the practice of daily meetings with Governor [Sherman] Adams and gradually increased my contacts with other members of the staff and the Administration, the doctors still kept
the newspapers away for the reason they didn’t want me worried about stories and gossip concerning my illness.

On top of this, I found it something of a relief to be away from the daily doings of the world, and consequently I did my work from knowledge already acquired, and from official reports, memoranda and studies brought to me by associates.

As a consequence of this hiatus in my understanding of what was going on in the world, I was astounded when I found that even as early as early November a great number of people were saying that they believed I could and should run again! I had a let-down feeling that approached a sense of frustration. As I look back, I truly believe that could I have anticipated in early October what later public reaction was going to be, I would have probably issued a short statement to the effect that I would determine as soon as possible whether it was physically possible for me to finish out this term, but that I would thereafter retire from public life.

Having missed the opportunity to do this (and again I say I cannot be so certain that I would have done it), it seemed to me that I had no recourse but patiently to wait the outcome of all the tests the doctors wanted to make on me and gradually come to a decision myself as to whether or not I could stand the pace.

I wish I could tell you just exactly what finally made me decide as I did, but there was such a vast combination of circumstances and factors that seemed to me to have a bearing on the problem—and at times the positive and negative were delicately balanced—that I cannot say for certain which particular one was decisive.

One—and this has been mentioned to no one else—had to do with a guilty feeling on my own part that I had failed to bring forward and establish a logical successor for myself. This failure was of course not intentional. To the contrary, I struggled hard to acquaint the public with the qualities of a very able group of young men; I will not bore you with the repetition of the story I told you many months ago. But the evidence became clear that I had not been able to get any individual to be recognized as a natural or logical candidate for the Presidency.

Parenthetically, I have just about decided that a first-term President—unless he has been publicly repudiated from the beginning of his term—can scarcely get his own party to think in terms of a candidate other than himself.

Of course, I told my story as much as I could over the television, the other evening, but in any such presentation it was
obviously impossible even to refer to all the types and kinds of influences that seemed important.

For example, I think we have put together in the Executive Branch, the ablest group of civilians that has worked in government during the long years I have been around Washington. If I had quit, no matter who might be elected in my place, there would be a tendency for this band to scatter. After all, two or three of them are even older than I, and most of them have business affairs and interests that attract them to a freer existence than they can lead here.

There was a volume of mail from people who almost prayerfully hoped that I would consider the matter favorably. Only two or three of my friends really urged me to decline, and all of these put the matter purely on the personal basis—that I would shorten my life. Possibly this is so. But it is certainly true that never once in all these weeks of study has it occurred to me that that particular point was of great importance.

There remain several questions about the current year.

The first is that if I am to have a recurrence of this illness, I assume that the possibility is greater during this year than it will be during any one of the following two or three. In my case this would seem to be true if for no other reason than because, in an election year, the tirades of demagogues and the newspaper quarrels tend to reach a venomous level. In fact, if one were not rather philosophical about the things he reads and hears, any sensitive man would never attain that calmness of attitude and spirit that the cardiologists so glibly talk about.

Finally, I am a competitor, a fighter, so if, as normally happens, politicians begin to get scared along about the middle of October and see themselves losing the election because of lack of activity on my part, my own reluctance ever to accept defeat might tempt me into activity that should be completely eliminated from my life.

This I shall, of course, earnestly try to resist, but politicians are funny people and they can certainly paint a situation "scary" when they get to worrying about an election.

When I consider how many times I have been driven away from personal plans, I sometimes think that I must be a very weak character. I think that one mistake I made was in assuming, in 1948, that I had forever destroyed the possibility of a political career for myself. When I finally, in January of '52, acknowledged
publicly that I was a Republican, I realized that I had gone a long ways away from the personal objectives that Mamie and I had laid down for ourselves. Having gotten into the struggle, however, I naturally was not going to take any chances of defeat that I could avoid. I worked hard.

The next time that I had a defeat of a similar kind was when I allowed myself to be talked out of my purpose of announcing, in my Inaugural Address, that I was a one-term President only. However, all of the people who persuaded me to do so agreed that, at my age, one term was all that should be expected of me, or that I should attempt. My recent decision represents another of the same kind of defeat—speaking only from the personal viewpoint. I have gotten to the point that I believe the Constitutional Amendment limiting Presidential tenure to two terms is a good one, even though, logically, I think it is indefensible.

