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# THE 1940 RNC

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TUMUN IX

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## Letter From the Crisis Director

Dear Delegates,

My name is Nate Stewart, and I am a freshman at Tufts from Richmond, Virginia, and I am majoring in Political Science and International Relations. I am incredibly excited to be serving as this committee's crisis director. This is my eighth year participating in Model UN but my first at the college level.

The 1940 Republican National Convention was an incredibly transformative moment in the history of American politics. Prior to the convention, the GOP was still reeling from their landslide defeats in 1932 and 1936 and needed significant high-level changes to reestablish the party as a legitimate political force. Additionally, the Republicans faced a challenge never seen in American history, preventing a three-term president.

Though the 1940 RNC is often overlooked by traditional history courses, this event was nothing short of transformative in the history of American electoral politics. In addition, the uncertainty and intrigue surrounding the major players at the convention should provide delegates with several opportunities to alter the course of events in their favor.

If you have any questions relating to the committee or a specific position, please do not hesitate to email me. I look forward to meeting you all in March!

Best,

Nate Stewart

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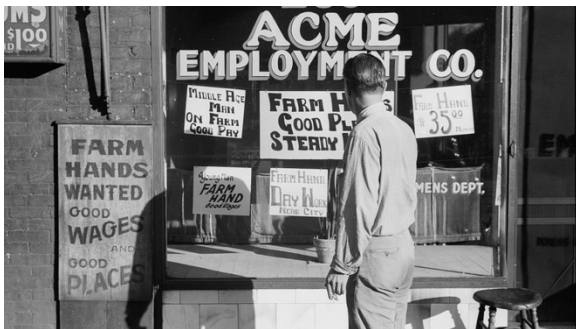
## Technology Policy

Out of the spirit of being historically accurate, there will be limitations on the use of technology in the committee. During moderate caucuses and debate, computers are not allowed. Your attention should be on the person speaking and the happenings of committee. However, you can use technology during unmoderated caucuses.

## America in the 1930s and the Roosevelt Administration

The first seeds of the chaos which would mark the 1940 Republican Convention became implanted over a decade before delegates were dispatched to the Philadelphia Convention Hall. In 1929, during the administration of Republican President Herbert Hoover, the once-booming stock market crashed, leaving the global economy struggling. This began the Great Depression, a period spanning over a decade in American history marked by significant unemployment, poverty, and business failures.

## The Great Depression and the New Deal



Immediately following the Stock Market Crash, President Hoover was reluctant to respond to the depression in any way. He initially chose to merely meet with US business leaders and secure handshake agreements in order to speed up private construction projects and prevent a lowering of wages in response to the upcoming decline in profits in order to maintain a steady base of consumer spending. While Hoover's privatized response initially bore fruit, with economic indicators pointing towards a recovery in the first quarter of 1930, the rise of the Dust Bowl—the most significant drought in US history—hampered successes as dry conditions hurt farmers in thirty states. Hoover, once again, championed a muted government response to the crisis; however, this time his plan

failed. Consumers cut spending, leading the businesses to cut industry and workers.<sup>1</sup>

Hoover attempted to increase his response to the depression through public works programs and local relief organizations, but he was publicly lambasted at every turn. As Hoover's administration ended, economic indicators continued to trend downward, and Hoover struggled in the press. Because of the failures of the Hoover administration, the Republican Party became seen as the party of pessimism and defeat, while Franklin D. Roosevelt's Democratic Party represented a new, optimistic vision to the electorate. This led to a landslide in the Presidential election of 1932, in which Roosevelt carried 42 of the 48 states.<sup>2</sup>

Following 1932, Roosevelt took a much more aggressive approach to combating the Great Depression.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Great Depression," Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://hoover.archives.gov/exhibits/great-depression>.

Roosevelt's first hundred days in office were some of the most active in US history as he sought to quickly institute many of his "New Deal" programs. Roosevelt's first major action was to declare a banking holiday to halt the bank runs which had plagued the US since 1929. Additionally, Roosevelt quickly began to establish the first of his "Alphabet Agencies" such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) which were the primary method by which Roosevelt implemented New Deal Programs. These programs worked in a myriad of different ways, but the most prominently utilized strategies were price stabilization, the creation of social safety nets, and job creation through public works. Between 1932 and 1940, the New Deal saw significant degrees of success and built a powerful electoral coalition that represents a

<sup>2</sup> "The Great," Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum.

significant challenge for any Republican candidate to overcome.<sup>3</sup>

## The War Situation in Europe and American Neutrality

Beyond the Great Depression, the other major issue facing American leaders in 1940 is the rise of Nazi Germany and the rapidly escalating war in Europe. With Paris falling to the Nazis just days before the beginning of the Republican National Convention, there was significant uncertainty among the American population over if America would soon be drawn into the war in Europe on the side of their Democratic allies.<sup>4</sup> This uncertainty was shared by Republican leaders, who were deeply divided over whether they should support their allies in Europe or remain neutral.<sup>5</sup>



Despite the long odds facing the US' Democratic Allies in Europe, US popular opinion would still not allow for American involvement in a significant military conflict abroad. Many Americans simply were not ready for another foreign conflict. Following the German Invasion of Poland in 1939 and their continued expansion in 1940, President Roosevelt attempted to provide support in what ways he was legally allowed, but this was heavily limited by the Neutrality Act of 1939. By 1940, Roosevelt's main way of

<sup>3</sup> "Great Depression Facts," FDR Presidential Library, last modified 2016, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/great-depression-facts>.

