

Stephen B. Elkins and the Benjamin Harrison Campaign and Cabinet, 1887-1891

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Few members of President Benjamin Harrison's administration traveled so complicated a route to political preferment as Stephen B. Elkins, secretary of war from 1891 to 1893. Elkins' pivotal role in the Republican national convention of 1888, when he acted as a broker between Harrison's managers and the followers of James G. Blaine, was well known at the time and has since been documented by historians.¹ What is less well known is why Elkins took on the role of a Warwick and what reward he expected for his pains. The answer is simple: Elkins wanted to be a United States senator from West Virginia. The problem was that he did not live in the Mountain State; thus, he naturally faced competition there from native Republican leaders. These considerations forced him to adopt a complicated strategy of maneuver in state and national politics. Harrison, for reasons of his own, eventually fell in with Elkins' strategy, but not before giving him some anxious moments, first during the preconvention campaign of 1888, then during the period of Cabinet making and remaking after he entered the White House.

Elkins began his political career in the territory of New Mexico, but he won national prominence as the manager of Blaine's several campaigns for the presidency. Elkins' ideas about a senatorial career dated back at least to 1879 when Blaine promised to make his protégé "Senator from New Mexico in two years," at which time, presumably, the Plumed Knight expected to place the weight of the presidency behind a New Mexico statehood bill acceptable to local land speculators.² But Blaine failed to win the presidential chair in 1880 or again in 1884, when Elkins acted as the architect of his narrowly

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¹ See especially H. Wayne Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley: National Party Politics, 1877-1896* (Syracuse, 1969), 281-92, 295-99; Harry J. Sievers, *Benjamin Harrison, Hoosier Statesman: From the Civil War to the White House* (New York, 1959), 329-53.

² James G. Blaine to Stephen B. Elkins, November 17, 1879, Stephen B. Elkins Papers (West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University Library, Morgantown). Elkins' senatorial ambitions can be inferred from his actions surrounding the New Mexico statehood bill of 1875; the practice of territorial delegates returning to Washington as senators after achieving statehood for their territory (as did two of Elkins' associates, Jerome Chaffee of Colorado, cosponsor of the 1875 bill, and Thomas Catron, who discussed the delegate-cum-senator pattern in a letter to Elkins in 1891 and who in time became New Mexico's first United States senator); and from Elkins' concentration on the senatorship once he had established himself in West Virginia. For details see John A. Williams, "New York's First Senator from West Virginia: How Stephen B. Elkins Found a New Political Home," *West Virginia History*, XXXI (January, 1970), 75-77.

defeated campaign against Grover Cleveland.³ In the meantime he turned to a post in James A. Garfield's Cabinet as a suitable position for his friend but again ran afoul of the problem of Elkins' "domicile."⁴ In 1877 Elkins abandoned New Mexico as a residence but not as a political address; he settled first in Washington, then in New York, where he managed business interests extending to several states and territories.⁵ In a day when geographical considerations counted for much, Elkins sorely needed a new political home. He also needed a new political patron after Blaine sailed away to Europe in the summer of 1887 making uncharacteristic noises about retiring from politics.⁶ West Virginia supplied the first need; Harrison, the second. The key man in each transaction was Elkins' father-in-law and principal business partner, Henry Gassaway Davis.

It was not Blaine but Davis who sponsored the initial Elkins-Harrison political discussions in 1887. A former Democratic senator from West Virginia from 1871-1883 with extensive mining and railroad interests in the state, Davis had seen his own political career disrupted by factional conflicts at home and his business interests threatened by the rising tide of tariff reform sentiment in the national Democracy.⁷ By the spring of 1887 he concluded that the interests of West Virginia coal producers would "be better served . . . by a liberal Republican [senator] than by a Free trade anti improvement Democrat."⁸ After repeated and unsuccessful attempts to distract President Cleveland from the spell of the tariff reformers, he seems to have reached similar conclusions regarding the presidency.⁹ At no time did Davis openly oppose candidates of his own party; rather his strategy was the covert withdrawal of funds and followers—"passiveness in certain quarters" as Elkins later

³ David Saville Muzzey, *James G. Blaine: A Political Idol of Other Days* (New York, 1934), 7, 233; Blaine to Elkins, June 13, 24, July 27, August 5, October 19, November 7, 24, July, 1884, Elkins Papers.

⁴ Blaine to Elkins, August 10, 1881, Elkins Papers.

⁵ Elkins had arrived in New Mexico in 1864 at the age of twenty-three and had served successively as territorial legislator, territorial attorney, federal attorney, and delegate to Congress. After he retired from Congress in 1877, he remained in the East, although New Mexico remained his political residence through the campaign of 1884. For details see Oscar D. Lambert, *Stephen Benton Elkins: American Foursquare* (Pittsburgh, 1955), 1-34, 66-69; Howard R. Lamar, *The Far Southwest, 1846-1912: A Territorial History* (New Haven, 1966), 137-51; and Robert W. Larsen, *New Mexico's Quest for Statehood, 1846-1912* (Albuquerque, 1968), 117-37, 142-43. For a summary of Elkins' numerous and far flung politico-economic ventures see John A. Williams, "Davis and Elkins of West Virginia: Businessmen in Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Yale University, 1967), 21-24.

⁶ Blaine to Elkins, March 15, June 30, 1887, Elkins Papers.

⁷ Williams, "Davis and Elkins," 72-81, 92-112.

⁸ "Draft of a letter to [Wheeling] *Register*," March 27, 1887, Henry Gassaway Davis Papers (West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University Library).