Far more than balancing all of this is the hope that I may still be able to do something in promoting mutual confidence, and therefore peace, among the nations. And that I can help our people understand that they must avoid extremes in reaching solutions to the social, economic and political problems that are constantly with us. If I could be certain that my efforts would really promote these two things, I shall certainly never have any cause for sympathizing with myself—no matter what happens.

I have talked enough and I have probably not clarified for you a single thing that was causing you doubt; possibly I have not even added an atom of information to your own store of knowledge. But I feel better for having written. I am fortunate in having you to absorb some of the offshoots from my sometimes wandering mind—and to get your reactions.

Give my love to Ibby and the family.

As ever,

On the evening of 7 June 1956, Eisenhower suffered an attack of what his doctors now diagnosed as chronic ileitis, and on June 9 he underwent a major operation in which the diseased section of his small intestine was surgically bypassed. As with the heart
attack, the president’s health once more became front-page news. But also, as in the case of the heart attack, Eisenhower’s vigorous constitution speeded recovery. Swede’s letter to Eisenhower was acknowledged by his personal secretary, Ann Whitman. "I merely want to tell you that your letter . . . pleased him enormously and that it will be one of the things he will want to answer personally when he feels a little more like himself." She assured Swede that Eisenhower “looked rosy and not at all as though he had lost weight . . . the important thing is that from now on he won’t have any more of those awful attacks. . . .” Two weeks later, she wrote again, reporting that Eisenhower was feeling much better and “getting back his zest and smiling once again that wide, wonderful smile.” Eisenhower himself did not write until he and Mamie had returned to Gettysburg for a brief convalescence.

12 July 1956

Dear Swede:

Your letter to me in the hospital (which reached me promptly, despite my long delay in acknowledging it personally) really gave me a lift at the time it was most needed. I don’t want to complain unduly, but the first days after the operation were really uncomfortable. But your reassurances, coupled with those of the doctors, buoyed my flagging spirits and got me through three very difficult weeks.

Now that I am here at Gettysburg and can detect a daily increase in strength and vitality, I am ready to put the whole nasty business behind me. The announcement [reaffirming his decision to run] which filtered out Tuesday through Senator [William F.] Knowland was an attempt to do just that.

The farm has never looked better, mainly by virtue of the frequent gentle rains we have had since we have been here, and I have been happily renewing my acquaintance with my tiny Angus herd. Official business, a small amount of "farming," and a strict regime of treatment, mild exercise and rest, more than occupy my days.
I want to write you again when I have more time to myself, but meantime I did want to tell you, before another day passed, how greatly [I appreciated] the thoughts and prayers of Ibby and yourself.

With warm regard,

As ever,

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One of the first crises that Eisenhower faced after his recovery was the nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt's prime minister, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Even a healthy Eisenhower would have had difficulty in preventing this crisis, bred as it was by conflict between colonialism and nationalism, between Arabs and Israelis, and between the United States and the Soviet Union. As it was, during a year punctuated by both the heart attack and the ileitis operation, American blunders helped to precipitate Nasser's seizure of the canal in late July.

In Washington, meanwhile, the House of Representatives failed to approve Eisenhower's recommendation that the United States join the Organization for Trade Cooperation (OTC). Protectionists, led for the most part by conservative Republicans, charged that United States membership in the OTC would harm American industry.

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3 August 1956

Dear Swede:

From a personal viewpoint, the past year has been notable mainly because of unaccustomed illness. It is scarcely useful, however, to make this a subject of a letter to you because my "innards" have been pictured, described and discussed in the papers, to say nothing of on the television and radio, until you,
along with many others, must be heartily sick of the whole business.

Of course, the two illnesses taken together provide for partisan political opponents a very fine platform from which to "view with alarm." Such people pretend to be astonished that I have not rebounded, within seven weeks, from a major operation, to my pre-operational level of weight, strength and physical activity.

I notice that one man has gone to the trouble of figuring out that, due to my heart attack, I was 143 days absent from duty, while in the second instance he figured I added another 42, at least. Nothing is said about the fact that in Denver, within five days of my initial attack, staff officers were in my room asking for decisions, while in my latest operation I had to be functioning again in the space of three days. Actually, after an operation on Saturday morning, I sat up to receive and talk to Chancellor Adenauer for quite a visit on the following Thursday.

I am, of course, disappointed that no other Republican has come sufficiently to the fore in public opinion as to make of himself a possible Presidential candidate satisfactory to the Party. But this was true before I thought of being sick; I still believe that, had I not suffered a heart attack in September, I could have taken much more drastic steps than I did to force the Republican Party to consider and accept someone else.

All that is in the past.

