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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 3, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR RON

FROM: CONNIE

Here is the information on the President's first campaign, obtained from terHorst's and Vestal's books.

The first section talks about when he went out to see the farmers, pitched hay, got out in the rain, etc. There isn't a whole lot, but it is all the SPECIFIC stuff out of both books.

The second section is the story of the whole background on Michigan politics in which the first Campaign took place in 1948. I have yellow lined some parts so you can skip the others. There may be a few things in there that you might want to use.

CAMPAIGN INCIDENTS

Farmers, etc.

GENERAL INFORMATION &
BACKGROUND ON FIRST
CAMPAIGN

It had begun two weeks earlier, without fanfare or hint of destiny. On June 17, 1948, the Grand Rapids *Press* carried the announcement that Gerald R. Ford, Jr. would challenge Representative Bartel J. Jonkman in the September 14 Republican primary election. Ford, a thirty-five-year-old bachelor, was just beginning the practice of law after four years service in the Navy during World War II. Few readers remembered —and fewer probably cared—that this was the same Jerry Ford who had been a football star at South High School and the University of Michigan in the decade before World War II. Wars have a way of changing people's concepts of what is important. Jonkman was sixty-four and pronounced his name the way his Dutch ancestors did—"Yunkmun." He had been county prosecutor and a Grand Rapids attorney almost all of Ford's life and was seeking a fifth term in Congress where, as a chief opponent of President Harry Truman's "giveaway" program of aid to the war-devastated countries of Europe, he reflected the isolationist traditions of the Fifth District of Michigan.

In announcing Ford's candidacy for Jonkman's seat, the *Press* dutifully quoted the tenderfoot's platform: "I believe in aid to Europe, with emphasis on making certain the common man in the countries we aid gets the maximum benefits. That is the way to build democracy."

On that soft June day in 1948, the citizens of Kent and Ottawa counties in western Michigan had other matters on their minds. The bass and bluegill season was about to begin on the inland lakes that dot the countryside; fat perch already were biting along the piers that jutted into Lake Michigan at Grand Haven. It was time to open summer cottages and plan vacations. Grand Rapids' factories—fully reconverted from wartime production—again were turning out the handsome, expensive lines of furniture long ago made famous by Dutch artisans. Detroit's automotive industry, trying to satisfy a car-hungry nation, was expanding into the area. New plants, tool-and-die shops, and metal-finishing firms were springing up. Labor unions, only a minor force before the war, were flexing newly developed muscles. Beyond Grand Rapids, out towards Rockford, Sparta, and Cedar Springs, it was spraying time in the apple and peach orchards that stretched for miles. Mid-June meant that murderous frosts no longer threatened the celery, onion, and lettuce growers—some of whom still boasted of the efficacy of wooden shoes for tramping the moist, black mucklands left by prehistoric swamps. The nearby cities of Holland and Zeeland were exulting over the success of the 1948 spring Tulip Festival, biggest in the world. In the neat, sturdy homes of the Fifth District, where cleanliness, godliness, and thrift comprise the real Holy Trinity, the housewives were more concerned with children home from school for the summer than with a primary race between two Republican candidates for Congress.

And for those who really relished politics, there was much meatier fare that day in the *Press*, the Grand Rapids *Herald*, the Holland *Sentinel*, and the Cedar Springs *Clipper*. The Republican National Convention was soon to open in Philadelphia. Michigan was intrigued with reports that Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg, Grand Rapids' most illustrious son, might become the Presidential nominee and restore dignity and fiscal sanity to the White House. On the day Ford announced for Congress, President Harry Truman was winding up a sixteen-day "non-political" tour of the nation. Truman made lively copy in western Michigan. The Calvinist burghers and fundamentalist Baptists were

shocked by his use of the word "damndest" in a speech in Emporia, Kansas. And everybody was enjoying the anger of Floridians over Truman's crack that California sunshine "makes Florida look like thirty cents." Vandenberg mirrored the conventional attitudes of his Michigan constituents in a story carried by the Associated Press. President Truman, said Vandenberg, "should be on the job in Washington," instead of gallivanting around the country on "a self-serving political vacation."

But for Jerry Ford, inconspicuous though his arrival on the scene may have been, entering politics as a Republican was as natural as saluting Old Glory.

Michigan's Republican heritage goes back to the Whigs, the Free-Soilers, and the anti-slavery factions within the Democratic Party of the Northern states before the Civil War. By 1854, scarcely seventeen years after Michigan's admission as the twenty-sixth state of the Union, there existed sufficient political momentum to give Michigan the right to claim a role in the birth of the Republican Party. A convention held that year in Jackson, ninety-six miles southeast of Grand Rapids, predated by one week the Wisconsin convention that met at Madison on July 13, 1854. The Civil War and the return of the Michigan contingents of the Union Army further solidified the state's identity with the Republican Party. Although Wisconsin and Michigan may argue as to which of them first raised the banner of the party, there is no argument over the fact that the tenets of Republicanism have dominated the political life of Michigan for most of its history, especially in the reaches of the huge peninsula that stretches north and west of Detroit. Republican political fortunes matched the state's industrial and business growth until 1932. Then, flattened by the Great Depression, Michigan joined other Republican states in rejecting a second term for Republican President Herbert Hoover. In 1936, Michigan again voted for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, but the state swung back to the Republicans in 1940, partly out of dismay over FDR's bid for a third term, and partly because of the magnetism of Republican nominee Wendell Willkie from neighboring Indiana. Roosevelt carried Michigan once more in 1944 on the strength of his argument that wartime was not the time to change Presidents, not even for native Michigan son Thomas E. Dewey. During all the Roosevelt years, however, Republican office-holders continued to thrive in western Michigan, including the counties of Ottawa and Kent that made up the Fifth Congressional District. For those who aspired to public service in the heartland of Michigan, the Republican Party was the party of the future as well as the past. For Jerry Ford, that tug was also personal.