⁹ For Davis' relations with Cleveland and the national Democracy on the tariff issue and for the bearing of that issue on Davis' and Elkins' political strategy in West Virginia see Williams, "New York's First Senator from West Virginia," 75-77.

explained it to Harrison. Given the narrow balance of partisan power in the nation and West Virginia's recent elevation to the status of a "doubtful state" thanks to impressive Republican gains in the 1884 and 1886 elections, Davis' potential influence was not inconsiderable.¹⁰ A long standing personal friendship with Harrison made him all the more eager to cooperate with Elkins' design if indeed—as Elkins later hinted¹¹—he did not instigate it. Harrison and his family were frequent visitors at Deer Park, the Davis summer home atop the Maryland Alleghenies.¹² The Hoosier's 1887 sojourn at Deer Park was different, however. In addition to the usual rich mixture of political gossip and mountain air, Harrison's hosts offered the prospect of the presidency. Blaine, Elkins told him, might not stand for renomination and if he did, might not get it. In that case Elkins could think of no one more likely to win support of the "Blaine Legion" than Harrison. Davis advised his guest to encourage any presidential boom that might develop and hinted at his own willingness to support him.¹³ Harrison replied to these overtures with the modesty appropriate to this stage of the campaign; but the idea had been broached, and none of the principals forgot the conversations during the months that followed. By December, when Cleveland's message to Congress lent powerful support to the tariff reform movement, Davis was at work among disaffected Democrats while Elkins kept tabs on the growth of presidential fever at Indianapolis.¹⁴ By February Elkins was ready to resume with Harrison their "several conversations last summer at Deer Park about the presidency."¹⁵

On March 1, 1888, Blaine lent his approval to Elkins' presidential strategy although he said nothing and probably knew nothing about the West Virginia angle in the affair. In his "Florence Letter" of January 25, the Plumed Knight had publicly renounced designs on the presidential nomination, and subsequent private elaborations to Elkins discounted the possibility of a draft.¹⁶ Blaine also cast a

¹⁰ Elkins to Benjamin Harrison, August 4, 1888, microfilm copy, Benjamin Harrison Papers. Microfilm copies of the Harrison Papers, which are located in the Library of Congress, Washington, were examined in the libraries of Yale, West Virginia, Notre Dame, and Illinois (Chicago) universities. For Davis' role in the 1888 campaign see Williams, "New York's First Senator from West Virginia," 79-82.

¹¹ Elkins to Davis, October 28, 1889, Elkins Papers.

¹² Charles M. Pepper, *The Life and Times of Henry Gassaway Davis* (New York, 1920), 145, 160; see also Davis to Samuel Spencer, June 15, 1883, Davis Papers, concerning Davis-Harrison family visits in Indianapolis.

¹³ Sievers, *Harrison, Hoosier Statesman*, 310-11, 317; see also Elkins to Harrison, February 11, 1888, Harrison Papers; Harrison to Elkins, February 18, 1888, Elkins Papers.

¹⁴ Davis to Robert White, December 7, 1887; Davis to James B. Taney, December 8, 1887; Davis to Johnson N. Camden, December 9, 1887, Davis Papers; William R. Holloway to Elkins, December 15, 1887, Elkins Papers.

¹⁵ Elkins to Harrison, February 11, 1888, Harrison Papers.

¹⁶ Muzzey, *Blaine*, 368; Mary Ann Dodge to Elkins, January 24, 1888; Blaine to Elkins, March 1, April 8, 1888, Elkins Papers.

shrewd eye on the remaining Republican hopefuls. John Sherman and a clutch of favorite son candidates were "unavailable at critical points"; they were hostile to Blaine and Elkins (Sherman), unattractive to business interests (Walter Q. Gresham and William B. Allison), or could not be elected ("Evarts, Hawley, Phelps, Alger, Cullom, Rush, et id omne genus"). The "one man remaining" was Harrison.¹⁷ Elkins passed on these assurances to Harrison as they arrived from Europe. He did not write off the possibility of a draft nomination for Blaine and discussed it frankly with Harrison. "I know he wants to escape the turmoil and excitement of another campaign, but it is possible yet that the Convention may if it finds a sharp division between the other candidates without result, go to Blaine by acclamation." Elkins thought that the best strategy was to promote Harrison as a second choice candidate among the Plumed Knight's followers, thereby reducing the chances of a stalemate.¹⁸ He had already passed the word around in New York and would, he said, make the Indianian the heritor of Blaine's strength, "At the proper time & when I think it will best serve your interest."¹⁹

Elkins' approach to Harrison was quite explicitly that of a Warwick. The "Blaine element," he wrote, "will largely determine the result at Chicago, and probably go where Blaine friends decide it is best to go."²⁰ This was a clear invitation to bargain: what would Harrison do for Elkins in return for his support in the nominating convention? Harrison's answers were disappointing. His replies to Elkins' advances were an adroit mixture of diffidence and encouragement. He was profuse with reciprocal declarations of friendship and promptly responded to Elkins' inquiries as to his record and the political situation in Indiana. Beyond that there were "some things I would say & some things I would ask you to say if we were together, but about which I do not care to write."²¹ Elkins too had confidences too deep to entrust to a letter but repeated attempts to draw Harrison east for a conference proved futile. Harrison never really declined to come, but the obligations of his law practice always managed to interfere with his coming, even when Davis offered suitable "cover" for a secret meeting at Deer Park.²² Thus from the beginning Elkins got a taste of that disdain for the byways of "practical politics" that in time would isolate Harrison

¹⁷ Blaine to Elkins, March 1, 1888, Elkins Papers, referring to William M. Evarts, Joseph R. Hawley, William Walter Phelps, Russell Alger, Shelby Cullom, and Jeremiah Rusk.

¹⁸ Elkins to Harrison, February 27, 1888, Harrison Papers.

¹⁹ Elkins to Harrison, February 11, 14, 1888, *ibid.*

²⁰ Elkins to Harrison, February 27, 1888, *ibid.*

²¹ Harrison to Elkins, February 13, 18, March 1, 12, 19, 1888, Elkins Papers. Quotation is from letter of March 19.