Today the difficult things for me are political, both in the domestic and in the international fields. Nasser and the Suez Canal are foremost in my thoughts. Whether or not we can get a satisfactory solution for this problem and one that tends to restore rather than further to damage the prestige of the Western Powers, particularly of Britain and France, is something that is not yet resolved. In the kind of world that we are trying to establish, we frequently find ourselves victims of the tyrannies of the weak. In the effort to promote the rights of all, and observe the equality of sovereignty as between the great and the small, we unavoidably give to the little nations opportunities to embarrass us greatly. Faithfulness to the underlying concepts of freedom is frequently costly. Yet there can be no doubt that in the long run such faithfulness will produce real rewards.

One of the frustrating facts of my daily existence is the seeming inability of our people to understand our position and role in the world and what our own best interests demand of us.
The other day I happened onto a copy of Mckinley’s last speech, delivered the day before he was shot. In it he argued for more and freer trade, for reciprocal trade treaties—and made the flat assertion, “Isolation is no longer possible or desirable.” What he discerned 55 years ago has grown more true with every passing year, especially as we became more and more a creditor nation. Yet an astonishing number of people today believe that our welfare lies in higher tariffs, meaning greater isolation and a refusal to buy goods from others. They fail to see that no matter what we do in providing, through loans, for the urgent needs of other countries in investment capital, unless we simultaneously pursue a policy that permits them to make a living, we are doomed to eventual isolation and to the disappearance of our form of government.

Now I do not expect the trend of which I speak to go that far. Before a final disaster of this kind came upon us, there would be greater understanding of the facts and corrective action gradually applied. But I do greatly fear that this trend could continue until we might have lost certain important segments of the remaining free world—a loss which will make our future existence more difficult, and possibly even more dangerous.

Many years ago someone wrote a little novel or story, the central theme of which was that the rich owner of a factory could not forever live on top of the hill in luxury and serenity, while all around him at the bottom of the hill his workmen lived in misery, privation and resentment. In comparatively recent years we learned this lesson nationally. As a result, we have the greatest middle class in the world because there is practically nobody in the lowest or “edge of starvation” group. Now we must learn the same lesson internationally—and once having learned the lesson we must study the best ways to bring about better standards for the underdeveloped nations. It cannot be done by grants, it will not be the result of any one specific action.

We must pursue a broad and intelligent program of loans, trade, technical assistance and, under current conditions, mutual guarantees of security. We must stop talking about “give aways.” We must understand that our foreign expenditures are investments in America’s future. A simple example: No other nation is exhausting its irreplaceable resources so rapidly as is ours. Unless we are careful to build up and maintain a great group of international friends ready to trade with us, where do we hope to get all the materials that we will one day need as our rate of consumption
continues and accelerates? Possibly the future chemist will make all the materials we need out of crops grown annually, but, if he does, that day will probably come long after our minerals of various kinds are fairly well exhausted.

It just occurs to me that I seem to be thrusting off on to you some of my problems and troubles. I didn’t mean to do so, but at least you will see that in the approach to such grave difficulties as the Suez crisis, there is a great need for keeping in the back of the mind the understanding of these broader, long-term issues in the international world.

Give my love to Ibby.

As ever,

On the day before his departure for San Francisco and the Republican National Convention, Eisenhower returned to an issue that had occupied much of his attention during World War II and during his tour as chief of staff, that of interservice rivalry. It was an issue that would grow particularly intense during the second term, as the services, together with their allies in Congress and industry, lobbied for larger and larger defense expenditures. These struggles would ultimately prompt Eisenhower, in his Farewell Address, to warn of the grave dangers to the United States that were being posed by the “military-industrial complex.”

20 August 1956

Personal and Confidential

Dear Swede:

The probable explanation for the simultaneous arrival in New York of your two letters, one bearing three cents and the other six
cents postage, is the institution of a new policy on the part of the Postmaster General. Where a subsidized air line is not involved, and a three cent letter can be carried on a plane without extra cost—and space is available—the policy is to pick up the letter and carry it exactly as if it were bearing a six cent stamp.

Not long ago you expressed some of your irritation that anyone should even dream of putting the Services into the same uniform. I won't quarrel with the idea, but I will attempt to give you a slightly different viewpoint toward the Services than you probably have.

