Paul Vories McNutt was both a towering figure in Hoosier politics during the 1930s and a “substantial political figure in the Roosevelt Era.” As governor of Indiana from 1933 to 1937, McNutt backed the New Deal while he revamped his state's government, emerging as the
nation's strongest and best-known governor in the mid-1930s. He later served under Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman as federal security administrator (1939-1945), high commissioner to the Philippines (1937-1939 and 1945-1946), chair of the War Manpower Commission (1942-1945), and ambassador to the Philippines (1946-1947). McNutt saw himself as a successor to FDR, until the president decided to run for a third term in 1940. He then sought the Democratic nomination for vice president, until Roosevelt declared his preference for Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace. A possible candidate for president and a viable candidate for vice president, McNutt showed what was and what might have been in American politics in the mid-twentieth century. Yet, he still lacks a scholarly biography.

Interestingly, McNutt did not enter public life through the traditional means of partisan politics. He started out as an academic and a university administrator, becoming a professor of law at Indiana University (IU) in Bloomington in 1919 and then serving as dean of the IU School of Law between 1925 and 1933. More importantly, it was veterans’ politics in general, and the American Legion in particular, that launched McNutt's political career. He won election as commander of the Legion's Indiana Department in 1926 and became national commander of the organization two years later. At the same time, the

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3The only published biography of McNutt is I. George Blake, Paul V. McNutt: Portrait of a Hoosier Statesman (Indianapolis, 1966).
American Legion’s beliefs in patriotic service, anti-pacifism and anti-communism, a strong national defense, and benefits for veterans coincided with those of McNutt, who became one of the most charismatic figures in the organization over its first two decades.

The topic of McNutt and the American Legion is significant in two respects. In a narrow, biographical sense, McNutt’s rise in the organization exemplified much of his life’s pattern. He succeeded at winning offices in the Legion, and that raised his confidence and fueled his ambition—his most commented-on character trait. He also labored hard to promote the Legion’s agenda. And yet, McNutt advanced beyond the organization, into the realm of electoral politics. Through the Legion, he learned how to express his intentions, mobilize supporters, plot strategy, and prevail at conventions. At the same time, in a much larger historical sense, McNutt’s experience in the Legion allows one to examine the internal politics, ideology, and early years of the best known veterans’ organization to emerge in the U. S. following the Great War.

Involvement in the Legion proved, for McNutt, a generally positive experience. Joining the organization satisfied a range of personal needs, including an ideological one. McNutt’s experiences reinforced his realistic views on foreign and defense policy, and may have encouraged his later embrace of the welfare state. Moreover, the Legion, because of its youth, organizational structure, and revolving-door leadership, became a road to distinction and later on to a political career. McNutt’s rise in the outfit made him a state and national figure just as the Grand Old Party (GOP) was beginning to decline politically in both Indianapolis and Washington, D.C. The Legion played a vital role in McNutt’s election as governor of Indiana in 1932. Yet such successes also fed McNutt’s belief that, having advanced swiftly in the field of veterans’ politics, he could do likewise in national, elected office. That did not happen.

McNutt and the American Legion

Paul McNutt was, at bottom, a striving midwesterner. A native Hoosier, he was blessed with a range of talents and reared in a middle-class home that valued hard work, education, and success. Born in 1891, Paul was the only child of John C. McNutt, a lawyer and minor state official, and Ruth Neely McNutt, a homemaker. Young Paul grew up in Indianapolis and then in Martinsville, a county seat town about twenty-five miles south of the state capital. His parents, both former teachers, instilled in him the importance of books and learning. Paul was the aca-
Paul V. McNutt in uniform c. 1917. McNutt volunteered for military service while still an IU undergraduate, and he trained troops for artillery duty at four camps in the South.

Press Association photograph, courtesy of the author
demic standout at Martinsville High School, where he excelled in art, letters, theater, journalism, and campus politics. He repeated those feats, in a much larger arena, at Indiana University, from which he graduated with a B.A. in English in 1913. Thereafter, Paul, like many ambitious midwestern youths, headed east; he enrolled in Harvard Law School and earned his L.L.B. in 1916. Paul then returned to Martinsville to become a partner in his father’s law firm. But after living near Boston, he soon tired of life in his hometown. The chance to become an instructor of law at IU, in the spring of 1917, offered him a means of escape, albeit only a temporary one.⁴

McNutt wanted to do something grand, and when America entered World War I in 1917, he seemed to get his chance. While he had shown little interest in the military, his family possessed a tradition of service: his maternal (and favorite) grandfather, Jacob M. Neely, had fought in the Civil War as a member of the Twenty-Second Indiana Volunteers.⁵ Not surprising, as the IU campus mobilized following the declaration of war, McNutt volunteered for service. One of the so-called ninety-day wonders, he entered the Second Officers Training Camp at Fort Benjamin Harrison, near Indianapolis, on August 27, 1917, and left camp on November 27 as a captain in the field artillery.⁶ By war’s end, he had attained the rank of major. Over the course of the war, McNutt trained men for the artillery, moving from one base to another. He was stationed at Camp Travis, Kelly Field, and then Camp Stanley—all in Texas—before moving on to Camp Jackson in South Carolina. He exuded pride in his contribution, although the war ended before he saw combat overseas. Like many veterans, he became a member of the Legion in 1919.⁷

⁵Nina Jo to Grace [Woody], March 28, 1972, folder: Biographical and Genealogical, box 1, Neely Family Papers, Lilly Library (LL), Indiana University (IU), Bloomington, Indiana; News clipping, “Taps Sounded Sunday Morning for J. M. Neely,” [March 1921], Vertical File—Correspondence—Neely, Morgan County Public Library, Martinsville, Indiana (quotation).
The American Legion that McNutt joined, and would one day lead, began as a grassroots movement whose founders were “[n]obody, and everybody.”8 World War I had given American soldiers a common experience and a sense of fraternity toward one another, and it was almost inevitable that, as veterans, they would organize.9 Following the end of hostilities, a group of officers led by Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., son of the former president, met in Paris in 1919 to form what became the American Legion.10 These officers were a highly pragmatic group, founding the Legion out of the fear that “left-wing doctrines might infect the restless troops” who would later “link hands with dangerous ‘bolshevik’ elements at home.”11 That did not happen. Instead, over the next two decades, Legionnaires founded twelve thousand local posts, of varying sizes, in locales across America.12 Each state became its own department with its own commander, while an executive committee and a national commander, elected for a one-year term, oversaw the Legion as a whole.13 By the eve of World War II, membership had swelled to over one million, meaning that more than one in four veterans of World War I had joined the organization.14 The Legion was open to all veterans of the armed forces in the First World War, whether or not they had experienced combat.15 This openness was crucial for McNutt, who had remained stateside during the conflict. The refrain that McNutt was “the teacher who never taught, the soldier who never fought, the lawyer who never tried a case,” would later be hummed by political opponents but not by rivals in the Legion.16

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13To be accurate, the Legion, at its peak, had fifty-eight departments, one for each of the fifty states, plus one each for the District of Columbia, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal, Canada, France, Italy, and Mexico. See Rumer, *The American Legion*, 565-81.
As an institution, the American Legion managed to look backward, sideways, and ahead all at the same time. Veterans’ organizations had deep roots in American history. The Legion, like the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), which had been formed by Union soldiers following the Civil War, strove to maintain and to promote bonds between its members. Social functions cemented Legionnaires together; despite the advent of Prohibition, alcohol flowed at local, state, and national meetings. In the long run, the culture of the Legion, with its mixture of spirits, revelry, and high jinks, steeled by war stories and masculine bravado, enabled men of middle age to revisit their youth and to escape “the routine of everyday work and the constraints of community life.” In the short run, the organization was, as an early observer writing in a southern dialect noted, “a young man yit.” In other words, it was populated by youthful veterans who mirrored the temper and aims of the newly founded Legion itself—“a good, game scraper, ready to fight for a cause he considers just.”

A principal cause of the American Legion, as it had been for the GAR, was to secure benefits for veterans. In this area, the Legion’s greatest victory came in 1924 when, over the objections of business leaders who feared inflation, and over the veto of President Calvin Coolidge who was determined to balance the federal budget, Congress passed a bonus for those who had served in World War I. The bonus was really a life insurance policy to be paid to the heirs of each veteran upon his death, or to the veteran after twenty years. Although the bonus did not foreshadow the social concern and federal activism of the New Deal, it did signal a major financial commitment by Congress to a specific group during a period of conservative governance. It also underscored the Legion’s belief in the power of lobbying and collective action by its members.