²² Elkins to Harrison, March 31, April 6, 16, May 2, 7, 1888, Harrison Papers; Harrison to Elkins, April 4, 12, May 6, 1888, Elkins Papers.

from the bulk of Republican chieftains.²³ For the moment, however, Harrison's behavior could be passed off as the coquetry expected of any potential nominee. While avoiding commitments, he was careful to respond encouragingly to Elkins' advances. Following Elkins' advice, he spoke admiringly of Blaine in public and did not oppose the selection of Blaine men as delegates to the convention.²⁴ He detailed Louis T. Michener, attorney general of Indiana and the manager of his home state "boom," to act as liaison with Elkins and other Blaine leaders.²⁵ Eventually Michener went to New York in late May to satisfy Elkins' desire for a meeting. While he too was instructed not to make commitments, his earlier hints of the benefits to be won by the engineers of a Blaine-Harrison fusion left little to imagination. "General Harrison will be nominated and elected," he assured Elkins; in which case "no good friend of Mr. Blaine's will have any occasion to regret it, and I do not use this language lightly, for I understand its full import, and mean it to be understood in that light."²⁶

Whether Elkins himself placed all his cards on the table at this point is open to interpretation. His strategy required dangling the possibility of a draft before Blaine loyalists, and this necessitated some deception of his Indiana friends. For example, around the end of April James S. Clarkson of Iowa, Richard C. Kerens of Missouri, and other "old time workers" came to New York for a series of conferences with Elkins. Kerens subsequently sent word to Harrison that he and Elkins had used the opportunity to press the Hoosier's candidacy and that Blaine's prospects had hardly been mentioned. This last reference was patently untrue if Clarkson's version of the talks is accurate.²⁷ At the same time Elkins told Harrison that he had laid the basis for cooperation between the latter's forces and those of Iowa's favorite son, William B. Allison.²⁸ Possibly this *was* true. Through Clarkson and other friends on the national committee Elkins was able to control the arrangements at the convention down to and including the ticket printing and carpentry.²⁹ There would be no unfriendly gallery such as had harrassed the Blaineites

²³ The literature on Harrison's personality and political style is conveniently summarized in Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 288-89n.

²⁴ Elkins to Harrison, February 27, 1888; Elkins to Louis T. Michener, March 21, 26, 1888, Harrison Papers; Sievers, *Harrison, Hoosier Statesman*, 325.

²⁵ Harrison to Elkins, March 21, 1888; Louis T. Michener to Elkins, March 9, 19, 23, 24, April 7, 10, 20, May 5, 11, 1888, Elkins Papers.

²⁶ Louis T. Michener to Elkins, April 10, 1888, *ibid.*

²⁷ Richard C. Kerens to Russell B. Harrison, May 10, 1888, Harrison Papers; James S. Clarkson to Elkins, May 18, 1888, Elkins Papers; see also Elkins to James S. Clarkson, May 6, 1888, copy of letter, Elkins Papers. The original letter is in the James S. Clarkson Papers (Library of Congress).

²⁸ Elkins to Harrison, May 2, 1888, Harrison Papers. Unless otherwise indicated letters written to "Harrison" refer to Benjamin Harrison.

²⁹ James S. Clarkson to Elkins, May 18, 1888, Elkins Papers.

during their terrible struggle with Roscoe Conkling in 1880. At the same time Elkins kept tabs on Blaine's old followers as they sought election as delegates. "In general," Clarkson reported to Elkins after a leisurely tour on his way back to Iowa, "I may say that I find our old line of friends everywhere ready to act together, and to unite at last. I carried everywhere the word you gave me, and the whole line is thoroughly informed and ready to respond."³⁰

The "word" Elkins gave Clarkson may not have been the same one he gave Harrison. But Harrison's managers recognized that Elkins' usefulness to them depended on his keeping the Blaine element in united and manageable condition. When Michener visited New York on May 25, Elkins gave him advance notice of a second letter from Blaine reiterating his declination.³¹ This ended the threat of a Blaine draft so far as Michener was concerned, and he was convinced of Elkins' loyalty. "With your help," Michener wrote Elkins on his return to Indianapolis, "we shall be able to get the greater part of the Blaine delegates, and thus nominate our man."³²

Although Elkins continued to play his double game between Harrison and the Blaineites almost to the moment of the final ballot, by the eve of the convention he appears to have been working mainly for Harrison. Besides marshalling the Blaine forces and holding them in readiness for a switch, he persuaded several influential eastern conservatives to regard Harrison as Blaine's legatee. Among the converts he claimed were Benjamin F. Jones, the steel magnate, Whitelaw Reid of the New York *Tribune*, Charles Emory Smith of the Philadelphia *Press*, John King of the Erie railroad, and Frank Thomson of the Pennsylvania railroad.³³ A more delicate problem was presented by the powerful New York and Pennsylvania bosses, Thomas C. Platt and Matthew Quay. Jones reported Quay ripe for inclusion in a Blaine movement, but as far as second line candidates were concerned, he was conducting a flirtation of his own with Sherman. Jones suggested getting at Quay through Platt.³⁴ Elkins had gone to work on Platt in March, but the approach of the convention found the "Easy Boss" still "in a doubtful state."³⁵ Although the struggle between organization and antiorganization forces in New York was by no means over, Platt had established his

³⁰ *Ibid.* See also letters to Elkins from William Monaghan (Ohio), Albert S. Horton (Kansas), S. F. Scott (Missouri), Jno. C. Dougherty (Tennessee), C. G. Clarke (Virginia), Reuben Carroll (Kentucky), J. T. Ensor (Maryland), April-June, 1888, *ibid.*

³¹ Louis T. Michener to Elijah W. Halford, May 25, 1888, Harrison Papers. The letter does not mention Elkins but was written in his New York office.