So far as I am personally concerned, I should say that my most frustrating domestic problem is that of attempting to achieve any real coordination among the Services. Time and again I have had the high Defense officials in conference—with all the senior military and their civilian bosses present—and have achieved what has seemed to me general agreement on policy and function—but there always comes the break-up. The kindest interpretation that can be put on some of these developments is that each service is so utterly confident that it alone can assure the nation's security, that it feels justified in going before the Congress or the public and urging fantastic programs. Sometimes it is by no means the heads of the Services that start these things. Some subordinate gets to going, and then a demagogue gets into the act and the Chief of the Service finds it rather difficult to say, "No, we could not profitably use another billion dollars."

What I have tried to tell the Chiefs of Staff is that their most important function is their corporate work as a body of advisers to the Secretary of Defense and to me. We now have four-star men acting as their deputies, and those men are either capable of running the day-to-day work in the Services or they should not be wearing that kind of insignia. Yet I have made little or no progress in developing real corporate thinking.

I patiently explain over and over again that American strength is a combination of its economic, moral and military force. If we demand too much in taxes in order to build planes and ships, we will tend to dry up the accumulations of capital that are necessary to provide jobs for the million or more new workers that we must absorb each year. Behind each worker there is an average of about $15,000 in invested capital. His job depends upon this investment at a yearly rate of not less than fifteen to twenty billions. If taxes become so burdensome that investment loses its attractiveness for
capital, there will finally be nobody but government to build the facilities. This is one form of Socialism.

Let us not forget that the Armed Services are to defend a "way of life," not merely land, property or lives. So what I try to make the Chiefs realize is that they are men of sufficient stature, training and intelligence to think of this balance—the balance between minimum requirements in the costly implements of war and the health of our economy.

Based on this kind of thinking, they habitually, when with me, give the impression that they are going to work out arrangements that will keep the military appropriations within manageable proportions and do it in a spirit of good will and of give and take.

Yet when each Service puts down its minimum requirements for its own military budget for the following year, and I add up the total, I find that they mount at a fantastic rate. There is seemingly no end to all of this. Yet merely "getting tough" on my part is not an answer. I simply must find men who have the breadth of understanding and devotion to their country rather than to a single Service that will bring about better solutions than I get now.

Strangely enough, the one man who sees this clearly is a Navy man who at one time was an uncompromising exponent of Naval power and its superiority over any other kind of strength. That is [Adm. Arthur W.] Radford.

I do not maintain that putting all of these people in one uniform would cure this difficulty—at least not quickly. But some day there is going to be a man sitting in my present chair who has not been raised in the military services and who will have little understanding of where slashes in their estimates can be made with little or no damage. If that should happen while we still have the state of tension that now exists in the world, I shudder to think of what could happen in this country.

* * *

Tomorrow Mamie and I leave for San Francisco and what promises to be, for us at least, a hectic and tumultuous two days there. Then Cypress Point—and I hope some rest.

Give my love to Ibby.

As ever,
During the fall campaign, Eisenhower wrote to Swede only once, and then briefly. His secretary, Ann Whitman, also wrote to Swede a month later.

17 September 1956

Dear Swede:

I shall follow your advice and at this moment shall attempt no lengthy answer to your fine letter of the twelfth. I give you merely my own personal report on my health, which is that I really do feel splendid.

On Wednesday evening I am to make about a twenty minute talk on the Columbia Broadcasting System, and the following day I go out to Iowa where I will attend informally (and without a major address) the plowing contest at Newton, Iowa. Then, after returning here, I shall go out to Illinois only three or four days later to deliver a major farm speech.

Give my love to Ibby and the children, and again my thanks for your note.

With warm regard,

As ever,

22 October 1956

Dear Captain Hazlett:

You of all people will understand that for the next two weeks the President is the busiest of men. He asked me simply to thank you for your good wishes for his [sixty-sixth] birthday. Incidentally, he told me the other day his current ambition was to live until he could switch the numbers upside down!
Furthermore he said to tell you—apropos of your statement that he should not get too mad—that he had been helped a lot in this regard by golf. The doctors have insisted that he could play only if he refused to get mad at himself when he played poorly. Actually, he hasn’t had a game of golf for the last five or six weeks; there just hasn’t been time.

Probably you watched the President’s progress through the last trip. Capsule: here it is—Minneapolis and St. Paul turned out the most tremendous crowds I have ever seen anywhere—three and four deep in residential districts (and packed on the sidewalks in the business districts); Seattle, not too many people along the motorcade route but an intensely enthusiastic audience at the Rally. [Republican senatorial candidate Arthur B.] Langlie seems to be in trouble, as incidentally, does [former Secretary of the Interior Douglas] Mckay [who resigned to challenge Democratic incumbent Wayne Morse]. Portland was again wildly enthusiastic, and of course, Los Angeles outdid itself as only that city can in screwballs and glamor and enthusiasm.