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18 Pencak, *For God & Country*, 100.
22 “Together you moved the world and can do it again!” declared the caption of a cartoon distributed to members of the Iowa Legion in 1924. “Alone you can do nothing and never could!” Jay Ding cartoon attached to James F. Barton to Hanford MacNider, March 27, 1924, folder: American Legion Adjutants, Departments, 1924-1925, box 1, Hanford MacNider Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library (HHPL), West Branch, Iowa.
Sheet music for a 1931 American Legion song. The Legion’s focus on “100 percent Americanism” is evident in the flag and eagle symbolism and in the quotation from the organization’s preamble.

Courtesy of the Indiana Historical Society
The Legion ventured beyond the issue of veterans’ benefits when it campaigned for “100 percent Americanism.” This effort operated at three levels. First, the Legion strove “to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation.” It did so by promoting public remembrance of patriotic sacrifice. Second, the Legion sought to protect the United States from external enemies through a program of military preparedness. Lastly, the organization wanted to safeguard America “from foes within.” To assure the loyalty of the next generation, the Legion favored displaying the Stars and Stripes on all school grounds, teaching upbeat interpretations of American history—not fault-finding revisionism—and offering military training in high schools and colleges. Overall, the American Legion pledged fealty to “God and Country” and to defend the Constitution of the United States.

The Legion was unable to speak of American ideals without citing the need to defend them. In the shadow of the Russian Revolution, strikes at home, and the Red Scare of 1919-1920 (when the U. S. attorney general deported alien radicals), the Legion attempted to silence the views of people whom it deemed subversive or un-American. The organization was not opposed to freedom of speech, just “un-American free speech.” As Theodore Roosevelt Jr. phrased it, free speech “simply means free speech within given bounds.” Communists emerged as special targets for the Legion, as did pacifists, who rejected both preparedness and military education. Of the two groups, pacifists enjoyed far greater popular sympathy. In the aftermath of World War I, many Americans, disillusioned that their nation had not achieved its wartime aims to promote democracy and a lasting peace, turned toward isolationism and against war. The Legion tried to counter such thinking by memorializing its members’ past service and by attacking “professional”

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27 Hanford MacNider speech, undated, folder: American Legion Articles, Talks Undated, box 2, MacNider Papers, HHPL.
pacifists as “either secret Communists or unwitting dupes” for advocating disarmament despite the presence of external threats. In 1933, for example, the “Americanism” committee of the Legion’s Department of Illinois denounced the social reformer and pacifist Jane Addams and the well-known defense attorney Clarence Darrow as communists by virtue of their association with “international-pacifist-defeatist organizations.”

“There is room in this country for only one ‘ism,’” declared National Commander Frank N. Belgrano Jr. in 1934. “That is Americanism.”

The American Legion also became a venue for veterans to distinguish themselves and to be active politically. To be sure, the Legion’s constitution defined the organization as “absolutely non-political,” and it forbade local posts from endorsing candidates for elected office. Nevertheless, individual members saw nothing wrong with engaging in partisan activities. In 1920, Theodore Roosevelt Jr. and a few other Legion founders promoted Gen. Leonard Wood for the Republican Party’s presidential nominee. Four years later, Roosevelt and Hanford MacNider, a former national commander of the Legion, formed the Republican Service League to mobilize veterans to elect Coolidge. And the list of national commanders who attained high office was long. It included the junior Roosevelt, who was assistant secretary of the navy under President Warren G. Harding and who ran unsuccessfully for governor of New York in 1924; MacNider, who served as assistant secretary of war under Coolidge, and later as U. S. minister to Canada; and Louis A. Johnson, assistant secretary of war under FDR and secretary of defense under Truman. The number of departmental commanders who went on to be elected as governor or U. S. senator from their home state was, if anything, even greater. Perhaps for that reason, National Commander O. L. Bodenhamer found himself warning, in 1930: “Probably the most serious offense an American Legion post, department, or national official can commit against his organization is to use his office in the Legion for partisan political purposes.”

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33 Pencak, *For God & Country*, 107-117, 107 (first quotation), and 106 (second and third quotations).
McNutt, for his part, became attracted to the American Legion for several reasons. During World War I, Paul had longed to see combat overseas and lamented that the war ended before he got the chance to go “over there.” After the war, he kept up his soldierly ties by accepting a commission in the field artillery branch of the Officers Reserve Corps, where he rose to the rank of colonel. He also entered the Reserve Officers Association and even led the organization’s Indiana department from 1923 to 1924. Veterans’ activities, moreover, were part of McNutt’s family history: Grandfather Neely had served as assistant adjutant general of the GAR and later headed that organization’s Indiana branch. Above all, McNutt became a Legionnaire because he was a joiner. A profile, published in 1938, described the Hoosier as “a Methodist, a Mason, an Elk, a Kiwanian, a Rotarian, a dean, a professor, [and] a colonel.”

The Legion also had strong ties to McNutt’s native state. Indiana’s capital city was home to the leadership of the American Legion; at the organization’s first national convention in 1919, Hoosiers, aligned with delegates from the South and West, were able to get Indianapolis, and not Washington, D.C., selected as the location of the Legion’s national headquarters. This success enabled the Legion to achieve “a high degree of visibility” in Indiana and its members to become a “political force” within the state. “Politicians,” historian James H. Madison observed, “were particularly sensitive to the voting strength of Hoosier veterans.” During the 1920s, the Legion had sufficient political muscle in Indiana to secure public funding for a state headquarters, a building to house the national headquarters, and a monument to honor veterans of the Great War—all in Indianapolis.

Did McNutt join the Legion just to advance his political aspirations? Not quite. When he became a member of Bloomington’s post in 1919, he had behind him one unsuccessful race for county prosecutor in Indiana in 1916, and only a few thoughts about running for Congress in

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34 Nina Jo to Grace [Woody], March 28, 1972, Neely Family Papers, LL; “Taps Sounded Sunday Morning for J. M. Neely.”
36 For information on how this came about, see Walter D. Myers, “A Collection of Recollections,” pp. 163-71, unpublished manuscript, Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis.
38 Ibid., 39.
1920. He knew the pitfalls of politics, having watched his father run for local and state offices with little success. Moreover, both the elder and younger McNutt were ardent Democrats in a Republican state during a period of GOP dominance. For Paul, a political career was hardly inevitable. And yet, he had long been interested in electoral contests dating back to his undergraduate days at IU. In the 1920s, the Indiana Legion emerged as a bailiwick for young Democrats and Republicans who, shut out of leadership by more senior members of the parties, used the organization as a “training ground and springboard” into public office. “They started in organizing Legion posts and learning the ethics and primary purpose of politics,” Harold C. Feightner, a longtime Hoosier journalist, later explained. “There [were] quite a few fellows who learned their Ps and Qs through the American Legion.”

For McNutt, the Legion was at first a refuge, and only later a launching pad to statewide office. He joined the organization following World War I, when his future was unsettled. In the early 1920s, McNutt began to socialize with Legionnaires over card games, as he grew restless with his life as a law professor. Then, as McNutt clarified his professional goals and decided to be something more than a faculty member—securing the deanship of IU’s law school in 1925—he showed greater interest in the Legion. Like many Hoosier veterans, McNutt thought that the local post was “a place to be active.” Only later on, during 1927 and 1928, did he consider running for governor of Indiana. By that point, interestingly, he was deeply involved in the politics of the American Legion.

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40 “Friend, “Watch Paul McNutt,” 86

41 Harold Feightner Oral History, February 28, 1968, p. 61, Manuscript Division, Indiana State Library (ISL), Indianapolis.

42 Jack Alexander, “Paul McNutt ‘It Would Be Kind of Nice to Be President, Wouldn’t It?’” box 178, Raymond Clapper Papers, LC.

43 Feightner Oral History, October 24, 1968, p. 84.

44 McNutt to Ralph N. Smith, December 26, 1927, box 3; McNutt to Gilchrist B. Stockton, August 18, 1928, box 4—both in McNutt Papers, LL.
Ideals as well as ambition fed McNutt’s interest in the Legion. He shared the Legion’s core values, especially concerning patriotic service. Regarding the Officers Reserve Corps, of which McNutt was a member, he wrote: “I want to see it live and prosper and I intend to do everything in my power to help.” He saw military service as a patriotic duty and exhorted IU students to join the reserves. Consistent with the national mood, however, young people seemed uninterested. Early in 1926, a debate erupted at IU over military training through the school’s Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). Some students asserted that this training ought to be made voluntary, while others wanted it to remain mandatory. Those favoring change drew inspiration from Frederick J. Libby, a well-known pacifist leader, who was on a speaking tour that included stops in Indiana. At the same time, around 600 students petitioned to retain compulsory military training. Their chief supporter was William Lowe Bryan, the university’s president.