³² Louis T. Michener to Elkins, June 8, 1888, Elkins Papers.

³³ Elkins to Harrison, March 16, 31, April 6, 1888; Elkins to Louis T. Michener, June 10, 1888, Harrison Papers.

³⁴ Benjamin F. Jones to Elkins, May 21, 23, 28, 1888, Elkins Papers.

³⁵ Elkins to Louis T. Michener, June 10, 1888, Harrison Papers.

control sufficiently to secure a united delegation at Chicago and was anxious to exploit this resource to advantage.³⁶ He would not spend his seventy-two votes hastily, however, and he promised to wait until Elkins had seen Harrison before making up his mind. This lent a note of urgency to Elkins' attempts to arrange a conference with Harrison. But again the latter declined to come to Deer Park or to take part in a furtive interview between trains that Elkins proposed for Columbus, Ohio.³⁷ Elkins' extreme reluctance to be seen at Indianapolis suggests a fear of compromising his authority in the eyes of those Blaine men who, like Clarkson, were committed to one of the other favorite sons. However he was able to arrange suitable precautions for secrecy and went to the Hoosier capital to visit Harrison on June 15.³⁸ Again he was unable to secure an explicit commitment, either on his own account or on Platt's. But what he got was enough. As he later reminded Harrison, "I made use of your expressed determination to stand by your friends and my knowledge from our acquaintance that you would surely do so," to convert the doubtful.³⁹ Vague assurances like these, transformed by the enthusiasm of intermediaries into all but explicit promises, were the stuff of which presidents were made.

The Republican convention of 1888 fascinated contemporaries and quickly became part of the political lore of the age. The memoirs of the time focus on the critical weekend recess of June 23-24 and tell of midnight intrigues in Chicago hotels, of messengers to Indianapolis and telegrams to Washington.⁴⁰ There is no need here to go into details, except to note that one of the more famous items concerned a Sunday morning carriage ride during which Elkins and Platt were said to have determined upon Harrison's nomination. Whether Platt needed much persuasion is a debatable point; most of the New York delegation had broken to Harrison on the fourth ballot the previous

³⁶ Harold F. Gosnell, *Boss Platt and His New York Machine: A Study of the Political Leadership of Thomas C. Platt, Theodore Roosevelt and Others* (Chicago, 1924), 34-35.

³⁷ Elkins to Louis T. Michener, June 10, 1888, Harrison Papers; Louis T. Michener to Elkins, June 9, 1888; Harrison to Elkins, June 10, 1888, Elkins Papers.

³⁸ Elkins to Harrison, June 13, 1888; William H. H. Miller to Louis T. Michener, June 15, 1888, Harrison Papers.

³⁹ Elkins to Harrison, February 19, 1889, *ibid.*; see also Sievers, *Harrison, Hoosier Statesman*, 336-37.

⁴⁰ The most convenient account is Herbert Eaton, *Presidential Timber: A History of Nominating Conventions, 1868-1960* (Glencoe, Ill., 1964), 117-37; see also Matthew Josephson, *The Politicos, 1865-1896* (New York, 1938), 413-19; Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 295-99; Sievers, *Harrison, Hoosier Statesman*, 336-52; Nathaniel W. Stephenson, *Nelson W. Aldrich: A Leader in American Politics* (New York, 1930), 71-72; Leland L. Sage, *William Boyd Allison: A Study in Practical Politics* (Iowa City, 1956), 214-18; Henry L. Stoddard, *As I Knew Them: Presidents and Politics from Grant to Coolidge* (New York, 1927), 156-64; and the memoirs of Joseph B. Foraker, Thomas C. Platt, John Sherman, and Chauncey Depew.

day.⁴¹ Thus it is probable that—whatever may have been implied in their conversation—the Elkins-Platt outing had mainly to do with the mechanics of swinging the convention into line, not a “corrupt bargain.”⁴² In any event New York decided on Monday morning to vote as a unit for Harrison and to carry his standard on the convention floor.⁴³ Elkins was further armed with a cable from Andrew Carnegie, Blaine’s current host in the Scottish highlands, giving incontrovertible evidence of the Plumed Knight’s “unavailability” to lay before those of his followers who were still on the fence and stating Blaine’s preference for Harrison.⁴⁴ The convention responded smoothly on the seventh ballot. The movement to Harrison began with California, the only delegation hitherto casting its vote solidly for Blaine. Clarkson moved Iowa into the Harrison column, and Quay delivered Pennsylvania. The previously badly—one suspects deliberately—scattered delegates of the New England states and West Virginia went overwhelmingly for Harrison. Tennessee, also previously divided, clinched the nomination with a nearly solid vote, a result for which insiders gave Elkins credit.⁴⁵

The important thing about the convention was the difference between appearance and reality. From all appearances it was an open convention, deliberating eight days and choosing the nominee from among no fewer than nineteen candidates. In reality the result was dictated by a handful of men who nominated Harrison, not because there was a widespread demand for his nomination but because they wanted victory in the fall and the rewards that went with it; that required an uncontroversial candidate in a campaign in which the tariff issue was expected to predominate over personal appeals.⁴⁶ Elkins played a critical role in producing the result; he hastened to congratulate the nominee and left to Davis a direct statement of his claim on Harrison’s gratitude. “Perhaps it ought to come from some one else,” Davis wrote Harrison on June 25, “but I know you will agree with me—that Elkins did much to bring it

⁴¹ Eaton, *Presidential Timber*, 130; for an inside view of the New York delegation told some months after the event see A. E. Bateman to Harrison, December 17, 1888, Harrison Papers.