Back in the spring of 1940, like most Yale law students, indeed like those on campuses everywhere, Ford had found his attention diverted by events outside the classroom. Europe was in flames; Hitler's panzer divisions already had seized Poland, Norway, Denmark, the Nether-

lands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The fall of France was imminent; Britain was in peril. How much longer could the United States stay out of the war? In Washington, President Roosevelt was pondering a try for an unprecedented third consecutive term, angering some leaders within his own Democratic Party and further whetting Republican determination to topple him and his hated New Deal. During that ominous springtime, the only bright sign Ford could see on the horizon was the emerging Presidential candidacy of a political upstart, Republican Wendell Willkie. There was something about the big, rumpled, easy-going man that appealed to twenty-seven-year-old Ford. Willkie, a native of Rushville, Indiana, and a graduate of Indiana Law School, had succeeded on Wall Street. Despite his wealth and modest beginnings, Willkie exhibited a lively interest in political and academic issues in a manner that set him apart from the typical businessman. More than that, Willkie talked like a political amateur; he did not put on airs, stand on ceremony or give the impression of being a wheeler-dealer. Willkie was anathema to the so-called Republican professionals, a fact that boosted his stock among independents, college students, and "good government" Republicans. Ford liked that, too. He decided to spend a few weekends away from New Haven, Connecticut, to help the fledgling Willkie campaign in New York. By summertime, Ford was thoroughly committed to Willkie, inspired by the Hoosier's pledge to beat the party bosses and capture the Republican nomination—and then to go on to beat Roosevelt. Ford went home to Grand Rapids determined to work for Willkie there. As he had done with every other important decision in his life, he talked it over first with his stepfather.

Gerald R. Ford, Sr. prided himself on being a businessman and not a politician. A large, friendly man with a frame as broad as Jerry's, the senior Ford was a respected and well-liked figure in the Grand Rapids community. Although he was active in the affairs of his Episcopal church, Boy Scouting, and an assortment of civic organizations, most of his time was occupied with running the Ford Paint & Varnish Company, a modest firm he had established to provide finishes and special products to the Grand Rapids woodworking industry.

He had approved his stepson's decision to enter the law, but was quite unimpressed by the legal profession as a whole. He knew some lawyers whose ethics he questioned; he felt particularly cool toward lawyers who dabbled in Grand Rapids' partisan politics. Its slickness and well-oiled machinery perturbed him. The senior Ford also was skeptical of the merits of devoting an entire summer to the Willkie campaign. Reformers had come and gone and he worried that Jerry might become disillusioned and tarnished by the experience—not to mention the wasting of summer months that might be better devoted to helping the family business or his career. But, sensing that Jerry had made up his mind, Ford's stepfather gave him some advice: "If you want to work in politics around Grand Rapids, you had better start by seeing McKay."

Frank D. McKay was a legendary figure in Michigan. He was a stocky secretive man who affected a pince-nez and a pearl stickpin. maintained a fancy automobile and yet was seldom seen in public places. Lacking formal education, McKay spoke in short, explosive phrases, usually profane and earthy. But whenever he spoke, things happened in one part of the state or another. A millionaire many times over, McKay maintained a handsomely furnished office suite in Grand Rapids' tallest building (now named McKay Towers), on Monroe Avenue at Louis Campau Square, in the heart of the city. Rumor had it—and McKay was never heard to deny it—that his suite contained an apartment complete with kitchen, bath, bedroom, and private elevator. While McKay didn't advertise the location of his headquarters, every political figure in both parties—plus those who did business with the state, city or county—knew where to reach him. McKay was a real estate operator, a financier, a banker, insurance broker, bondsman, puller of strings and arranger of government contracts. At one time, as Republican National Committee member from Michigan, McKay was the undisputed backstage boss and dispenser of patronage of the State Capitol at Lansing. He was reputed to own a piece of almost everything worth owning in Michigan during the twenties, thirties and early forties. That proprietorship included elected and appointed officials at every level of government. In an era when almost everything political had its price, it was often McKay who set it and who collected from those who benefited. Jerry Ford remembers with some amusement the ironic nature of his stepfather's advice to see McKay—to talk to the political boss of that day about working in the Willkie campaign to beat bossism.

"You know," President Ford recalled, "at one time Frank McKay sold every tire for every vehicle for every state agency from a little two-room building in Grand Rapids. He wrote bonds for almost all the state officials who needed them. I guess he left an estate of ten million dollars when he died.

"Anyway, I went to see McKay. I thought, here I was, offering myself as a volunteer, that he would welcome me gladly, especially in my own home town. Well, he made me wait outside his office for four hours and, boy, was I mad. Finally he saw me, gave me three minutes, and good-bye. Nothing."