The debate escalated in March 1926, after Libby addressed an IU convocation. Bryan did not attend the event, and neither did McNutt. In a speech a few days afterward, McNutt registered his disapproval of pacifism, Libby-style. He reiterated that it was the “duty of every American citizen to serve this nation in time of war” and that military training was “an essential and proper part of an adequate national defense.” McNutt’s vehemence descended into an attack that both Libby and his supporters took as a personal affront. McNutt charged Libby with agitation and peddling subversive propaganda. The more McNutt learned about the pacifists, the more he hated them. Six months later, he accused “leaders in many of the so-called peace organizations”

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45 McNutt to A. C. Sandeford, April 7, 1921, box 1, McNutt Papers, LL.
46 “Optional Military Move Not Incited by Dr. Libby—Reed,” Indiana Daily Student, March 9, 1926, folder: 1926 Newspaper Clippings, box 25, McNutt Papers, LL.
47 Frederick J. Libby Diary, February 28, 1926, box 3, Frederick J. Libby Papers, LC.
48 “Optional Military Move Not Incited by Dr. Libby—Reed,” Indiana Daily Student, March 9, 1926, folder: 1926 Newspaper Clippings, box 25, McNutt Papers, LL.
49 Libby Diary, March 3, 1926, box 3, Libby Papers, LC.
50 McNutt to Frank H. Streightoff, March 9, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
51 Libby Diary, March 3, 1926, box 3, Libby Papers, LC.
52 McNutt to Streightoff, March 9, 1926; McNutt to Fred R. Marvin, March 19, 1926 — both in box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
with being “Reds” who “‘work for the abolition of all means of defense in order to make way for the revolution.’”

On the whole, the crusade against pacifists and communists helped McNutt’s career, even though he was espousing a less-than-popular cause. The first Red Scare was a fading memory and Americans, longing for a lasting peace, were unlikely to respond to calls for military training. The Kokomo (Indiana) Dispatch chided McNutt’s speeches for being out of step with the times:

Mr. McNutt might find more wicked foes for his thrusts than those he pleases to brand as pacifists. We need more of their class of clear sighted citizens of the world. As for the ‘reds’—well, we haven’t seen one for a long time, though perhaps Mr. McNutt sees them lurking in Indiana cornfields and briar patches.

But McNutt’s denunciation of pacifists strengthened his relationship with President Bryan, a defender of ROTC, and more importantly, his anti-pacifism and anti-communism squared with mainstream thinking in the Legion. McNutt’s ideology and rhetoric, as well as his rising visibility on the stump, proved useful as he energized his local post and looked to win election as commander of the Indiana Legion.

POLITICAL APPRENTICESHIP IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INDIANA

McNutt’s ascent in the Legion began locally. In Bloomington, Legionnaires had founded the Burton Woolery Post No. 18, named in honor of a local boy and IU student, Henry Burton Woolery, killed in

53 “M’Nutt Defends Plan For Military Training,” Indianapolis News, September 30, 1926, box 25, McNutt Papers, LL.
54 McNutt, for example, often had to explain his views to women who were active in the peace movement. See McNutt to Mrs. Frank D. Hatfield, March 15, 1926, folder: McNutt Misc. Speaking Engagements, box 2; Esther Everett Lape to McNutt, February 8, 1927 and May 27, 1927, folder: American Foundation, box 3A—both in McNutt Papers (Dean’s Files), Indiana University School of Law Library, Bloomington, Indiana.
56 McNutt to L. R. Gignilliat, March 25, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
action near Esperance Ferme, France, in 1918. As the post set out to elect a new commander in October 1925, McNutt disclosed that friends were urging him to be a candidate. Although he professed uncertainty about entering the race, he allowed his devotees “to make a quiet canvass” of the membership. Such thinly veiled ambition and maneuvering would be repeated in McNutt’s later campaigns. And it worked. The Bloomington post had endured sharp fluctuations in its membership, and McNutt—young, dynamic, attractive, smart, and accomplished—appeared to be just the person to shake it from its doldrums. Legionnaires in Bloomington were “flattered” that “such a big man as the dean of the law school was willing to accept the command,” and they elected him their leader.

With the prize won, McNutt launched his recruitment drive by distributing lists of veterans to each of the post’s eighty-seven members. Each man then “had to sell [the] Legion to as many on his list as humanely possible.” McNutt exceeded his goal of recruiting 250 new members; by the end of his term, the Burton Woolery Post alone had 502 members. The jump made Bloomington the second largest post in its district and the third largest in the state, and McNutt’s stature in the Indiana Legion rose. Clarence A. Jackson, commander of the Department of Indiana, spread word of McNutt’s accomplishments, and the American Legion Weekly “carried stories of the feat.”

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58 Alexander, “Paul McNutt ‘It Would Be Kind of Nice to Be President, Wouldn’t It?’”
59 The membership of the post was 305 in 1920, 114 in 1921, 102 in 1922, 36 in 1923, 135 in 1924, and 110 in 1925. See C. A. Jackson to McNutt, February 11, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
60 Alexander, “Paul McNutt ‘It Would Be Kind of Nice to Be President, Wouldn’t It?’”
61 “M’Nutt Vaults Barriers to Legion Throne,” Indianapolis Times, May 18, 1933, p. 16.
62 McNutt to Jackson, April 13, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL; Von Blon, “The Hoosier Schoolmaster,” 49.
63 The Burton Woolery Post gained a meeting place of its own. It built a home for a war widow and her family, helped needy veterans, and carried out the national office’s program to promote “Americanism.” “The Progress of the American Legion 1926,” no date, folder: McNutt Am. Legion, Nat’l Guard, etc., box 1, McNutt Papers (Dean’s Files), IU School of Law Library.
64 Jackson to McNutt, March 1, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL; “M’Nutt Vaults Barriers to Legion Throne,” Indianapolis Times, May 18, 1933, p. 16 (quotation).
The cheering boosted McNutt’s confidence as he eyed a higher office: commander of the Indiana Legion. The state commander was elected to a one-year term in much the same way that political parties selected nominees. The next convention was to be held at Marion, Indiana, in August 1926. In launching his campaign, McNutt sounded like a U. S. politician of the previous century, bashful about seeking office and insistent that friends were pushing his candidacy. “I have been strongly urged to become a candidate for State Commander of the American Legion,” McNutt told one associate. “I have no intention of entering any general scramble for the place because I feel that, at this stage of the Legion’s development the office should seek the man rather than the man the office.” Then he added: “I am willing to serve if the members of the Legion want me.” 65 Such false modesty seemed to confirm an old adage about Indiana, that “every Hoosier baby’s first words are: ‘Although I am not a candidate for any public office, if nominated by the people of my party and elected by the sovereign voters of the great State of Indiana, I will serve to the best of my ability.’” 66 Before the Department of Indiana convened, McNutt was encouraging friends to canvass on his behalf. 67 He even tried to sow the idea that other candidates might consider withdrawing. 68 When that failed, he communicated with Legionnaires in the districts of his rivals in order to “break off” some of their support. 69 McNutt also prepared well for the convention, and his local post nominated him for state commander. 70 Such happenings, combined with endorsements from other posts, left the impression that McNutt was a formidable candidate indeed. 71

McNutt was no shoe-in to head the Indiana Legion. He was, after all, an academic—an “ivory tower” type, sneered more “earthy” veter-

65 McNutt to Wilbur S. Donner, August 17, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
67 McNutt to Marcus F. McCaughan, August 2, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
68 McNutt to McCaughan, August 16, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
69 McNutt to John M. McFaddin, August 18, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
70 He reserved one hotel room “as a headquarters” and another as a conference room. McNutt to Allen Messick, August 5, 1926; and McNutt to Joe H. Davis, August 5, 1926—both in box 2, McNutt Papers, LL; Neff, “The Early Career and Governorship of Paul V. McNutt,” 34.
71 Davis to McNutt, August 3, 1926; and McNutt to Harry P. Shultz, August 17, 1926—both in box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
Moreover, many former enlisted men disliked having “too many former officers,” such as McNutt, “in prominent places in the Legion.” And Republican Legionnaires were not too fond of someone who was known as an “enthusiastic Democrat.” McNutt overcame these obstacles through a combination of shrewdness, hard work, and luck. He arrived early in Marion and met with his managers—Bloomington Legionnaires who were all Republican and thus likely to remove some of the stigma of his party affiliation. On their advice, McNutt addressed as many district caucuses as possible, even on short notice. Such impromptu speeches frequently ended in “a roar of applause.” Meanwhile, McNutt’s aides searched for delegates to buttonhole. More than a few Legionnaires found this type of overt campaigning annoying and at odds with their organization’s practices.