⁴² Platt is supposed to have come over to Harrison in return for Elkins’ promise of the Treasury portfolio, which Elkins and Harrison always denied. The matter is discussed in Louis L. Lang, comp. and ed., *The Autobiography of Thomas Collier Platt* (New York, 1910), 206, 218-19; Stoddard, *As I Knew Them*, 160, 172; Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 298; John Sherman, *Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate and Cabinet* (2 vols., New York, 1895), II, 1029; Gosnell *Boss Platt*, 34.

⁴³ Sievers, *Harrison, Hoosier Statesman*, 350.

⁴⁴ Muzzey, *Blaine*, 379; Burton J. Hendrick, *The Life of Andrew Carnegie* (2 vols., New York, 1932), II, 327-28.

⁴⁵ Republican National Convention, *Proceedings* (Chicago, 1888), 204-205; Richard S. Tuthill to Harrison, June 27, 1888, Harrison Papers.

⁴⁶ Stoddard, *As I Knew Them*, 158-59; Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 290.

about."⁴⁷ Harrison may be pardoned for misunderstanding the nature of such claims. Having made no explicit promises, he believed that he owed the nomination to no one and took it as a personal triumph. The opposite was closer to the truth, but the misunderstanding was to cause Elkins in particular and the Republican party in general no little grief during the next four years.⁴⁸

Although preoccupied during the pre-convention period with his courtship of Harrison, Elkins had not neglected the West Virginia side of his double campaign. With Davis' help he arranged a bipartisan protectionist rally at Wheeling on February 29. At this rally, which was thinly disguised as a promotion of industrial development, Elkins made his maiden political speech in the Mountain State. He also bought into the leading Republican newspaper, arranged for the construction of a summer residence near the mountain village of Leadville (shortly rechristened "Elkins"), and made a nonpartisan address at the state university.⁴⁹ After Harrison's nomination Elkins concentrated on the West Virginia campaign. Aside from Davis' "passiveness," for which Elkins claimed credit and which contributed to a Republican gain of some one thousand votes in the upper Potomac mining region,⁵⁰ Elkins' most important achievement was the nomination of Representative Nathan Goff as the Republican gubernatorial candidate. Brought about by a mixture of cajolery and pressure organized by Elkins' newfound newspaper allies, Goff's reluctant acceptance of the honor promised to remove the foremost local claimant to the senatorship to which Elkins aspired.⁵¹ In these circumstances the first results of the fall election occasioned much joy among the members of the Deer Park circle. The unofficial vote showed Republican victories in state and nation. "Your election is a source of great personal gratification to the Davis family including myself," Davis wrote Harrison on November 8. To a West Virginia protectionist who had remained loyal to

⁴⁷ Elkins to Harrison, telegram, June, 1888; Davis to Harrison, June 25, 1888, Harrison Papers.

⁴⁸ For Harrison's assumptions and Republicans' subsequent disillusionment with him see Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 328-31, 400-401; and Platt, *Autobiography*, 210-19, 252. Numerous items in the Harrison Papers document the dissatisfaction of such diverse Republican chieftains as Charles B. Farwell, George F. Edmunds, Joseph B. Foraker, John J. Ingalls, and Mark Hanna; see, for example, Farwell to Harrison, January 4, 16, 1890; Farwell to Elijah J. Halford, April 19, 1890; Edmunds to Harrison, May 28, 1890; Ingalls to G. F. Little, copy of letter, August 2, 1890; Foraker to Louis T. Michener, August 27, 1890; Stanton J. Pelle to Harrison, February 2, 1891.

⁴⁹ Williams, "New York's First Senator from West Virginia," 80-84. Elkins' principal residence remained in New York; his summer home at Elkins was his only residence in West Virginia.

⁵⁰ Elkins to Harrison, August 4, 1888, Harrison Papers; Williams, "Davis and Elkins," 60.

⁵¹ Gerald Wayne Smith, *Nathan Goff, Jr.: A Biography* (Charleston, W. Va., 1959), 156-58; James Henry Jacobs, "The West Virginia Gubernatorial Election Contest, 1888-1890," *West Virginia History*, VII (April, July, 1946), 168-70.

Cleveland he noted: "The tariff question is one that hurt [the Democrats] most." Blaine sent the President-elect "special felicitations" on the result in West Virginia. He asserted that it was "the beginning of the break in the Solid South" and would insure the election of a Republican senator.⁵²

The next few days brought second thoughts, however. Harrison had indeed won the national electoral vote but not West Virginia's. Cleveland carried the state by a margin of 500 votes out of 159,000. And there were further complications, this time concerning Elkins' own career. Contrary to Elkins' hopes the election failed to take Goff out of the way. He continued to lead in the gubernatorial count by 110 votes, but the narrow result invited a Democratic contest which was soon forthcoming. The incumbent governor, a Democrat, refused to certify a winner, throwing the count into the legislature. The composition of the legislature itself remained in doubt, but it eventually showed a stalemate, with the balance of power belonging to three Union Labor delegates.⁵³ Thus no one could be certain how the gubernatorial matter would be settled, to say nothing of the impending senatorial contest. In these unpropitious circumstances Davis and Elkins met in New York, probably on the week end of November 16.⁵⁴ They decided to rely on their friendship with Harrison to carry Elkins over the shoals. Davis wrote the President-elect recommending himself as "a discreet friend in whom you have confidence" and requesting an interview that would be "of value to you & the country."⁵⁵ Partly because protocol demanded that the vice president-elect pay the first call, partly to give the visit more "social" surroundings, Davis delayed his journey to Indianapolis until the Christmas holidays, December 23-25.⁵⁶

Some confusion developed as to just what Elkins wanted Harrison to do. With his gubernatorial status in doubt Goff remained very much a live senatorial candidate. Did Elkins want Goff taken into the Cabinet, thus clearing his senatorial path; or did he want a Cabinet post himself, abandoning to Goff the unpromising situation at Charleston? After talking with Elkins in New York and Richard C. Kerens in St. Louis, Russell Harrison reported to his father that Elkins favored the former course: "he preferred the position of Senator to that of a member of the cabinet and [thought] that if he had a clear field he would enter the race earnestly and he believed

⁵² Davis to Harrison, November 8, 1888; Davis to Johnson N. Camden, November 8, 1888, Davis Papers; Blaine to Harrison, November 9, 1888, Harrison Papers.