Ford went to work for Willkie that summer nonetheless. Willkie's nomination at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia in late July was, Ford thought, a rebellion against the quality of the party's professional leadership. Back at New Haven in September to resume his Yale law studies and the coaching of the freshman football team, Ford had little time to devote to Willkie's fall campaign against Roosevelt. But he recalls with relish listening to the returns over the radio on that 1940 November election night. Although Roosevelt won his third term, Willkie managed to carry Michigan by a squeaky margin of 6,926 votes. The Michigan tally was Willkie 1,039,917, Roosevelt 1,032,991. For the first time ever, more than two million Michigan voters had gone to the polls. Moreover, Willkie had done exceedingly well in Grand Rapids and western Michigan. To Jerry Ford the message was obvious: a friendly, qualified candidate with grass roots support could beat a boss like McKay. When Ford returned to Grand Rapids in 1941 with his law degree, he found others who agreed with him.

W. B. "Doc" VerMeulen has greyed now and grown mellow with the years. A well-known Grand Rapids dentist in his middle seventies, he still puts in a full day at his office. Indeed, the day this reporter last talked with him, there were nine patients waiting in the anteroom. Thirty-three years ago, when Jerry Ford came back to Grand Rapids to set up a law office, Doc VerMeulen had but one ambition and it clashed mightily with his practice of dentistry.

That ambition was to smash the political machine of Frank McKay. From 1941 on, it was an obsession, a driving, unrelenting, all-consuming passion that occupied VerMeulen night and day. There were others like VerMeulen, of course, here and there around Michigan —dedicated men and women who worked unstintingly to rid the Republican Party and public offices of the kind of bossism that McKay represented. Unlike many of his allies, however, Doc VerMeulen did not aspire to elective office himself. Imbued with the righteous Calvinism of his Dutch forebears, VerMeulen wanted only to cleanse the temple, to drive out the moneychangers and the sellers of favors. VerMeulen's was a moral crusade, which made it suspect to some.

Moreover, he brought to his holy mission a kind of amoral pragmatism that cut across political ideology. He asked not whether supporters were conservative, liberal, or moderate Republicans, whether they were isolationists or favored America's entry into the war in Europe, whether they thought Franklin Delano Roosevelt was a godless socialist or simply a successful Democratic politician. VerMeulen had but one loyalty test: are you anti-McKay? Additionally, Doc VerMeulen knew how to organize the precincts as well as any ward boss in the McKay organization. He called his movement "the Home Front," a name borrowed from the doughty English then preparing to repel a feared German invasion. The appellation was to take on more direct meaning for Grand Rapids and western Michigan Republicans in 1942 when American soldiers went off to war. But citizens who openly dared buck McKay were still few in number when Jerry Ford first loomed on VerMeulen's political radar screen.

Ford walked into VerMeulen's office one day in 1941 when Doc was talking politics with Paul G. Goebel—owner of the city's largest sporting goods store, former University of Michigan football star, and a Big Ten official. "We were trying to make up a list of fellows who were financially independent or had the guts to stand up locally against McKay," VerMeulen recalled. "I'd never met Jerry Ford, but Paul Goebel knew him, of course, and he introduced us. When I explained to Jerry what we were trying to do, how we were trying to break McKay, Jerry said, 'Oh boy, you can count me in on that.'

Ford himself recalls his first interest in the Republican Home Front organization. "Allegations were surfacing about a lot of McKay dealings. About ten of us in Grand Rapids got together and started talking about what could be done to get things out of his grip. We felt he was a bad influence on the Republican Party and that the allegations about him were going to be particularly damaging. And, you can bet I hadn't forgotten how he made me wait outside his office that day."

America's entry into World War II slowed the anti-McKay drive. Many active Home Fronters were called into military service or defense work in Lansing and Washington. Enlisting in the Navy, Ford left Grand Rapids early in 1942. At his request, VerMeulen agreed to write him regularly about the Home Front's battle against the McKay forces. So did Philip Buchen, Ford's law partner and friend from University of Michigan days who was crippled by polio. In 1944, the correspondence between Ford in the Pacific and the Home Fronters in Grand Rapids took on special significance.

"That was the year we had enough Home Front strength to beat McKay pretty badly for control of the Kent County Republican Party," said VerMeulen. "And we needed somebody of stature, somebody without enemies, to serve as county chairman. I thought of Jerry's dad, who already was active in county civil defense and was well-liked by everybody and trusted even by those who were associated with McKay. So I asked him if he would do it. Jerry Senior said he had never been in politics, knew nothing about it and wouldn't do it under any conditions.

"Then the next Sunday noon he called me back. He said he had just come home from church and there was a special delivery letter from Jerry in the Pacific. He read me part of the letter, about Jerry's feelings about the war and the risks the GIs were taking. 'Dad,' Jerry wrote, 'if the Home Front ever asks you to do something, don't turn them down. I'm going to get into this thing when I get back from service and I'll take your place. So don't turn them down.' And then Jerry's dad said to me over the phone: 'Doc, I'll take that job.' "