McNutt also benefited from perceived flaws in his rival, Eugene O’Shaughnessy of Lawrenceburg, Indiana. On the surface, O’Shaughnessy was a strong candidate, better known than McNutt and part of a circle within the Indiana Legion that saw the office of state commander as “an honor to be conferred, not a prize to be contested.” It was, this clique thought, O’Shaughnessy’s turn to be commander. Moreover, O’Shaughnessy was a skilled organizer and had a following in his native southern Indiana. Yet, he also was Roman Catholic and the owner of a distillery. Members of the Ku Klux Klan, who hated alcohol as much as they hated Catholics and who saw the one inevitably following the other, found O’Shaughnessy’s candidacy offensive. Their opposition proved significant. “We must admit, however distasteful to us it is,” one of McNutt’s supporters wrote, “that there is some very strong Klan sentiment in the American Legion.”

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73 Clay A. Phillips to McNutt, September 2, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
74 McNutt to Robert R. Batton, August 16, 1926; and Batton to Frank McHale, August 18, 1926 (quotation)—both in box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
75 Alexander, “Paul McNutt ‘It Would Be Kind of Nice to Be President, Wouldn’t It?’”
77 Alexander, “Paul McNutt ‘It Would Be Kind of Nice to Be President, Wouldn’t It?’”
78 Floyd H. Evinger to McNutt, August 16, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
80 Evinger to McNutt, August 16, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
That sentiment ran true in the Legion’s Department of Indiana. The Klan and the Legion used the same slogan—“100 percent Americanism”—and shared other similarities, including followings in the Midwest and memberships that included professionals, merchants, and farmers. Around 300,000 Hoosiers joined the Klan in the 1920s. According to some Indiana Legionnaires, between twenty and fifty percent of their compatriots were Klansmen. Both organizations were avowedly patriotic, anti-radical, and unfriendly to immigration. The Klan attacked immigrants as well as Catholics, Jews, and African Americans. The Legion, for its part, lobbied Congress to restrict the flow of immigration into the United States. That subtle difference regarding immigration underscored other differences between the two organizations. The Klan asserted that white, native-born Protestants were the only loyal and true Americans. The Legion, in contrast, accepted into its ranks Jews, Catholics, and foreign-born citizens, as long as they had participated in the Great War. It also accepted African Americans, but confined them to segregated posts. In sum, military service and adherence to the nation’s founding principles and its constitution defined the Legion’s “Americanism.”

In the race to become state commander of the Legion, McNutt publicly kept mum on the Klan, although he privately denounced its activities as “pernicious.” After eight ballots, the professor from Bloomington prevailed over the distiller from Lawrenceburg, with a final vote of 206 to 176. A “howling” crowd carried the victor to the stage, where McNutt, sounding like a veteran politician, proclaimed that “the heart of the Legion is in the local posts.” As state commander, McNutt

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81 Madison, Indiana Through Tradition and Change, 45.
83 “Klan propaganda,” historian James H. Madison observes, “spewed hatred and ignorance against ‘them,’ those who were not ‘us.’” James H. Madison, A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America (New York, 2002), 38.
85 McNutt to Louis Plost, January 11, 1926 (quotation); and Plost to McNutt, January 7, 1926—both in folder: McNutt Miscellaneous, box 2, McNutt Papers (Dean’s Files), IU School of Law Library.
86 “Paul M’Nutt Elected Head of State Legion,” Vincennes Commercial, September 1, 1926, folder: 1926 Aug. McNutt Mss., box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
served those posts with relentless energy. He stepped up his speaking; during one period in 1927, he spoke sixty-one times over fifty-seven days.87 McNutt juggled all this and his regular duties at the law school by making addresses at night, on holidays, and after his classes had let out.88 He traveled 40,000 miles through eighteen states during his year-long term.89 Those trips allowed McNutt to make new friends. Before addressing the Department of Iowa in Mason City, he stayed with the parents of Hanford MacNider, a past national commander.90 After hearing McNutt’s speech, the editor of an Iowa newspaper expressed the hope that “we’ll be privileged to cast a unanimous vote for Paul McNutt for national commander.”91

The Indiana Legion thrived under McNutt. He accomplished statewide what he had done in Bloomington—increase the organization’s membership. His speechmaking played a critical role, as did his prodding of local posts to fill recruitment quotas.92 During McNutt’s year as state commander, membership in the Indiana Legion climbed from 18,336 to 25,505.93 Indiana, which had ranked thirty-eighth among forty-eight states in Legion membership at the close of 1926, advanced to sixth by the end of 1927.94 An Indiana Legionnaire praised McNutt for placing himself at “the beck and call of every post.”95 According to one scholar, McNutt was “one of the most active and successful Legion commanders the state ever had.”96

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90 McNutt to Hanford MacNider, March 11, 1927, folder: American Legion Correspondence 1927 L-R, box 5, MacNider Papers, HHPL.
91 W. Earl Hall to McNutt, March 25, 1927, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
92 McNutt to Otho R. Brewer, March 1, 1927, box 2; McNutt to Curtis Hodges, box 3—both in McNutt Papers, LL.
95 Letter to Glenn Seiss, March 16, 1928, box 3, McNutt Papers, LL.
BECOMING NATIONAL COMMANDER

If McNutt was good for the Indiana Legion, the Indiana Legion was also good for McNutt in three respects. First, his leadership position in the organization allowed him to travel to distant places. Late in 1927, McNutt ventured beyond the American heartland when he and his wife, Kathleen, attended the Legion’s convention in Paris. Second, the office of state commander kept McNutt out of party politics, at least for a spell. After his election, McNutt brushed aside pressure from Indiana Democrats to campaign for the party’s candidates in 1926. McNutt resolved that “any partisan speeches” would have “an unfortunate reaction” by turning wavering Legionnaires “against our candidates.”

Lastly, the Indiana Legion provided McNutt with political contacts, and none proved more precious than that of Frank M. McHale. At the time of McHale’s death, in 1975, Democrats and Republicans alike lionized him as a giant in Indiana politics. Born to Irish immigrant parents, McHale graduated from the University of Michigan and became a lawyer in his hometown of Logansport, Indiana. He served in World War I, organized an American Legion post in Cass County, and rose in the Legion’s Indiana Department, serving on its legislative committee from 1919 to 1929. McHale’s name became linked to McNutt’s star during their years in the Indiana Legion. McNutt solicited his support in his campaign to be state commander. Although in that contest McHale supported O’Shaughnessy, his fellow Irish Catholic, the paths of the two men continued to cross. In 1927, Hoosier Legionnaires, with McNutt’s blessing, elected McHale as their next state commander. The outgoing commander had persuaded four other candidates—all Protestants—to

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97 Barton to National Executive Committeemen, American Legion, March 19, 1927, folder: American Legion Convention 1927, France, box 4, MacNider Papers, HHPL.
98 H. K. Bachelder to McNutt, September 20, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
99 McNutt to Bachelder, September 23, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
102 McNutt to Batton, August 16, 1926; and Batton to McHale, August 18, 1926—both in box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
103 Alexander, “Paul McNutt ’It Would Be Kind of Nice to Be President, Wouldn’t It?’”
withdraw so that McHale could be elected, unopposed, in a “strike against the Klan.”

In McHale, McNutt found a friend as well as an ally. The two men shared many values, including a love of party, public service, and country. McHale, like McNutt, had no use for those who sat on the sidelines, thinking them either “selfish” or “cowardly.” The two men complemented each other quite well. McNutt was a show horse, the candidate as matinee idol, while McHale was a workhorse, the unseen strategist.

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It was McHale, as legislative leader of the Indiana Legion, who helped persuade the state legislature to build the War Memorial Plaza in Indianapolis, with its limestone monument to veterans of the First World War.107 Yet it was McNutt, as commander of the Department of Indiana, who presided over the monument’s dedication.108 Between 1928 and 1940, McHale’s skills as a political organizer, his wisdom, and his occasional misjudgments would be the exclusive property of McNutt.