⁵³ Smith, *Goff*, 168-70.

⁵⁴ The meeting may be dated roughly from Davis to James B. Taney, November 22, 1888, Davis Papers.

⁵⁵ Davis to Harrison, November 24, 1888, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Harrison to Davis, November 28, 1888; Davis to Elkins, December 3, 1888, Elkins Papers; Davis to Harrison, December 4, 14, 21, 1888; Davis to Elkins, December 21, 1888, Davis Papers.

he could win the prize from the present Legislature," the reason being that "he could get the labor votes where Goff could not."⁵⁷ It is interesting in this respect also that Davis requested interviews with two Democratic state legislators just before he left for Indianapolis.⁵⁸ On the other hand Davis mentioned nothing of the Goff project to Harrison according to his own accounts of the meeting, while Elkins' correspondence indicates that he had fixed upon a Cabinet post as early as November 23.⁵⁹ A delegation of West Virginia Republicans, led by Charles Burdette Hart of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, further complicated matters when it followed Davis to Indianapolis on December 26. Publicly, Hart's group was committed to Goff. Privately, Hart assured Elkins that "only ourselves know what the programme is" and on his return to West Virginia termed press reports concerning the visit to Indianapolis "*pure fabrications.*" In fact the press reports were probably correct; Hart and his friends appear to have double crossed Elkins, challenging his claim to represent West Virginia and supporting Goff.⁶⁰ Early in January Goff scotched *his* Cabinet movement by informing Harrison that he was not interested in a portfolio. By this time, however, the impression had been created in West Virginia—and apparently too with Harrison—that Goff sought to block all paths to preferments, an impression that naturally redounded to Elkins' favor.⁶¹ "We all love [Goff]," John M. Hagans of Morgantown told Elkins, "but it is asking too much, is it not, to expect a total surrender in all directions?" With other influential leaders in the party's traditional northern West Virginia strongholds Hagans began organizing a local movement in support of Elkins for the Cabinet.⁶² But so long as the Goff faction continued to dispute his claim to residence in West Virginia, Elkins could not afford to base his candidacy for a Cabinet position on geographic credentials alone.

Consequently Elkins had to use an alternative basis for appealing to Harrison. His earlier career as a territorial politician and lobbyist, involving such well publicized scandals as the Star Route mail frauds, dimmed his chances for a merit appointment; he therefore sought the undemanding War portfolio in which he had no economic

⁵⁷ Russell B. Harrison to Benjamin Harrison, January 7, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁵⁸ Davis to J. H. Gettinger, December 21, 1888; Davis to C. H. Knott, December 21, 1888, Davis Papers.

⁵⁹ Davis to John W. Mason, November 23, 1888, John W. Mason Papers (West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University Library).

⁶⁰ *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 27, 1888; Smith, *Goff*, 171; Charles Burdette Hart to Elkins, December 20, 29, 1888, Elkins Papers; Elkins to John W. Mason, December 28, 31, 1888, January 7, 10, 22, February 2, 25, 1889, Mason Papers.

⁶¹ Smith, *Goff*, 172; clippings from *New York World* and *New York Tribune*, scrapbook, Davis Papers; Harrison to Elkins, February 23, 1889, Elkins Papers.

⁶² John M. Hagans to Elkins, December 25, 1888; William P. Hubbard to Elkins, December 31, 1888, Elkins Papers; George C. Sturgiss to John W. Mason, January 21, 1889, Mason Papers.

interest, but there was still opposition on the basis of his past.⁶³ In any case apparently neither he nor Harrison nor any of their friends ever discussed whatever qualifications for executive office he may have had. His appointment would have to discharge political obligations, and, aside from geography, these could be of two sorts: personal or factional. Elkins could be credited to Harrison himself if the President-elect sought—as Blaine had described Elkins to Garfield in 1881—“a strong and valuable friend . . . useful at odd times.”⁶⁴ In this respect Elkins was hampered by the hostility of some of Harrison’s Indiana advisers, especially William H. H. Miller, Harrison’s former law partner and future attorney general.⁶⁵ Elkins’ foremost qualification was thus as a factional leader. In the Cabinet he would represent the Blaine wing of the party; his appointment would also recognize his role at the Chicago convention. But before Elkins could play this suit, Blaine stepped forward to cash the chips Elkins had so carefully accumulated.

Earlier Blaine had led Elkins and many others to believe that he did not wish to return to office except perhaps as a senator from Maine. On November 8, however, Blaine wrote Elkins that he had changed his mind. He wanted to be secretary of state and expected Elkins to undertake a campaign of pressure to secure his appointment. Above all he wanted him to clear up any impression Harrison may have gained that he was not “available.” Elkins waited until after his conference with Davis before complying with this request and then agreed to do as Blaine desired.⁶⁶ Blaine, however, declined to reciprocate when informed that Elkins, too, was interested in the Cabinet. If he were to place himself behind Elkins’ candidacy, he argued, it might be “prejudicial to both of us . . . at present silence is my imperative duty on all personal politics.” Blaine nevertheless insisted that there was no conflict between them if Elkins presented himself to Harrison on a geographic and personal, rather than factional, basis. According to the Plumed Knight, West Virginia was Elkins’ “great, fruitful, decisive field,” while the Davis family’s “years of intimacy” with the President-elect offered him an inestima-

⁶³ Preston B. Plumb to Harrison, December 22, 1888, Harrison Papers.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Theodore Clarke Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield* (2 vols., New Haven, 1925), II, 1086.