Gerald Ford, Sr. was serving his second year as Kent County Republican Chairman when Jerry came home from the war in December, 1945. Then thirty-three years old, still a bachelor, he had more immediate interests than participating in Doc VerMeulen's good government crusade. Besides, McKay's power was on the wane at the state level. While still a major force in Grand Rapids and western Michigan politics, the McKay organization had fallen on lean years during World War II. A spectacular scandal had enveloped the State Capitol, bringing grand jury indictments for bribery, corruption, and payoffs within the legislature and among the banking, racing and insurance lobbyists in Lansing. A Grand Rapids trucking executive under grand jury investigation was killed when his automobile was struck by a train; a Grand Rapids state senator was found dead in his car of carbon monoxide poisoning two days after testifying; another state senator from Albion was shot to death as he drove home on a lonely road one night after talking to the grand jury. Although the McKay organization was widely suspected of being involved, nothing was ever pinned on the Grand Rapids boss. McKay was himself indicted on charges of conspiring to make illegal profits from the financing of the Blue Water Bridge linking Michigan with Canada at Port Huron, but he was not convicted. And in 1946, Ford's first year home from the Navy, Michigan voters elected as governor the colorful, white-haired prosecutor of the scandal, Republican Kim Sigler.

Feeling no pressing need to involve himself in politics, Ford linked up again with Buchen, this time in the Grand Rapids law firm of Julius Amberg, one of the most prestigious in the state. "I was 33, single, working, having a great time, playing a lot of golf," Ford said. "All I was interested in was enjoying life and getting on with my law practice."

But deep inside, something had happened to Ford, something that overshadowed his old gridiron glory days, his carefree postwar existence, and his interest in legal suits, torts, and wills. In time, Ford came to recognize it. "A change happened within me during the war. In college I had been a real isolationist. But the war and being overseas changed my mind about the role that America should play in the world." Like so many returning servicemen, Ford perceived that prewar attitudes and values would not suffice to insure a bright future for America. Being a doer, an activist, not much given to intellectualizing his philosophy, Ford began grappling with postwar life as he found it in Grand Rapids. One of the first issues that attracted his attention was the problem of housing for young, married ex-servicemen anxious to put down roots and raise families. And he found himself smack up against the banking, zoning, and real estate interests that he had come to identify, at an earlier time, as being heavily influenced by the McKay crowd. Typically, Ford discussed his concerns with his stepfather and mother, with whom he was living in the comfortable family home on Santa Cruz Drive in East Grand Rapids, and with the Home Front activists still out to wrest control of the city and county government from the McKay organization.

Because it was a region of extraordinarily high home ownership, a mark of individualism and community pride, western Michigan was not interested in the construction of big apartment projects for its returning war veterans and their young families. Nor, indeed, were the veterans. They wanted to take advantage of the four per cent home mortgage money available through the GI Bill. It was the era of the "two-bedroom GI home" and nearly every veteran wanted one of his own. Drawing on his Willkie campaign experiences, Ford devoted his evenings to organizing the Independent Veterans Association along with like-minded young men. Ford was elected vice president of the IVA and it proved to be a muscular organization for lobbying the Grand Rapids city commission, the Kent County board of supervisors and the boards of the mainly-rural suburban townships that surrounded the city. Not even the old McKay organization dared openly buck the veterans' groups. The IVA didn't get everything its members hoped for, but zoning laws were amended to open up desirable land for low-cost housing developments for veterans, and construction codes were modified to permit builders to employ new techniques, materials, and methods in order to speed houses to the market. It was Ford's first taste of pressure politics on local governing bodies and he found it satisfying. Moreover, it whetted his appetite. For the first time, Jerry Ford began ruminating about running for political office.

In November of 1946, voters across the nation expressed their weariness with wartime controls and the policies of the Roosevelt-Truman years by electing a Republican majority to Congress for the first time in sixteen years. Flushed with victory after so many years in the legislative wilderness, the Republican Eightieth Congress went to work with a vengeance. The session was only three months old when the House and Senate approved the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution, limiting future Presidents to two terms in the White House—a direct reaction to FDR's four-term record. In June of 1947, over President Truman's veto, the Republican majority enacted the controversial

Taft-Hartley law to regulate the nation's labor unions. By October, the House Un-American Activities Committee began an investigation of alleged Communist infiltration of Hollywood's movie industry. The Committee's newest Republican member was a first-term Californian who had, the previous November, defeated ten-year Democratic Representative Jerry Voorhis by accusing him of "voting the Moscow line." The new lawmaker's name: Richard Milhous Nixon.

Back in Grand Rapids that year, Jerry Ford found himself sharing the widespread Republican attitude that left-wing influence had infected the ranks of labor, Hollywood, and the Democratic Party. Yet his long months overseas had made it philosophically impossible for him to slip back comfortably into the isolationism that still characterized western Michigan's conservative outlook on the world. Ford was not the only Republican who felt uneasy about leftist tendencies in American politics at home, and yet, felt equally certain that the United States could not again retreat into the cocoon of the past if it was to avoid being entangled in future wars. Grand Rapids, in fact, was in ferment over that very dilemma. Two of its most eminent public officials, both Republicans, were on opposite sides of the national debate. It was in the papers and on the radio almost every day.

Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan had made a dramatic switch from isolationism to internationalism during World War II. Vandenberg had been a founder of the United Nations and a prime leader in getting Senate Republicans to join with the Democrats in ratifying the treaty authorizing United States membership in the new world body. With Republicans in control of the Senate, Vandenberg was now chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and an ardent backer of Harry Truman's "Marshall Plan" for reviving and rebuilding Europe with American dollars. Whatever misgivings Vandenberg's constituents might have felt about his bipartisan role in support of the Truman foreign policy, they were tremendously proud that Grand Rapids' native son was being mentioned in Republican circles throughout the country as a prospective party nominee for President in 1948.