By 1928, the post of national commander of the American Legion was beckoning to the increasingly ambitious McNutt. This office was, on one level, a safe one to pursue. There had been calls for McNutt to run for governor of Indiana in 1928. He demurred, however, for the Democrats seemed likely to nominate for president, New York Governor Alfred E. Smith. McNutt concluded that, given Hoosiers’ “strong prejudices,” the Catholic Smith would drag the Democratic ticket in Indiana down to defeat.109 At another level, the position of national commander was a natural fit for McNutt, coming on the heels of his leadership of the Department of Indiana. So, he began his campaign for national commander with trademark expressions of modesty and behind-the-scenes maneuvering.110 He also prodded district leaders in the Indiana Legion to line up behind his candidacy.111 Then, after two posts endorsed McNutt for national commander, he professed: “Naturally, I cannot disregard such an expression of confidence.”112

Securing the support of the Department of Indiana marked the first phase of McNutt’s campaign; lining up other departments in the Midwest was its second part. McNutt’s public speaking in states such as Illinois, Wisconsin, and Nebraska, certainly helped him.113 So, too,
did the lobbying of subordinates: McHale, for example, “did some very effective work” on his behalf at the Legion’s convention in Michigan.114 McHale was instrumental in managing the final phase of McNutt’s campaign, the period leading up to the national convention in San Antonio. He and McNutt had their work cut out for them. The American Legion, not unlike its Indiana Department, had been run by a clique that had secured the election of the two previous national commanders. In 1928, this machine rallied around the candidacy of John H. Ewing of Louisiana. In response, seven independent candidates emerged as challengers, including McNutt.115 The array of candidates did not bode well for McNutt, who was still new as a leader within Legion circles. So, as he had done when seeking election as state commander, McNutt took a stab at some pre-convention maneuvering, proposing to meet with two of his rivals to affect a “satisfactory settlement”—to the Hoosier, no doubt.116 This effort failed, and the field remained crowded.117 McNutt therefore readied for a “dog fight” in San Antonio.118

McNutt overcame his status as an outsider and an underdog with preparation, organization, tireless speaking, and sheer effort. Not unlike the Marion convention in 1926, McNutt and his advisers arrived in San Antonio a few days early to survey the landscape.119 McNutt’s advisers called for the candidate to replicate his feat at Marion by addressing as many delegates as possible.120 In the meantime, McHale lobbied state leaders. He knew that, even if McNutt did not place among the top three

114McNutt to R. E. Snoberger, September 19, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.
116McNutt to George E. Denny, March 30, 1928 (quotation); and McNutt to Henry L. Stevens, April 9, 1928—both in box 3, McNutt Papers, LL.
117One rival begged off meeting with McNutt. See O. L. Bodenhamer to McNutt, April 12, 1928, box 3, McNutt Papers, LL.
118McNutt to Wheeler, September 14, 1928, box 3, McNutt Papers, LL.
120The group included C. A. Jackson, a past Indiana commander; state commander Frederick Weicking; John H. Klinger, editor of the *Hoosier Legionnaire*; Pleas Greenlee, the new adjutant for the Indiana Department; and McHale. McNutt to Wheeler, September 14, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL; Neff, “The Early Career and Governorship of Paul V. McNutt,” 50; McNutt to Snoberger, September 24, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.
contenders on the early ballots, the Hoosier still might win later on, if he could emerge as the second choice of enough delegates.\textsuperscript{121}

McHale fired the opening salvo of the battle on October 11, when he nominated McNutt. He praised the Hoosier’s army service, emphasized his accomplishments as state commander, and even suggested that McNutt, rather than himself, had secured the requisite funds to build the memorial plaza near the Legion’s national headquarters.\textsuperscript{122} Although the press had slighted McNutt’s chances, the first round of balloting put him in third place with 189 votes, behind Roy Hoffman of Oklahoma, who had 245 votes, and the machine candidate Ewing with 231 votes. On the second ballot, McHale’s “second choice” strategy appeared to pay off as McNutt got 213 votes, which placed him behind only Ewing with 245 votes.\textsuperscript{123} At that point, Ewing realized that he had peaked and withdrew from the race. On the third ballot, Ewing’s home state of Louisiana cast its fifteen ballots for McNutt, and the delegations from the large states followed suit. Hoffman performed the final act, announcing Oklahoma’s seventeen votes for the Hoosier and urging that the vote now be made unanimous.\textsuperscript{124} It was, whereupon the Indiana delegation “paraded” to the stage, waving its banner.\textsuperscript{125} Lurking beneath the celebrations, however, was something worrisome. McNutt and his followers showed a nascent confidence that, having prevailed at this convention, they could do likewise at other conventions. “My Hoosier supporters,” McNutt told a friend, shortly after his election, “are not lacking in the rudiments of political strategy.”\textsuperscript{126}

NATIONAL COMMANDER, NATIONAL FIGURE

As national commander of the American Legion, McNutt saw his life change dramatically and permanently. He became, as one of his staunchest supporters in the Legion emphasized, a “national figure.”\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{121}“How the Texas Meet Did It,” Bloomington (Indiana) Weekly Star, October 18, 1928; Neff, “The Early Career and Governorship of Paul V. McNutt,” 44.
\textsuperscript{122}Philip Von Blon, “Therefore Be Resolved,” American Legion Monthly (December 1928), 27.
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{124}“How the Texas Meet Did It,” Bloomington (Indiana) Weekly Star, October 18, 1928; Neff, “The Early Career and Governorship of Paul V. McNutt,” 52-53.
\textsuperscript{125}Von Blon, “Therefore Be Resolved,” 27.
\textsuperscript{126}McNutt to Perry Faulkner, November 17, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.
\textsuperscript{127}Wheeler to McNutt, March 16, 1928, box 3, McNutt Papers, LL.
McNutt’s speechmaking continued, but his audiences were now larger. The raised platform on which he stood allowed him to refine his thinking on topics from patriotic service to veterans’ benefits to national defense. On that last issue, he challenged a president of the United States. In fact, it was during the late 1920s and early 1930s that McNutt began to think about occupying the White House himself.128

The office of national commander gave McNutt his largest platform yet, and he made the most of it. Looking at his nation in the 1920s, he denounced the freewheeling frivolity and “sordid scramble for gain.”129 Who should be blamed? Not American institutions, McNutt explained to one audience: “The fault lies with our people,” whose problem was “selfishness.”130 As a former soldier, McNutt looked back fondly on the “great wave of patriotic fervor” that had swept the United States during the Great War and had instilled in his countrymen a sense of service to a greater cause. As a Legionnaire during the Roaring Twenties, he now saw a nation uninterested in sacrifice.131 In response, McNutt continued to extol the virtues of America, the nobility of military service, and the need to fight pacifists and to fund a strong national defense.

These were well-worn themes in McNutt’s speeches, yet two things had changed by this time. First, McNutt had honed his skills and was emerging as a fine speaker. His oratory drew from his years as an undergraduate at IU, where he had majored in English and had acted in plays, and from his training as a lawyer, where he had been taught to be mindful of the facts. One Bloomington resident remembered a McNutt speech as “clear, forceful, and convincing, and yet so simple and direct that all could understand.”132 An undergraduate at IU in the 1920s recalled him as a “marvelous” speaker who could “move a crowd.”133 For his part,

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128 After the convention in San Antonio, one man wrote that someday he expected to vote for McNutt for president of the United States. Fred R. Hill to McNutt, October 17, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.

129 Paul V. McNutt, undated speech beginning “The matter of these lines concerns you,” no date, folder: Speeches, n.d., box 24, McNutt Papers, LL.


131 McNutt, undated speech beginning “The matter of these lines concerns you.”

132 William F. Book to McNutt, November 4, 1930, box 6, McNutt Papers, LL.

133 Edith Schuman Tackitt interview with the author, June 29, 2006, Bloomington, Indiana.
McNutt worked hard at drafting speeches and often delivered the same address, again and again.134

The second change was that McNutt, as national commander, had integrated his ideas into a coherent train of thought. “The burden of war,” he stressed in one address, “falls upon the citizen soldier.” He thus pressed for a vigorous policy of preparedness to ensure that soldiers had proper training and modern weapons. Such a program promised to reduce casualties in wartime and to ward off aggressors during peacetime. “Adequate national defense is necessary to command respect,” McNutt asserted. To keep America fit and ready, McNutt pushed the Legion’s campaign to promote civic education. “We are not paid propagandists,” McNutt affirmed, in reference to his fellow Legionnaires, “and we have no selfish interest.”135 The conflict between selfishness and service became personal for him. To one graduating class, McNutt declared: “Your question is what can I do, not what is to be done for me.” And yet, he doubted whether his listeners would perform “unselfish service” to America.136

McNutt’s low regard for human nature shaped his hardheaded views on foreign and defense policy. One reason he disdained pacifists was that he doubted that humans possessed sufficient goodness to achieve peace. The reality was that “hate, fear, lust, greed, and envy” in individuals filtered up to nations and their foreign policies.137 Wary of European nations beset by hunger, bankruptcy, and jealousy of the United States, McNutt foresaw the emergence of aggressive dictatorships and urged necessary preparations.138 Anticipating the global crisis of the late 1930s, he asked in 1925: “Would you clean up a gang of thugs and murderers by sending peaceful citizens, unarmed, into their midst?”139 As national commander, McNutt vowed to “impress upon the general public the importance of making adequate provision for our national

135McNutt, “Squared Shoulders vs. Skulking Feet.”.
137McNutt to J. Frank Lindsey, November 27, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.
138Paul V. McNutt, “Speech Delivered Before the Annual Convention, Department of Minnesota, American Legion,” August 8, 1927, box 14, McNutt Papers, LL.
139Paul V. McNutt, Speech at Purdue University, November 11, 1925, box 14, McNutt Papers, LL.
security.”