⁶⁵ Elkins believed the hostility to be based upon a “misunderstanding” of his maneuvers between Blaine and Harrison before the 1888 convention. Actually Miller’s distrust dated from 1886 when he blamed Elkins for involving Russell Harrison in a speculative Montana land and cattle enterprise, endangering Miller’s own funds and those of other Indianapolis citizens. Other investors blamed Russell more than Elkins for the affair. Sievers, *Harrison, Hoosier Statesman*, 296; Cyrus C. Hines to Elkins, January 26, February 1, 1887, Elkins Papers.

⁶⁶ Blaine to Elkins, November 8, 13, 1888, Elkins Papers; Eugene Hale to Harrison, November 25, 1888; Levi P. Morton to Harrison, November 27, 1888; Eugene Hale to Morton, copy of letter, November 29, 1888; Elkins to Harrison, November 22, 1888, Harrison Papers.

ble advantage. These factors would do more, Blaine concluded, than such "distant recommendations" as he or others might make. In short, Blaine was accepting no riders in his own drive for preferment and was leaving Elkins to make it on his own as best he could.⁶⁷

In view of Blaine's attitude and the uncertain picture in West Virginia, Elkins elected to present his candidacy to Harrison on the basis of his personal devotion and his political indispensibility to the new administration. Davis' role was to convert their long standing social relations with the President-elect into a political asset. In this respect Davis' December trip to Indianapolis was moderately encouraging. The visit was a social success. Politically, he wrote, Blaine's chances were good. "As to Elkins he stands well with the Gen[eral] & family they talk nicely about him but Gen did not commit himself." On his return to the east Davis imparted three important pieces of news: Harrison would make no decision for several weeks and no announcement until the eve of the inauguration; he anticipated trouble in meeting the claims of New York Republicans; "Mrs H" and the family generally were favorable to Elkins and Blaine. On his part, Davis had informed the President-elect that "No man succeeded in business or politics by passing old friends for new ones."⁶⁸

The friendliness of the family was a useful counterweight to the hostility of Harrison's political advisers. Elkins' "services at Chicago were greater than you imagine," Russell informed his father. "I am the only one whom he really trusted as to his real position and what he was trying to do. All our Indiana friends were mislead [*sic*]." ⁶⁹ The West Virginians also appealed to the nepotism for which Harrison was later noted.⁷⁰ Elkins held out the prospect of a newspaper job for Russell, while Davis found a place for J. Robert McKee, Harrison's son-in-law, in the West Virginia Central Railroad hierarchy, offering him \$2,500 a year and stock in one of the Davis-Elkins coal companies. Davis even offered money to Harrison himself—a "draft for a few thousand to be return [*sic*] when it suits you"—to tide him over preinaugural expenses. Probably this was going too far. It appears that nothing more was said of the money, and McKee shortly thereafter turned down the proffered employment.⁷¹ Harrison was willing to accept small favors, however. Davis undertook to arrange for the inaugural train and got McKee a pass on the Pennsyl-

⁶⁷ Blaine to Elkins, December 6, 1888, Elkins Papers.

⁶⁸ Davis to Blaine, December 28, 1888, Davis Papers.

⁶⁹ Russell B. Harrison to Benjamin Harrison, January 7, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁷⁰ Harry Thurston Peck, *Twenty Years of the Republic, 1885-1903* (New York, 1906), 194; Harry J. Sievers, *Benjamin Harrison, Hoosier President: The White House Years and After* (Indianapolis, 1968), 49-50, 55-57.

⁷¹ Elkins to Harrison, December 29, 1888, Harrison Papers; Davis to Harrison, January 10, 1889; Davis to J. Robert McKee, January 19, February 5, 1889, Davis Papers.

vania railroad. He also arranged for a more imposing presidential cottage at Deer Park and made plans for a postinaugural tour of the South by members of the two families.⁷² Meanwhile the President-elect's family remained useful to Elkins for transmitting letters that he did not want Harrison's political advisers to see.⁷³

While Davis worked to cement personal ties, Elkins set out to display his political usefulness to Harrison. "I am keeping quiet and out of the way of Cabinet making and cabinet makers,"⁷⁴ he told the President-elect, when, as a matter of fact, he was right in the thick of things. Following Davis' return from Indianapolis Elkins wrote to Jones of Pittsburgh and other Republicans to get backing for his own campaign.⁷⁵ More vital to his success, however, was his intervention in the confused situation in New York. There Boss Platt was endeavoring to collect on his alleged promise of the Treasury portfolio and to insure to his organization control over patronage in the Empire State. Harrison was willing to concede a share in the spoils but refused absolutely to include "State bosses" in the Cabinet and insisted that Platt come up with a Cabinet appointee acceptable to all New York Republicans, including a rival faction headed by ex-Senator Warner Miller.⁷⁶ Because of his presence and contacts in New York, Elkins afforded an ideal "medium," as Harrison put it, in the negotiations. The conflict in New York also afforded Elkins an opportunity to demonstrate to Harrison "the interest I feel in your success"⁷⁷ and put the two men in direct communication without breaching the façade of disinterest in his own advancement that Elkins was forced by custom to maintain. Throughout January and most of February Elkins worked hard to secure the harmonious result that Harrison hoped for. Eventually he came up with two potential appointees, Senator William M. Evarts and Benjamin F. Tracy, a Brooklyn lawyer, who were acceptable to both Platt and his rivals. Harrison gratefully seized upon Tracy as his secretary of the navy.⁷⁸ He also followed Elkins' advice on the Treasury post, allotting it to the West and appointing William Win-

⁷² Davis to George B. Roberts, January 5, 1889; Davis to Harrison, January 10, 1889; Davis to "Mrs. President Harrison," April 1, 1889; Davis to C. E. Pugh, March 29, 1889, Davis Papers.