The President took the whole thing in that magnificent stride of his, while the lesser of us felt an inclination at times to fall by the wayside. But we all returned, pretty much in pieces, but here at least.

The President will write you, I know, once this whole fracas is over. Meantime, you know he is thinking of you.

Sincerely,

[Ann C. Whitman]

In regard to the Middle East, Eisenhower’s repeated efforts to reach a peaceful settlement to the Suez crisis were frustrated, and Great Britain, France, and Israel began to make secret preparations for armed intervention. Their plan was for Israel to attack Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula, which would then become the pretext for an Anglo-French invasion to “protect” the canal from the two combatants, Egypt and Israel. The Israeli attack began on October
29, in the midst of a two-week period marked also by the abortive uprising in Hungary and by the election in the United States.

Eisenhower, whom the British and French had sought to deceive, responded coolly and deliberately. "We cannot and we will not condone armed aggression," he declared, "no matter who the attacker, and no matter who the victim." When British and French troops landed at the northern end of the canal a few days later, he quickly moved to tighten economic and political pressure on his former allies. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, issued threatening warnings to Britain, France, and Israel. Faced with opposition from both Russia and the United States, the British and French soon capitulated, agreeing to a cease-fire and a negotiated withdrawal.

Meanwhile, in the election, Eisenhower won by a landslide, easily defeating Adlai Stevenson and his running mate, Tennessee's Senator Estes Kefauver. The Democrats, however, as Eisenhower seems to have anticipated, retained control of both the House and the Senate.

2 November 1956

PERSONAL

Dear Swede:

Except for an informal appearance on a "Round-up" telecast from 11 to 12 o'clock on Election Eve, I have finished my campaigning. It became too difficult for me to keep in touch with the various items of information that pour constantly into Washington from Europe and the Mid East and at the same time carry on the hectic activities of actual campaigning.

It is not difficult at all to operate efficiently in carrying on Presidential functions from any other point in the United States, if there is opportunity to set up the kind of communications required. But when I am gone from here for a period of eight to twelve hours, or up to two to three days, with no communications
available other than commercial telephone, it becomes much more
difficult, especially so with a world situation such as now exists.

But there is another reason that I decided to do no more in this
campaign. Up until a few months ago, I had set my face deter-
minedly against any campaigning except for three or four televi-
sion speeches to be given in a Washington studio. Some weeks
back, however, a lot of people in the Administration came to
believe that the distortions and half truths peddled by Stevenson
and Kefauver had to be answered—and that no speaker of ours,
other than myself, could gain a sufficient audience to answer them
effectively.

So I took to the speaking trail, first to call the hand of the
opponents on some of the wild things they were saying, and
secondly, to awaken the American people to the importance of the
contest and to the realization that each of them should record his
own decision.

This I think has been done. So in my last evening's talk, in
Philadelphia, I confined myself to laying out the approach I have
employed since 1952 to the whole problem of foreign relations and
how I would approach it in the future if the American people want
me to continue.

Actually, unless I win by a comfortable majority (one that
could not be significantly increased or decreased in the next few
days by any amount of speaking on either side), I would not want
to be elected at all. This is for a few simple reasons, even though I
believe that the Stevenson-Kefauver combination is, in some ways,
about the sorriest and weakest we have ever had run for the two
top offices in the land.

My first reason is that I still have a job of re-forming and re-
vamping the Republican Party. Since by the Constitution this is my
final term, my influence in these next four years with my own
party is going to be determined by their feeling as to how popular I
am with the multitudes. If they feel that my support will be a real
asset in the next election they, individually and as a party, will be
disposed to go in the direction that I advocate. If, on the contrary,
they think that politically I am a rapidly "waning" star, then they
would be disposed to take the bit in their teeth regardless of my
opinions.

My second reason is that in any event, whether or not we win
control of one or both Houses of the Congress, the division is
certain to be very close. In almost every project some Democratic
help will be absolutely necessary to get it accomplished. Again this strength can be marshalled, on both sides of the aisle, only if it is generally believed that I am in a position to go to the people over the heads of the Congressmen—and either help them or cause them trouble in their districts.

For these two reasons I think that my only opportunity for doing anything really worthwhile is to win by a comfortable majority. This belief, incidentally, was an additional reason for my deciding to do a bit of traveling in the campaign. It also offered me a chance to prove to the American people that I am a rather healthy individual.