To be sure, he did not oppose all international commitments and collective security arrangements for the United States. As a Democrat and a Wilsonian, he backed U.S. entrance into the League of Nations and the World Court. But by the latter 1920s, McNutt was not campaigning for these causes to which the public was, at best, indifferent. He held an even lower opinion of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, under which fifteen nations, including the U.S., agreed to renounce war as an instrument of national policy. McNutt dismissed the treaty as a “gesture.” “As long as individuals break promises, so will nations,” he emphasized. In contrast to the toothless Kellogg Pact, McNutt favored “any enforceable agreement” to bring about peace.

In McNutt’s opinion, the strength of such agreements rested on America having adequate stockpiles of weapons. In 1929, he prodded Congress to fund a set of new navy cruisers as a way of “giving substance” to the Kellogg-Briand Pact. He went further, attacking past disarmament efforts, in particular, the Five Power Pact, a product of the Washington Naval Conference of 1921 which set a ratio of 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 on the tonnage of capital ships for, respectively, the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, and Italy. The Legion’s commander insisted that this pact had forced the U.S. to scrap “the most modern battle fleet in the world.” Accordingly, when President Herbert Hoover suspended construction of three out of five new cruisers authorized by Congress, McNutt wired the president to protest. In an open

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140 McNutt to W. J. Patterson, November 17, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.
141 McNutt to Lindsey, October 7, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
142 He apparently told Esther Everett Lape, a confidante of Eleanor Roosevelt’s and the head of the American Foundation, which was devoted to American membership in the World Court, that the “question of American adherence to the World Court is not—or at least should not be made—a political question.” See Lape to McNutt, January 8, 1927, folder: American Foundation, box 3A, McNutt Papers, IU School of Law Library. McNutt said that the U.S. government had to respect the “expressed will of the majority” on issues of the League of Nations and World Court. McNutt to Lindsey, November 27, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.
143 McNutt to Newman T. Miller, November 2, 1928, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.
145 McNutt to Lindsey, October 7, 1926, box 2, McNutt Papers, LL.
146 “Legion Head Urges Cruiser Bill Vote,” New York Sun clipping, [January 1929], folder: 1929 Newspaper Clippings, box 25, McNutt Papers, LL.
letter, Hoover defended his decision by asserting that the “disparity” in navies stemmed from “competitive building” among nations and that negotiation represented the best way to reduce armaments and restore parity at sea. Hoover, a small-government Republican and a Quaker, believed that more arms would lead neither to security nor peace but to “burdensome expenditure” at home and “suspicion, ill will and misunderstanding” abroad.148

McNutt’s exchange with Hoover was significant for several reasons. First, Hoover got the better of the argument in the short term, for his position was in accordance with the mindset of the American public following World War I. The Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal praised the president’s “proper” rebuff to “Commander McNutt” and reproached the Legion for encouraging America to “squander” money on “military machines” which yield “nothing but death.”149 McNutt’s exchange with a sitting president also underscored the extent to which he was now on the national stage. Reporters thought that Hoover had replied to McNutt, over other critics of his naval policy, because of the “straightforward manner” in which McNutt had made his case and the “splendid national publicity” that his statement had garnered.150

The debate over cruisers also revealed that McNutt was willing to seek federal support for projects he deemed worthwhile. The rehabilitation of veterans and the provisioning of their orphans and dependents became his pet projects. McNutt vowed not to rest until “every veteran disabled in the World War receives the care and award to which he is entitled.”151 To that end, he pressed Congress to build more veterans’ hospitals and to allow additional time for veterans of World War I to demonstrate any physical handicaps which stemmed from their military service.152 The plight of disabled veterans touched McNutt in a most personal way. He was, after all, the grandson of a Civil War soldier whose

148 Herbert Hoover to McNutt, July 30, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.
149 “Instructing a Commander,” Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal, August 1, 1929, folder: 1929 Newspaper Clippings, box 25, McNutt Papers, LL.
150 Edward McE. Lewis to McNutt, July 31, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.
151 News clipping, “Western New York Legion Men Greet Their U.S. Leader,” February 16, 1929, fiche 1, Department of Indiana, Biographical Files—Paul V. McNutt, American Legion Library.
152 “Dean McNutt Spends Quiet Day at Home After Speaking Tour,” Indiana Daily Student, May 22, 1929, p. 3; McNutt to Comrades, June 22, 1929, “Disabled Veterans of World War Non-Compensated,” Subject File, American Legion Library.
family had struggled unsuccessfully to have his annual veteran's pension increased. In 1928, McNutt jotted a Christmas message to former soldiers at hospitals, exhorting them to “be of good cheer,” praising their courage, and pledging to work for them “every day of the year.” One disabled veteran heard McNutt speak and came away impressed that he was “on the right side” of this issue. Even after he left the post of national commander, McNutt still thought of veterans. As the Depression set in, he favored, for “moral and economic” reasons, an immediate payout of the bonus to veterans of the Great War. The money was due to them for their service, and its prompt dispersal promised to provide relief by pumping dollars into the economy.

In McNutt’s speeches on behalf of disabled veterans, one can see, to some extent, the origins of his later embrace of the welfare state, as governor of Indiana and as a member of FDR’s administration. McNutt, as national commander, did not see a federal answer to most problems. But a concern for disabled veterans led him to espouse, in a general sense, measures to provide care for those whom he dubbed “the unfortunate products of modern civilization.” In an address before the Department of Massachusetts in 1929, McNutt praised the Bay State for adopting forward-looking social policies that had gone “a long way” toward providing some security for its poorer citizens. “The answer to the question, ‘Am I my brother’s keeper?’” McNutt averred, “is ‘Yes,’ whether we like it or not.” Once again, his vision was steadily widening to consider issues of national relevance.

As Legion commander, McNutt was able to convey his thoughts to more people than ever before. While visiting New York, he spoke on the

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153 Ralph W. Moss to John C. McNutt, January 9 and 17, 1911; Jacob M. Neely, “Claim for Increase of Pension Under the General Law,” March 10, 1911; General Affidavit, January 2, 1911; William A. Cullop to Jacob M. Neely, December 11 and 12, 1911; Commissioner of Pensions to Neely, November 18, 1913— all in box 1, Neely Family Papers, LL.

154 Paul V. McNutt, “Merry Christmas, Buddy!” fiche 1, Department of Indiana, Biographical Files—Paul V. McNutt, American Legion Library.

155 Albert J. Stader to McNutt, January 30, 1930, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.

156 “The Soldier’s Bonus,” no date, folder: n. d. Miscellaneous 1, box 12, McNutt Papers, LL.

157 He wanted the Legion to limit itself to matters affecting veterans of the Great War and their families and to avoid controversial issues such as establishing a cabinet-level department of education or passing a constitutional amendment to abolish child labor. McNutt to E. M. Blessing, October 22, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.

158 “The American Legion, Department of Massachusetts, Address by Paul V. McNutt,” January 19, 1929, box 14, McNutt Papers, LL.
Kellogg Pact to a nationwide radio audience, and a Movietone newsreel carried his comments on cruisers. By October 1929, McNutt had traveled almost 95,000 miles as national commander, and had completed a second, more extensive trip to Europe. McNutt led a delegation to Paris to dedicate the headquarters of the Legion’s Department of France and to attend the annual nine-nation congress of the Allied Veterans Federation. The ceremonial nature of this visit, along with the unique leadership position now occupied by McNutt, enabled him to represent his nation and to meet with foreign leaders, including Pope Pius XI and Premier Benito Mussolini of Italy.