<sup>4</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "German Invasion of Western Europe, May 1940," United State Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed

January 14, 2025, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/german-invasion-of-western-europe-may-1940>.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of State, "American Isolationism in the 1930s," Office of the Historian, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/american-isolationism>.

supporting American Allies in Europe was a system of “cash and carry” arms sales to help replenish the quickly diminishing stockpiles of the British and French. Though this inefficient system was unlikely to hold off the Germans for long, a diverse alliance of isolationists consistently prevented Roosevelt from doing anything more.<sup>6</sup>

## The Republican Party in 1940

Following the historic landslide defeat of Alf Landon in 1936, the Republican Party was plunged into chaos. The party immediately entered a period of bickering between different factions. The most prominent conflict within the party was over foreign policy. While many in the party, the so-called Internationalists, supported a more active role for America in the world,

isolationists – on the other side – opposed any American engagement abroad. The conflict between the internationalists and isolationists came to a head over American involvement in World War II. The party was deeply divided over support for policies like the Neutrality Acts in 1937 and 1939, with Western, more Conservative Republicans trending towards more isolationist positions, while Northeastern, progressive Republicans were more internationalist.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the party also faced significant questions over what New Deal policies they were willing to accept in the name of economic recovery and which they were unwilling to allow due to government overreach.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State, "The Neutrality Acts, 1930s," Office of the Historian, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/neutrality-acts>.

<sup>7</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "The United States: Isolation-Intervention," United State Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed January 14, 2025,

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-united-states-isolation-intervention>.

<sup>8</sup> Ray Hill, "The Minority Leader: Charles L. McNary of Oregon," The Knoxville Focus, last modified 2024, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.knoxfocus.com/archives/this-weeks-focus/the-minority-leader-charles-l-mcnary-of-oregon/>.



## Questions to Consider

- Is it more important to nominate a candidate who will unite the Republican party going forward or one who can most likely prevent a third Roosevelt term?
- What would a coherent, united Republican platform look like? Where is compromise possible between the various wings of the party?
- Is it important that the candidate be a committed Conservative with a strong track record in the Republican party?
- Is there a candidate outside of the main three who deserves real consideration?
- Should the uncertainty following the fall of France at all change isolationist Republicans' position on intervention?
- What alternatives can Republicans propose to the New Deal?
- empire does not fall into another Time of Troubles?

## The Candidates

At the beginning of the Republican National Convention, it was largely seen as a three-way race for the nomination. These three candidates were primarily divided over their support for US intervention in Europe and their ideas surrounding depression recovery. The delegates in this committee are the brass of the Republican Party. To reestablish unity and stability in the GOP, delegates must come together to create a sufficiently appealing ticket to achieve widespread national support behind one of these men without compromising any of the party's specific interests. Otherwise, victory in November will be impossible.

**Wendell Willkie** - Born in Indiana, Wendell Willkie was a lawyer and Utility executive. Willkie was largely uninvolved in politics until, in 1933, the Roosevelt Administration's creation of the Tennessee Valley Authority threatened his company's utility monopoly. Willkie staunchly opposed

this action which he saw as the New Deal masking government encroachment on the role of private enterprise. This high-profile bout with Roosevelt won Willkie much notoriety and respect from political leaders around the nation. Despite his entrance to politics coming through a disagreement with Roosevelt, Willkie was still a member of the Democratic Party until 1939, even being considered as a possible candidate for the Democratic Nomination had FDR decided not to run in 1940. When it became clear that Roosevelt would run in 1940, Willkie flipped his allegiance and sought the Republican nomination instead.

Willkie is the most interventionist of the three major candidates, often emphasizing the dangers posed by a Nazi-controlled Europe to the United States. This has won Willkie the support of a very specific, powerful group of Republicans who will champion him as the party's pro-war candidate at the convention. Though

Willkie is new to politics, and even newer to the Republican Party, his dark horse campaign has already captured much of the party's machinery and seems well-positioned to achieve success during the convention.<sup>9</sup>

**Thomas Dewey** - Dewey was considered the favorite heading into the convention. A young and exciting candidate, Dewey represents a divergence from the Hoover-era Republican pessimism. Dewey earned his name prosecuting Mafia bosses in Manhattan. This high-profile job has won Dewey public support from across the nation, and early polling suggests he could be a very strong candidate against Roosevelt in November. In 1938, he became the Governor of New York, and he now looks to become the youngest president in US history at just 38 years old. Though Dewey previously looked very well positioned to

claim the nomination, the war in Europe has complicated things. Many Republican leaders wonder if Dewey has enough experience to lead the country if they get drawn into a global war. Dewey is also ardently against US intervention in Europe, a position steadily losing support amid the uncertainty surrounding the recent fall of France.<sup>10</sup>

**Robert A. Taft** - Taft, the son of former President and Supreme Court Justice William Howard Taft, is the most conservative of the three major candidates. Arguing for complete non-intervention in Europe as well as a complete deconstruction of the New Deal, Taft was a divisive figure, even among Republicans. Taft currently represents Ohio in the Senate and is one of the leaders in the Conservative Coalition standing up to Roosevelt's attempts for continued expansion of the New Deal.