I had planned two more trips—one for last Wednesday when I was going to stop at the airfields in Dallas, Oklahoma City and Memphis, and the other for the last day of the campaign when I expected to stop in Hartford, Connecticut, and Boston, Massachusetts. These I cancelled, mostly because of preoccupation with official business.

The Mid East thing is a terrible mess. Ever since July twenty-sixth, when Nasser took over the Canal, I have argued for a negotiated settlement. It does not seem to me that there is present in the case anything that justifies the action that Britain, France and Israel apparently concerted among themselves and have initiated.

The 1888 Treaty says nothing at all as to how the Canal is to be operated, although it did recognize the existence of the "Concession" dating, I believe, from 1868. I think, therefore, that no one could question the legal right of Egypt to nationalize the Canal Company. And what really became the apparent or legal bone of contention was, "Shall the world’s users of the Canal, which is guaranteed as an international waterway in perpetuity, be privileged to use the Canal only on the sufferance of a single nation?" Even this, in my opinion, is not the real heart of the matter.

The real point is that Britain, France and Israel had come to believe—probably correctly—that Nasser was their worst enemy in the Mid East and that until he was removed or deflated, they would have no peace. I do not quarrel with the idea that there is justification for such fears, but I have insisted long and earnestly that you cannot resort to force in international relationships because of your fear of what might happen in the future. In short, I think the British and French seized upon a very poor vehicle to use in bringing Nasser to terms.
Of course, nothing in the region would be so difficult to solve except for the underlying cause of the unrest and dissension that exists there—that is, the Arab-Israel quarrel. This quarrel seems to have no limit either in intensity or in scope. Everybody in the Moslem and Jewish worlds is affected by it. It is so intense that the second any action is taken against one Arab state, by an outsider, all the other Arab and Moslem states seem to regard it as a Jewish plot and react violently. All this complicates the situation enormously.

As we began to uncover evidence that something was building up in Israel, we demanded pledges from [Prime Minister David] Ben-Gurion that he would keep the peace. We realized that he might think he could take advantage of this country because of the approaching election and because of the importance that so many politicians in the past have attached to our Jewish vote. I gave strict orders to the State Department that they should inform Israel that we would handle our affairs exactly as though we didn’t have a Jew in America. The welfare and best interests of our own country were to be the sole criteria on which we operated.

I think that France and Britain have made a terrible mistake. Because they had such a poor case, they have isolated themselves from the good opinion of the world and it will take them many years to recover. France was perfectly cold-blooded about the matter. She has a war on her hands in Algeria, and she was anxious to get someone else fighting the Arabs on her Eastern flank so she was ready to do anything to get England and Israel in that affair. But I think the other two countries have hurt themselves immeasurably and this is something of a sad blow because, quite naturally, Britain not only has been, but must be, our best friend in the world.

Only a star-gazer could tell how the whole thing is going to come out. But I can tell you one thing. The existence of this problem does not make sleeping any easier—not merely because of the things I recite above, but because of the opportunities that we have handed to the Russians. I don’t know what the final action of the United Nations on this matter will be. We are struggling to get a simple cease-fire and, with it, compulsion on both sides to start negotiations regarding the Canal, withdrawal of troops, and even proper reparations. But the possibility that both sides will accept some compromise solution does not look very bright, and every
day the hostilities continue the Soviets have an additional chance
to embarrass the Western world beyond measure.

All these thoughts I communicated to [Sir Anthony] Eden
[British prime minister] time and again. It was undoubtedly
because of his knowledge of our bitter opposition to using force in
the matter that when he finally decided to undertake the plan, he
just went completely silent. Actually, the British had partially
dispersed some of their concentrations in the Mid East and, while
we knew the trouble was not over, we did think that, so far as
Britain and France were concerned, there was some easing of the
situation.

Just one more thought before I close this long letter. There is
some reason to believe that the plan, when actually put into effect,
was not well coordinated. It looks as if the Israelis mobilized pretty
rapidly and apparently got ready to attack before the others were
immediately ready to follow up, using the Israeli attack as an
excuse to “protect” the Canal. In any event, British and French
troops, so far as I know, have not yet landed in Egypt. Apparently
there has been bombing of airfields, nothing else.

If you have any bright ideas for settling the dispute, I, of
course, would be delighted to have them. From what I am told,
[newspaper columnists] Walter Lippmann and the Alsops [Stewart
and Joseph] have lots of ideas, but they are far from good—about
what you would expect from your youngest grandchild.

Give my love to Ibby and the family.

As ever,