McNutt would have been unable to travel, speak, and lead the Legion without the help of a competent staff at the Legion’s headquarters. At their first meeting, McNutt told James F. Barton, the national adjutant: “Jim, you stay here and run things and I’ll go out and put on the medicine show.” What McNutt did, on an institutional level, was to insert himself into the existing bureaucracy, traditions, and agenda of the American Legion rather than reform it. Elected without the support of the organization’s machine, McNutt might have tried to change the manner in which the Legion selected its national commanders. But there is no reason to think that he did so. By 1933, MacNider complained to Theodore Roosevelt Jr., a fellow former national commander, that the Legion was still in the hands of a few “politicos” who “dictate absolutely every job in the outfit.” To be certain, such laments—from one Republican to another—reflect the fact that several Democrats, including McNutt and Louis Johnson, who served as national commander from 1932 to 1933, were rising to leadership offices within the organization. Nevertheless, there was a clear pattern to McNutt’s leadership, for he preferred to work within the system. As governor of Indiana during

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159 “Colonel McNutt Talks Over Radio on Peace Topics,” Indiana Daily Student, June 19, 1929, p. 1; McNutt to William C. Rose, February 9, 1929, box 4, McNutt Papers, LL.
160 Mileage report, no date, folder: 1929 Sept. 27-30, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.
162 McNutt’s Star Continues to Rise; Elected Governor,” Indianapolis Times, May 19, 1933, p. 22.
163 Blake, Paul V. McNutt, 61.
164 ‘MacNider to Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., September 18, 1933, folder: Hanford MacNider 1920-34, box 29, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., Papers, LC.
the 1930s, he practiced the prevailing ethics of his state by forming a political machine of his own and by utilizing an unrepentant system of patronage.\(^{166}\)

Although not a reformer, McNutt was, according to most accounts, a successful national commander. By the end of his term, the Legion’s membership had grown by over 36,000—the organization’s largest annual increase since 1921. Meanwhile, the Legion’s lobbyists, no doubt directed by Barton, were able to pry some legislation from Congress, including a nine-million-dollar bill to improve veterans’ hospitals.\(^{167}\)

With such accomplishments, McNutt was hailed as a credit to the Legion.\(^{168}\) A Legionnaire from Chicago praised his “dignity,” “perfect poise,” and “unceasing devotion” which had given the Legion its “greatest year.”\(^{169}\) If McNutt used the organization to propel himself into a political career, “[H]e certainly did the Legion no harm.” That was the view of C. A. Jackson, a former commander of the Department of Indiana, and many members nationwide agreed.\(^{170}\) A Legionnaire in Ohio assured McNutt that his state would support him “in any enterprise.”\(^{171}\) In Bloomington, Legionnaires and Rotarians had an inkling of what that enterprise should be. At a meeting of both organizations held in November 1929, they nominated McNutt for president of the United States.\(^{172}\)

FROM LEGION COMMANDER TO ELECTED POLITICIAN

McNutt’s experience in the Legion proved an asset as he made the transition to elected politics. Although an ardent Democrat, McNutt, through the Legion, had made a number of friends in the other party.\(^{173}\)


\(^{167}\)Neff, “The Early Career and Governorship of Paul V. McNutt,” 63-64.

\(^{168}\)Lemuel Bolles to McNutt, October 9, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.

\(^{169}\)Ferre C. Watkins to McNutt, October 4, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.


\(^{171}\)Eddie Lee to McNutt, October 5, 1929, box 5, McNutt Papers, LL.


\(^{173}\)One example was John W. Wheeler, a Republican Legionnaire from Crown Point, Indiana. Wheeler to McNutt, October 28, 1930, box 6, McNutt Papers, LL.
To exploit McNutt's ties to veterans, the chair of Indiana's Democratic Party, R. Earl Peters, invited him to deliver the keynote address at the state party convention in 1930.\textsuperscript{174} McNutt responded with a “rousing piece of oratory” that hailed the Democracy, assailed the Grand Old Party, and closed with an appeal to independent voters.\textsuperscript{175} Such a plea doubtless stemmed from McNutt's service in the nonpartisan/bipartisan Legion, and it had a powerful effect. Journalist Harold Feightner conjectured that the typical Indiana Legionnaire saw in McNutt's budding career “a cause. . . to fight for.”\textsuperscript{176} Many agreed. A Republican friend of McNutt's wrote to him after reading his address to the state's Democrats: “Few men, Paul, are able to command the respect of the opposition. . . as you do.”\textsuperscript{177}

When McNutt decided to run for governor in 1932, he was uniquely positioned to win. That year, the state GOP, beset by a spate of scandals and the Great Depression, was riding for a fall. Early in 1932, McNutt disclosed his intentions, mobilized supporters, and triumphed in the Democratic primary. Crucial to his successes was his experience in the American Legion, where he had learned how to announce his candidacy for an office, enlist lieutenants, plot strategy, and prevail at official gatherings.\textsuperscript{178} Moreover, Legionnaires formed a major component of McNutt's bid to become governor.\textsuperscript{179} A trio of Legion members comprised the campaign's brain trust: Bowman Elder collected financial contributions; Pleas Greenlee served as secretary and oversaw the formation of McNutt-for-Governor Clubs; and Frank McHale managed the enterprise as a whole.\textsuperscript{180}

The campaign staff's most notable innovation was the McNutt-for-Governor Clubs, which they built outside the regular party outfit to

\textsuperscript{174} R. Earl Peters to McNutt, July 30, 1930, box 6, McNutt Papers, LL.
\textsuperscript{175} Madison, Indiana Through Tradition and Change, 78; “Keynote Speech, by Hon. Paul V. McNutt, Delivered at Cadle Tabernacle,” June 10, 1930, box 2, Walter Treanor Papers, LL.
\textsuperscript{176} Feightner Oral History, October 24, 1968, p. 84, ISL.
\textsuperscript{177} Snoberger to McNutt, June 11, 1930, box 6, McNutt Papers, LL.
\textsuperscript{178} Madison, Indiana Through Tradition and Change, 78.
\textsuperscript{179} McNutt remained conscious of the need to avoid involving the American Legion, as an organization, in partisan politics. For that reason, he declined an offer to announce his candidacy for governor in the pages of The Hoosier Legionnaire. Blake, Paul V. McNutt, 94-95.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, 94, 107.
appeal to independents and Republicans as well as Democrats.\textsuperscript{181} This sensible effort nevertheless irritated older Democrats. Long-serving party chieftains held a bifurcated view of these newcomers from the Legion, seeing them as “engines of party victory” on the one hand, and as “politically ambitious veterans” who were challenging “the party’s established order” on the other.\textsuperscript{182} Claude R. Wickard, a Democrat who won election to the state senate in 1932, recalled the “McNutt group” as being “younger and . . . newer and . . . more liberal than the old Democratic organization which had been in control in the twenties.”\textsuperscript{183} In the long run, the Legionnaires who had infiltrated the state party became known, somewhat disdainfully, as the “boy scouts.”\textsuperscript{184} Nevertheless, in the short run, McHale and company had the organization and the votes to nominate McNutt for governor, by acclamation, at the state party convention in June 1932.\textsuperscript{185}

The pique of many senior party officials was part of a larger phenomenon: the rise of veterans as a force in the 1932 elections in Indiana. During that campaign, the GOP nominated for governor Raymond S. Springer, who had been the first commander of the Legion’s Department of Indiana.\textsuperscript{186} Such changes suggested a generational shift in Indiana politics. As the campaign drew to a close, Feightner, writing in the \textit{New York Times}, contrasted young guard Democrat McNutt with another statewide candidate, incumbent U. S. Senator (and Majority Leader) James E. Watson, a quintessential partisan wheelhorse and an old guard Republican.\textsuperscript{187}

McNutt’s status as a veteran and as a former national commander of the Legion gave him a star quality, and he exploited it. In fact,
Feightner justified his comparison of McNutt with Watson, and with not Springer, on the grounds that the one-time Legion commander and the current Senate leader were both “nationally known figures.” McNutt’s candidacy drew wide interest. The *Providence* (Rhode Island) *Journal* sent a reporter to Indiana to cover the youthful dean/Legionnaire/Democrat. This correspondent observed that McNutt was engaging in a new manner of campaigning by making the candidate, rather than the party and its symbols, the chief attraction. With respect to politics in Indiana, such a strategy did not hurt McNutt at all, for “even earthy Hoosiers were convinced that this man was above the average politician in ability.” In November, McNutt defeated Springer by winning fifty-five percent of the vote—a record for a gubernatorial candidate in Indiana.

With respect to national politics, McNutt’s experience as a national commander of the American Legion hurt rather than helped him in 1932. After McNutt won his party’s nomination for governor, he began to think that something bigger lay ahead. The Democratic National Convention opened in Chicago in June, and the field was awash with candidates for the presidential nomination. According to the party’s rules for gaining the nomination, the frontrunner, Gov. Franklin Roosevelt of New York, had to win the votes of two-thirds of the convention delegates—and he was short of that number. McNutt, as the leader of the Indiana delegation, decided to withhold his state’s support from the Roosevelt campaign and then wait to see what transpired in the Windy City. McNale and Elder concurred with those thoughts, prompting Robert E. Proctor, the leader of FDR’s campaign in Indiana, to ask them: “What kind of meat do you fellows eat that makes you so

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188 Pauly, “Out Indiana Way,” *Ohio State Journal* (Columbus), October 20, 1932, folder: 1932 Newspaper Clippings, box 26, McNutt Papers, LL.