Not so Representative Bartel J. Jonkman of Michigan's Fifth Congressional District. As one of the ranking Republicans on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Jonkman took every opportunity to attack the Marshall Plan, or, as it was more formally called, the European Recovery Program (ERP). He termed it a flagrant waste of tax dollars, likely to be subverted by "socialistic" leaders in Britain, Germany, and France, and a colossal monument to fuzzy thinkers in the White House, the State Department, and Congress. Jonkman was fond of ridiculing ERP, too. "This BURP boondoggle," he would tell audiences, "er, excuse me, ERP. . ." The pinch-faced Congressman got a good press in Grand Rapids, Holland, and elsewhere in the Fifth District but not, as he believed, because of the merits of his isolationist argument. Since controversy makes headlines, the newspapers played up Jonkman's attacks on the Marshall Plan because his position was diametrically opposite that of his most important constituent, Senator Vandenberg. The Senator, who never suffered from modesty, found Jonkman's behavior more than irritating. It was inexcusable. Vandenberg decided to do something about it. Back in Grand Rapids, Vandenberg learned that the Home Front Republicans, while ideologically a moderate

aggregation, had had their fill of Jonkman, too. Not only was he philosophically galling but worse, he was also a protégé of the McKay organization. While Vandenberg discreetly stayed out of their deliberations, the Home Fronters began casting about for a candidate willing to tackle Jonkman in the September primary. They did not have to look very far.

When he was first approached to run against Jonkman, Ford hesitated. "I was tremendously impressed with Vandenberg's record, and as for Jonkman, I felt that an isolationist like him ought not to go unchallenged," Ford said. "I thought about it and thought about it and finally I decided that although I probably couldn't win, he ought to be challenged. I told them I would go."

Ford's reluctance was understandable. Oldtimers could not recall the last time an incumbent had been beaten in the party primary in any similar confrontation in western Michigan. Furthermore, there was virtually no chance that Jonkman could be defeated in the November election by a Democratic opponent. There just were not enough Democrats in the Fifth District. In that respect, western Michigan in 1948 was as solidly Republican as the "Solid South" was traditionally Democratic. Indeed, the Fifth District had last elected a Democrat to Congress in 1910, some thirty-eight years earlier, and the victor had managed to hold his seat for only two years. If Jonkman were to be ousted, he would have to be removed by his own Republican constituents in the September 14 primary. Ford quickly learned the difficulty of the fight ahead of him. The best odds he could find on his decision to run against Jonkman, he recalled, were "three to one against me."

Although the average Fifth District voter, like Jonkman, was not impressed by the June 17 announcement of Ford's candidacy, it actually amounted to the pop of the starter's gun for a two-man track meet that was to last nearly three months. Ford had been in training for weeks. So had a group of key advisers, quietly raising money, scouting for a campaign headquarters site, preparing the required campaign posters and leaflets, charting the strengths and weaknesses of Jonkman as well as the assets—and liabilities—of their young challenger, analyzing the ethnic, political, and religious characteristics of every precinct in Kent and Ottawa counties, and drawing up lists of influential citizens whose endorsements and active support would be useful. The nucleus of the Ford-for-Congress Committee was Home Front Republican, but it included a substantial number of Democrats and independents who shared the dislike for Jonkman. With quiet pragmatism, Ford did not fret over the fact that some of his principal backers were more enthusiastic about the opportunity to defeat Jonkman than they were about his own qualifications for a seat in Congress.

For a campaign manager, Ford turned to a fraternity brother and college buddy from his University of Michigan days, John R. "Jack" Stiles. A burly, mercurial man, Stiles was the son of a prominent lumber company owner long active in Grand Rapids civic affairs. Like Ford, Stiles had been in the Navy and had come out of the war with lieutenant commander's stripes. Stiles, too, had been one of the leaders in the Independent Veterans Association drive for GI housing in Grand Rapids. Yet it would have been difficult to imagine two more opposite personalities. Ford was reflective, serious, not given to easy banter,

candid and direct in manner and speech. Stiles was a brash extrovert, fun-loving, quick to anger and quick to regret—a man with a flair for phrase-making and a zest for combat of every kind. At the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity house in Ann Arbor, Stiles and Ford had been inseparable companions—the one aspiring to be a writer, the other the football team captain—partying together, double-dating, studying together. "If Jack was the guy who got us in trouble, it was usually Jerry who got us out," a fellow Deke commented years later.

In addition to Stiles, the original Ford-for-Congress group included Doc VerMeulen, the politically active dentist; Paul G. Goebel, the sporting goods store proprietor who was later elected mayor of Grand Rapids in another anti-McKay drive; Dorothy Judd, wife of a prominent attorney and active in the League of Women Voters; and Philip Buchen, Ford's first law partner and another fraternity brother. Among the Democrats who took up Ford's cause were Leonard Woodcock, then a regional representative of the CIO and now president of the United Auto Workers Union; Kenneth Robinson, another UAW organizer; A. Robert Kleiner, then a young attorney and now Democratic chairman of the Fifth District; and Julius Amberg, the senior partner in Ford's law firm who had served as an assistant secretary in the War Department in Washington during World War II.