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<sup>9</sup> John Dickerson, "We Want Willkie," July 13, 2016, in *Whistlestop*, podcast, audio, 51:49.

<sup>10</sup> Shiawassee District Library, "Thomas E. Dewey," Local History, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.mysdl.org/local-history/thomas-dewey>.

Though Taft has a strong legislative record, he is an uninspiring speaker and poor public face. Though the so-called “Mr. Republican” is the favorite of a significant portion of the Republican Party’s conservative elites, a more moderate, exciting candidate might look better come election day.<sup>11</sup>

## The Roles

Though Willkie, Dewey, and Taft appear the best-positioned candidates headed into the convention, many notable names from the fractured Republican party have expressed interest in the nomination. Most notably, former President Herbert Hoover is posing himself as the only man with the political experience to stand up to

Roosevelt’s attempt at a third term.<sup>12</sup> Other notable politicians such as Senator Arthur Vandenburg and Pennsylvania Governor Arthur James have also made attempts at earning the nomination but appear much more likely to be considered for the vice-presidential nomination than the presidential one.<sup>13</sup> In the end, in addition to constructing a coherent party platform, the delegates assembled for this convention will need to choose one of these men to rally around. Otherwise, it will mean yet another embarrassing electoral defeat and America’s first ever three-term President.

**Charles L. McNary** - A Senator from Oregon and the Senate Minority Leader, McNary disagreed with Willkie on many points. As one of the more popular western

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<sup>11</sup> US Senate, "Robert A. Taft," Senate Leaders, accessed January 14, 2025, <https://www.senate.gov/about/origins-foundations/parties-leadership/taft-a-robert.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> James A. Hagerty, "Hoover Bids for Nomination to Fight New Deal; Stronger Anti-War Plank Put in Platform; Italy to Occupy Areas in France and Africa," *The New York Times*, June 26, 1940,

accessed January 14, 2025, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/400626convention-gop-ra.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Independence Hall Association, "GOP Convention of 1940 in Philadelphia," UShistory.org, last modified 1999, accessed January 14, 2025, [https://www.ushistory.org/gop/convention\\_1940.htm?srsltid=AfmBOoq1jtOx24SLk8PIG87a4d96j5aVtpJC hE2V-pHXcvJEIG0XzHYI](https://www.ushistory.org/gop/convention_1940.htm?srsltid=AfmBOoq1jtOx24SLk8PIG87a4d96j5aVtpJC hE2V-pHXcvJEIG0XzHYI).

Republicans, McNary initially sought the presidential nomination himself.

**Arthur Vandenburg** - A Senator from Michigan who was the fourth most popular candidate entering the convention. Heavily influential foreign policy thinker who supported isolationism and vehemently opposed the New Deal in 1940.

**Herbert Hoover** - Former President of the United States. Sought the 1940 Republican nomination on a platform of New Deal opposition. Received little actual convention support.

**Arthur James** - The Governor of Pennsylvania, he sought the nomination at the convention. James entered the convention as a strong supporter of Conservative principles.

**Frank E. Gannett** - A Newspaper Publisher and a former supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, Gannett was a minor candidate who ran for the nomination. Gannett is a

staunchly anti-Roosevelt Republican now who champions conservative positions.

**Joseph W. Martin Jr.** - The Leader of the House Republican Conference, Martin was a strong Willkie ally. Martin was a moderating figure focused on nominating a candidate that could defeat Roosevelt.

**Harold E. Stassen** - The relatively moderate Governor of Minnesota and the Convention's Keynote speaker, Stassen was one of Willkie's most prominent allies. He would later serve as the floor manager for the Willkie campaign.

**James Eli Watson** - A former Senate Majority Leader, Watson is one of the Republicans most staunchly against the nomination of Willkie. Watson was a conservative who believed the nomination of a former democrat was a travesty.

**Oren Root Jr.** - Major force in the Willkie Campaign, Root oversaw organizing the national Willkie Clubs.

**Raymond Baldwin** - The Governor of Connecticut, Baldwin was one of the earliest Willkie supporters. Willkie initially promised Baldwin the vice-presidential nomination should he win the presidential nomination.

**Alf Landon** - Following his landslide defeat to President Roosevelt in 1936, Landon became a moderating figure in the Republican Party. Focused on uniting the party.

**John W. Bricker** - The Governor of Ohio, Bricker was an important conservative figure in the party. Bricker declined to seek the nomination, instead choosing to support the fellow Ohio Conservative Robert A. Taft.

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