189 “Indiana is very important to them,” McNutt wrote one of his aides. “All of this makes our position stronger.” McNutt to Douglas I. McKay, June 15, 1932, box 8, McNutt Papers, LL.
The answer, simply stated, was the Legion. Their idea was to rally behind some stalking horse, deadlock the party's convention, and affect the nomination of McNutt for president, in an encore of the Legion's convention three years earlier. In the words of Wickard, McHale was “planning all the time to elect Paul McNutt President of the United States” and remained hopeful that McNutt “would get the nomination” in 1932.

Unfortunately for the McNutt forces, the Democratic National Convention was a larger and more complex affair—bringing together wily, veteran politicos—than a Legion gathering of young, politically minded veterans. On the fourth ballot, the Texas and California delegations switched their support to Roosevelt, nullifying Indiana’s resistance and handing FDR the presidential nomination. After the convention, James A. Farley, Roosevelt’s convention manager and chair of the party’s national committee during FDR’s first two terms in the White House, never forgot the disloyalty of McNutt, whom he assailed as “the ‘platinum blond’ S. O. B. from Indiana.” McNutt’s actions, ambition, and even arrogance at the 1932 Democratic National Convention stemmed from a number of different experiences and character traits. Yet, it is hard to believe that memories of the Legion convention three years earlier, when the Indiana delegation had triumphed against all odds, did not loom large in the minds of McNutt and his managers.

RETROSPECT

McNutt’s experience in the American Legion shaped his governorship and his later career in three respects. First, McNutt brought the symbolic trappings of the Legion to the statehouse. His inauguration as governor brimmed with pomp and circumstance in part because the Legion was front and center, with a band from 120 different posts play-

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193 Proctor, “Memorandum of Activities of Indiana Delegation Chicago Convention 1932,” no date, folder: Dewitt, Clyde, box 4, Coy Papers, FDRL.
194 Ibid.
195 Wickard Oral History, February 14, 1933, p. 529, box 54, Wickard Papers, FDRL.
196 Steve Neal, Happy Days Are Here Again: The 1932 Democratic Convention, the Emergence of FDR—and How America Was Changed Forever (New York, 2004), 274-76, 296.
ing in tribute to their former national commander. Not unlike McNutt’s campaign for governor, the ceremony was stage-managed to spotlight the new executive and to signify a shift in state politics. Former Governor James P. Goodrich, a Republican, wrote of the day: “McNutt inaugurated with a lot of fuss and feathers for a Democrat.”

Secondly, McNutt drew upon his background in the military and the American Legion as he sought to calm Hoosiers and rally their spirits during the Great Depression. In his inaugural address, he acknowledged an economic crisis “as grim and as real as any war” and called on the “unselfish service, energy, intelligence and solidarity” of Hoosiers to meet the challenges ahead, as they had during the First World War. McNutt set the pace. Although tainted by machine-style tactics, his administration reorganized the state’s government and reformed its tax system; tightened regulation of banking and of liquor; passed pensions for the aged; centralized the state’s control over poor relief; and worked with FDR’s government to provide jobs to the unemployed and Social Security for the elderly.

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Although these programs cannot be traced directly to his years in the Legion, those designed to help the needy were, in a very general sense, consistent with his support of veterans’ aid programs. Moreover, as McNutt pushed through his agenda, he continued to invoke military-style analogies. Even in hard times, he once insisted, “we can order a charge and can move forward with courage.”

Thirdly, McNutt retained the same realistic outlook on foreign affairs that he had exhibited as national commander of the Legion. After McNutt left the governorship in 1937, he became, at FDR’s invitation, U.S. high commissioner to the Philippine Islands. There, he challenged the administration’s policy by advocating a reappraisal of Philippine independence, set to take place in 1946. Instead, McNutt favored “a permanent political and economic relationship” between the United States

199 James P. Goodrich Diary, January 9, 1933, box 3, Goodrich Papers, HHPL.
200 Inaugural Address of Governor Paul V. McNutt of Indiana, January 9, 1933, box 14, McNutt Papers, LL.
202 “Talk by Governor Paul V. McNutt of Indiana, Given on the Ohio School of Air,” September 18, 1933, box 14, McNutt Papers, LL.
and the Philippines, for he was convinced that if the islands became independent they would “immediately fall prey” to the “might” of Japan.203 “America cannot leave the Orient today,” McNutt emphasized, “without serious loss of prestige and without further endangering world peace.”204 World War II reinforced his early thoughts on the need for col-


204 McNutt to Roy W. Howard, December 11, 1937, folder: 1937 Philippines, box 133, Howard Papers, LC.
lective security. “One cannot quarantine a land against tyranny and persecution,” he wrote in 1942. “The world is one. If aggression stalks the people of the earth, no land, no person is immune.” Following the war’s end, McNutt supported policies, such as the Marshall Plan, to contain Soviet power in Europe, and military actions, such as the United Nations intervention in Korea, to repel communist advances in Asia. His own contribution to containment and to America’s emerging defense perimeter in the Pacific came at the close of his public career. While serving as U. S. ambassador to the Philippines from 1946 to 1947, McNutt successfully negotiated a treaty under which the United States gained access to valuable military bases in its former colony.

Service in the American Legion helped give McNutt the major elements of his political ideology, one that would dominate the years immediately following World War II. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, McNutt might be described as an early cold war liberal—a proponent of the welfare/warfare state who wanted to promote economic security for Americans at home and national security for America abroad. As federal security administrator in the late 1930s, he oversaw much of FDR’s New Deal and was able to refine his thinking on the responsibility of the state to its citizens. Meanwhile, his hatred for dictatorships remained intense, as did his longstanding commitment to achieving a strong national defense. McNutt, not unlike Truman—another former Legionnaire, a staunch anti-communist, and a fellow cold war liberal—

205 McNutt to Abba Hillel Silver, January 14, 1942, box 11, Records of the Federal Security Administrator: General Classified Files, 1939-1944, Alphabetical Series, Record Group 235, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.


207 Gleeck, Dissolving the Colonial Bond, 23-28.

208 In 1935 he championed three domestic objectives: “The security of livelihood through better use of the natural resources”; “The security against major hazards and vicissitudes of life”; and “The security of better homes.” “Address of Paul V. McNutt, Governor of Indiana, at the Banquet Honoring Thomas Jefferson,” Martinsville, Indiana, April 24, 1935, box 13, McNutt Papers, LL.

209 Paul V. McNutt, “Cultural Pluralism in America” (a speech in Boston), no date, folder: Speeches n.d., box 23, McNutt Papers, LL.

210 “Address by His Excellency Paul V. McNutt, United States High Commissioner to the Philippine Islands, at National Sojourners Meeting Manila,” March 30, 1939, box 17, McNutt Papers, LL.
embraced a holistic view of security, whereby the federal government
would protect Americans from privation, subversives, and predatory
dictators. The liberal tradition would evolve in new directions after
1945, embracing such issues as civil rights for racial minorities. But the
notion of security lay at the heart of the emerging postwar consensus. 211
Unfortunately for McNutt, a succession of events beyond his control,
such as FDR’s decision to seek a third term, prevented him from occupying
the office to which Truman ascended in 1945.

The American Legion proved a boon to McNutt, though only to a
point. The organization was, in many respects, made for him. It was
inclusive—of veterans of World War I, whether or not they had
fought—patriotic, service-oriented, and anti-radical. Such values mir-
rored McNutt’s own. Also, the Legion’s structure and its revolving lead-
ership, with one-year terms for both state and national commanders,
opened opportunities for driven men, such as McNutt, to achieve dis-
tinction and to head an institution. Leadership of the Legion alone was
no royal road to securing a spot on a national ticket—as McNutt discov-
ered in 1932. But through it, as McNutt’s experience also showed, it was
possible to gain both renown and nomination to a lower level office,
from which one might launch a political career.

211 See David M. Kennedy, Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-
1945 (New York, 1999), 365, 377-78; Alonzo L. Hamby, Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman
and American Liberalism (New York, 1973) 513-14; Alonzo L. Hamby, Liberalism and Its
Challengers: From F.D.R. to Bush, 2nd ed. (New York, 1992), vii-viii, 3-4; Jonathan Bell, The
Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics in the Truman Years (New York, 2004),
xiii-xix, 268-75.