Ford's stepfather, naturally, resigned as Kent County Republican chairman to work in his behalf. There were others, too, some of whom attained recognition in later years in Washington and the national Republican Party. One was Ella Koeze, wife of a food manufacturer, a friend of Ford's mother, who served many years as a member of the Republican National Committee. Another backer was Rhodes scholar John B. Martin, a distinguished Grand Rapids attorney who won a State Senate seat in 1948, was later elected as State Auditor General, became Republican National Committeeman from Michigan, worked as an adviser in Governor George Romney's abortive bid for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1968, and served as Commissioner of the Administration on Aging during President Nixon's first term.

Jonkman, of course, had his own strategy for re-election to Congress and did not contemplate spending much time or money on beating Ford in the September primary. The veteran lawmaker sniffed openly at his young challenger and the band of Republican insurgents who supported him. Jonkman had ample reason for his confidence. He already had won four consecutive elections to Congress by wide margins; there was little likelihood he could not win a fifth. Before going to Congress in 1940, Jonkman had served four years as prosecuting attorney for Kent County, another elective office. He was sixty-four, old enough to be Ford's father, and had practiced law in western Michigan since Ford's infancy. Jonkman's name was known widely in Ottawa and Kent counties and, moreover, it was a Dutch name, while Ford's obviously was not.

In Washington, Jonkman had reached a level of considerable seniority on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the counterpart of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee of which Vandenberg was chairman. Jonkman felt he knew exactly what the voters of the Fifth District wanted done in postwar Washington. They wanted, he believed, a congressman who would battle the Truman Administration at every

level, who would help rid the federal government of New Deal-Square Deal influences—particularly the left-wing, soft-on-Communism bureaucrats Jonkman perceived in the State Department. Moreover, Jonkman disliked Senator Vandenberg and was jealous of the attention and flattery that the nation's capital and Michigan were bestowing on the senior Republican. So Jonkman would try to cut "old Arthur" down to size by suggesting he had been duped by Roosevelt and Truman into supporting the United Nations and the Marshall Plan, and was therefore a traitor to the Republican Party, if not to the country.

In his campaign strategy, Jonkman saw little need to hit the trail in Kent and Ottawa counties, little need to talk to the voters, to speak at political rallies or to luncheon groups. (He had, in any event, not done much of that in the past.) He would, in the manner of a statesman, rise above the pending fray in the Fifth District by making his speeches on the floor of the House and in committee hearings. Jonkman would tend to his job on Capitol Hill, where he felt he was needed, and where he assumed the voters wanted him to be. The Jonkman strategy, in sum, was the classic mistake that too many incumbents make when they have been exposed to "Potomac Fever." Ford and Stiles, despite their youthfulness and political inexperience, sensed it immediately.

"Jonkman the isolationist had become the darling of the Chicago *Tribune*," Ford observed. "He really began the whole McCarthy era in a way. Long before McCarthy picked it up, Jonkman was speaking out about the 'Communists' in the State Department. He also was attacking Vandenberg because Vandenberg no longer was an isolationist and Vandenberg was very irritated. Here was a congressman from his own party and his own city, cutting him up at every turn. After I announced, Vandenberg asked me to call on him. He told me he could do nothing for me publicly in the primary against Jonkman—after all, I wasn't supposed to win or even come close. But he told me how very, very pleased he was that I was taking Jonkman on."

Pleasing Vandenberg was one thing; pleasing his own law partners might not be so easy. It is often the policy of established legal offices to try to stay clear of partisan politics: political involvement can be bad for business. How would his associates react to Ford's decision to run for Congress? He needed to know whether his connections with the firm would now be severed. And if he lost the contest, would Ford be able to rejoin the firm? The decisions would be made by Julius Amberg, senior partner in the office, a very formidable man. Ford stood in awe of him. By all accounts, Amberg was as brilliant as he was prosperous. For years, he held the highest academic record in the history of Harvard Law School. Associates marveled at the functioning of his facile mind, his lightning grasp of complicated points of law, and the ease with which he expressed himself. Additionally, Amberg was a Democrat and one of the few prominent men in western Michigan who deigned to admit it. Amberg had returned to Grand Rapids after impressive wartime service in the War Department in Washington under Roosevelt. Rumor had it that Amberg had refused an FDR appointment to a high federal judiciary post because he preferred the combat of the courtroom. Ford vividly recalls the day Amberg summoned the most junior member of his firm to talk about running for Congress.

"He told me to sit down and, as usual, he paced up and down his office while he talked. He told me that he felt it very important that someone like Jonkman be beaten and retired from Congress. He said he did not believe the Jonkmans were good for the country. He reminded me that he was a Democrat but he said that, in the Fifth District, no Democrat could beat a Republican incumbent so it was up to me to beat him in the primary.

"Then he told me that what the law firm would require of me during the primary was that I come in for one hour a day. Meanwhile, I would be kept on full salary and all the rest of my time would be for campaigning. The salary wasn't much—three hundred dollars a month—but now I was free to campaign all day, every day. And I worked like hell. I really covered those counties."

Ford received important, if unwitting, help from another prominent Democrat—President Truman. In the midst of the Fifth District primary race, Truman summoned the so-called "do-nothing Eightieth Congress" into special session in Washington to deal with rising prices and housing problems. While Truman's action was part of his own 1948 election campaign, it had the effect of requiring Jonkman's continued presence on Capitol Hill. Ford made the most of the opportunity thus presented him.

On issues, Ford hammered constantly at Jonkman's refusal to back Senator Vandenberg on the Marshall plan and U.S. support for the fledgling United Nations. He talked of the district's need for representation sensitive to the postwar problems in Ottawa and Kent counties plus the need for someone who would strive to do something about it.

Ford also employed what he called "gimmicks" and what Stiles preferred to call tactics. Either way, they were designed to take advantage of assets Ford brought to the campaign as a war veteran and a young, friendly man. Despite his nearly eight years service in the House of Representatives, Jonkman was not known personally to many of the voters in the Fifth District. Between the biennial election campaigns, Jonkman seldom returned to report to his constituents except on special occasions. Essentially, he was an aloof man who did not mix easily with people, and who disliked making appearances at community affairs in Grand Rapids, Holland, Zeeland, Caledonia, Ravenna, Coopersville, and the host of smaller communities that make up Ottawa and Kent counties. Civic leaders used to quip that the only way to guarantee Jonkman's presence was to promise to give him an award or designate a "Barney Jonkman Day." Moreover, Jonkman had not seen military service in World War II, and although that was a matter of age, not choice, Jonkman had not noticeably done much for the thousands of servicemen who had returned to western Michigan after the war.

From dawn to midnight, Ford campaigned the length and breadth of the Fifth District. Talking to voters on the farms might be a gimmick, designed to attract favorable news coverage, but the candidate's daily handshaking tours of food markets, hardware stores, feed mills, and the business districts of towns big and small, and his appearances before Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis meetings, 4-H Fairs, county fairs, factory picnics, plant gates, and specially-arranged Republican gatherings in the evenings were not. Everywhere, Ford offered to debate Jonkman, a

challenge that worried some of the young candidate's backers because of Jonkman's oratorical skill and Ford's lack of it. Jonkman, however, avoided a face-to-face showdown with Ford, contenting himself with making shrill statements from his Capitol Hill office, confident that the McKay organization would, as always, turn out enough votes to protect his incumbency.

The question of Ford's intelligence concerned some of his supporters back in 1948. A. Robert Kleiner, an original Ford booster who since 1957 has been an ardent liberal Democrat, recalls the night he attended a Ford discussion on the United Nations at the Fountain Street Baptist Church in company with his mother, a woman active in civic affairs and national causes for the League of Women Voters. "She was the first person of my acquaintance who felt that Jerry Ford was not all that the rest of us thought he was," Kleiner observed. "I remember my mother, afterwards, looking at Len Woodcock and Ken Robinson and me, shaking her head, and saying, 'You gentlemen will be sorry. This young man is ignorant.' She put her finger on what the rest of us didn't see. Jerry Ford wasn't dumb, it's just that he lacked knowledge."

Whatever deficiencies Ford exhibited as a thinker, a platform speaker, or coiner of phrases, he more than made up for it with candor. "I don't know much about that," he frequently told audiences during that primary campaign, "but I'll find out for you." He had a forthright style of speaking that endeared him to his listeners, a way of reducing things to a common denominator easily grasped by the average voter. Intentionally or not, it had the effect of making him seem to be one of them, not somebody on a pedestal. And it sharpened the political contrast between Ford and Jonkman.

As Ford's campaign manager, Jack Stiles felt this was by far the most important aspect of the primary race. Sure, he told Ford, it was necessary to talk about issues like isolationism, the Marshall Plan, the United Nations and help for veterans—but it was absolutely essential to mingle with the voters, to "let them see you, touch you, shake your hand." Why? Because the Fifth District once had such a congressman in the late Carl Mapes, Jonkman's immediate predecessor, who had served a quarter century in the House of Representatives. "Carl Mapes was noted for his warm handshaking—and no speechmaking—just going out and meeting people and sitting on a park bench and being one of them," Stiles recalled. "So to some extent Jerry Ford's campaign was a nostalgic repeat of a Carl Mapes campaign. Jonkman had been cold, capricious, and arbitrary in his decision-making in Congress. The people of the Fifth District were saying in their hearts, in a reminiscent, sentimental kind of way, 'Why can't we have a congressman like old Carl?' Actually, that was the secret of it all."

Jonkman had dismissed the threat of Ford's candidacy during the first eight weeks of the primary race. When he returned to Grand Rapids in August after the rump session of the Eightieth Congress, he was in near panic. With only a month remaining before the September primary,

Ford's inroads were visible everywhere. The two largest dailies in the Fifth District, the *Press* and the *Herald,* the latter once owned by Senator Vandenberg, were giving the young challenger considerable daily coverage. Moreover, they were supporting him editorially and calling for Jonkman's defeat. Frustrated and enraged, the veteran congressman became petty. One of the downtown sights he heartily disliked was Ford's campaign headquarters, a war surplus red, white, and blue Quonset hut that served to remind voters of Ford's military service. Jonkman picked up his telephone and called Frank McKay. McKay promised he would get rid of Ford's Quonset to appease the angry congressman.

"There was a day when McKay could take care of almost anything," Ford said. "He knew just how to go about it." The Ford campaign headquarters was located on a vacant lot owned by Wurzburg's, one of Grand Rapids' leading department stores. And Wurzburg's attorney was Julius Amberg.

"McKay had someone call Wurzburg's, and the man who ran Wurzburg's called Amberg," Ford related. "He told Amberg that my Quonset hut offended McKay and that Wurzburg's was looking for some favors from McKay. Could Amberg get his young junior lawyer to move his hut?"

Amberg called Ford into his office, reminded him that Wurzburg's was indeed a good client of the law firm and asked Ford's opinion on the request. "I told him, 'Mr. Amberg, it would bother me, but we can end our relationship right here. I am not going to move that Quonset hut.' And Amberg said, 'Excellent! That's exactly what I hoped you would say!' The hut stayed."

The episode was symbolic, not only as a rebuke to McKay but to Jonkman as well. On September 14, 1948, Republican voters in Ottawa and Kent counties chose young Jerry Ford by a wide margin over veteran Barney Jonkman. The ballot count for Ford was 23,632; for Jonkman it was 14,341. That night the insurgents—Home Front Republicans, independents and the leading Democrats for Ford—staged a victory celebration at Jack Stiles' home. Stiles boasted the campaign had only cost $7,200, representing about $4,000 in cash contributions collected by Jerry's brother Tom, the campaign treasurer, with the rest in pledges. The adventure's great asset, aside from the candidate, according to Stiles, was womanpower. "You wouldn't believe the number of women who were out there working for Jerry," Stiles said. "It was probably the first time they were ever called upon to work in a congressional race and, man, they really made the difference."

One face that stood out at the victory party was that of Elizabeth Bloomer Warren. Ford still had to defeat his Democratic opponent in the November election in order to claim his seat in Congress. But Betty had only a month to wait in order to claim Jerry as her husband.

Their romance had been one of the few "secrets" of the Ford campaign for Congress. Everyone within the inner circle of advisers and workers knew that Jerry and Betty were planning to marry before the year was out. The question was when—and there was considerable relief among some of Ford's more politically-tuned backers that the couple had decided to wait at least until the Jonkman primary battle was over.

Given the stern Victorian attitudes of members of the Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church of America, the two Dutch Calvinist denominations whose moral precepts tended to set social standards for western Michigan, some of Ford's advisers feared a mid-campaign wedding would seriously harm his chances of beating Jonkman. Before meeting Jerry, Betty had been a dancer, a profession that raised eyebrows among the strait-laced churchgoers. Moreover, she was a divorcée when she and Jerry began dating, having been married five years to another Grand Rapids man, William C. Warren, a salesman. Divorce was as taboo among Dutch Calvinists as it was among Roman Catholics in the Fifth District communities in 1948. Although Jack Stiles cannot recall it, other members of the Ford inner group remember at least one strategy session at which an argument raged over the political risk of announcing the wedding plans before the September 14 primary. "I could see what would have happened," one of them said. "On Sunday before the Tuesday primary, the opposition would have gone to all the Dutch churches and passed out handbills saying 'Vote for Ford' and carrying a juicy tidbit about his intentions to marry a divorcée and ex-dancer. They had used that kind of tack many times in the past when they wanted to arouse the Dutch churchgoers, who resent *any* kind of Sabbath campaigning. Something like that about Betty just would have ruined Jerry's chances. Those Hollanders may be strict but they vote Republican. With Jonkman being Dutch, why we just couldn't risk that kind of bad publicity."

Fortunately for Ford, the Jonkman opposition did not employ any eleventh-hour tactics. The Ford team was never able to determine whether the McKay organization had failed to learn about the impending marriage—which seemed unlikely—or whether it was felt an attack might boomerang against Jonkman. Perhaps they merely figured Jonkman could win without it. With the primary won, Betty was free to prepare for the October 15 wedding in Grace Episcopal Church in downtown Grand Rapids. Ford, meanwhile, took on his new opponent, Democrat Fred J. Barr, the man he would have to defeat in the November election to win the Fifth District seat in Congress.

A cherubic promoter of conventions for Grand Rapids, Barr harbored no illusions that he was anything more than a Democratic name on the ballot. Ford defeated him handily, 74,191 votes to Barr's 46,972. But in Grand Rapids on November 2, 1948, the election of the new congressman was overshadowed by other political news. G. Mennen "Soapy" Williams, a lanky young Democrat, stunned Michigan by winning the

governorship from Republican incumbent Kim Sigler. President Harry Truman astounded the Chicago *Tribune* and the experts by beating favored Republican Thomas E. Dewey. And the Republicans lost control of Congress. Ford would go to Washington in January 1949 as a member of a Republican minority in the House. Whatever disappointments Ford had about that were eclipsed by the sweetness of his own victory, a triumph made sweeter still by the knowledge that he would be one of very few Republican newcomers in the Eighty-first Congress. First, however, he had to pay off a wager:

"During the primary, on somebody's farm—I can't remember whose—I said that if I got nominated and won the fall election, I would come out and work in the dairy barn for two weeks. So. . . there I was, every morning, from four-thirty until about nine-thirty, helping with the cows, cleaning up the barn, you name it. . ."

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He said even in that first campaign Jerry insisted a record be kept of contributors, by name and amount. Many contributions were "a five or ten dollar bill handed him on the street, and Jerry always made a record of the name."

In the primary Jerry had something else going for him that has not been spelled out often or in detail in later political history. He had the active support of many liberal Democrats and of important labor leaders. No less a leader supported him, for example, than Leonard Woodcock, then a regional director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), parent to the United Auto Workers International Union of which Woodcock later became president.

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