⁷³ Davis to Elkins, February 20, 1889, *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Elkins to Harrison, January 10, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁷⁵ Benjamin F. Jones to Elkins, December 25, 1888; Benjamin F. Jones to Harrison, January 9, 1889, Elkins Papers.

⁷⁶ For the situation in New York and Harrison's views on Cabinet making see William Walter Phelps to Harrison, November 19, 1888; Harrison to Whitelaw Reid, December 3, 1888; Warner Miller to Russell B. Harrison, December 25, 1888; Theodore Roosevelt to Harrison, January 13, 1889; Harrison to Frank Hiscock, February 4, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁷⁷ Elkins to Harrison, January 10, 1889; Harrison to Elkins, January 18, 1889; Whitelaw Reid to Harrison, January 27, 1889, Elkins Papers.

⁷⁸ Elkins to Harrison, January 26, 29, February 1, 7, 14, 16, 20, 1889, Harrison Papers.

dom of Minnesota, another old friend of Davis and a frequent visitor to Deer Park. Another hopeful sign was the appointment of Blaine as secretary of state, which position Harrison quietly tendered on January 17.⁷⁹

Despite these signs of his growing influence, Elkins grew alarmed as the inauguration neared and the pattern of Harrison's appointments began to emerge. With the exception of Blaine none of the secretaries thus far designated were men of national experience, and none had taken a very large role in the politics of 1888. It became apparent that Harrison was paying close attention to geographic distribution and was seeking out men whose uncontroversial records and characters were conducive, so he believed, to party harmony—men very much like himself, in other words, which Elkins was not.⁸⁰ He was ignoring those considerations which made Elkins' success most likely. Thus in the second week of February the latter determined to buck the trend and to press his own candidacy more forcefully. Davis again appealed to Harrison, and Blaine again declined to stick his neck out. The Plumed Knight did agree to ask Harrison to come to Washington with his Cabinet slate unfilled, which Harrison agreed to do.⁸¹ Elkins arranged for a conference with the President-elect on February 27.⁸² On February 18, however, he learned that Harrison planned to award the Interior portfolio to an unknown Missourian, and this information spurred him to make a bold representation in his own behalf. By letter he lectured Harrison on the danger of overlooking "the claims of friends who have felt that the proprieties would not be served by forcing themselves to your attention To abandon them in the formation of your Cabinet would, to my mind, reach the verge of injustice." Blaine's silence notwithstanding, Elkins now brought forth his qualifications as a factional leader. "The appointment of Mr. Blaine was wise," he stated. "But it should not follow that Mr. Blaine, standing as an individual in the Cabinet, should be held to satisfy the claims upon you of all of those who have heretofore been his friend, and who were loyal to you long before and during the Convention, and who were strong and brave enough to say to Mr. Blaine, in case he would not consent to be a candidate, you should be nominated" Furthermore, he argued, the appointees thus designated, though good men all, had done little or nothing for Harrison when the chips were down. "[Blaine] was

⁷⁹ Elkins to Harrison, February 7, 9, 14, 1889, *ibid.*; Harrison to Elkins, February 4, 1889, Elkins Papers; Davis to Harrison, February 15, 1889; Davis to William Windom, February 18, 1889, Davis Papers; Muzzey, *Blaine*, 389.

⁸⁰ William B. Allison to Harrison, February 8, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁸¹ Davis to Harrison, February 15, 1889, Davis Papers; Blaine to Elkins, February 11, 1889, Elkins Papers; Blaine to Harrison, February 13, 1889; Harrison to Blaine, February 18, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁸² Harrison to Elkins, February 18, 1889, Harrison Papers; Davis to Blaine, February 22, 1889, Davis Papers.

in Europe, and [Windom] was on the ocean. Wanamaker was not in the Convention . . . Gen. Noble was quietly pursuing his profession and making money" in the spring of 1888. Finally he urged Harrison to discount the advice of his Indiana friends. "I am satisfied now that many things that should have reached you, and were written to Michener and others for your ear, and spoken to your friends at Chicago, never reached you, and to some extent you do not understand what has been done." Lest Harrison miss the point of this outcry, Elkins advised that of the remaining Cabinet places "two or three be taken from that number who stood by you in the East and elsewhere when you needed friends . . . who resisted all promises from other candidates, who answered all arguments made against your claims, and who in the end made enemies for a life to serve you." "All this happened," he concluded passionately, "—you may not know it, but it did." As proof thereof he enclosed extracts from letters of March, 1888, showing how Senator John Sherman had bid highly but unsuccessfully for his services.⁸³

Asked to review a draft of this message, Davis advised against sending it,⁸⁴ but Elkins went ahead and was shortly in receipt of a reply. Harrison was equally frank. "I have not set anyone aside because he was anyone else's friend," he stated; nor had he "failed to think of my friends." He regarded Elkins' loyalty as proven and had paid no heed to hostile gossip. Rather it was "geographical and other considerations not involving any lack of fondness or gratitude" that governed his decision. Thus Harrison made it clear that Elkins' push for the Cabinet had momentarily failed, not because of factional complications or because he had failed to win Harrison's confidence but because his West Virginia credentials were still too weak. Elkins would not go away empty handed, however. "It is my hope," Harrison concluded, "that some of these things may be accomodated [*sic*] in other ways . . ."⁸⁵ On this ambiguous but encouraging note Elkins' drive for office came to a temporary halt.

As of inauguration day, 1889, the Davis-Elkins political combination had produced mixed results. The tariff on coal was secure in the hands of Representative William McKinley and the Fifty-first Congress. Harrison was in the White House. Davis was content to bask in reflected presidential glory and to oversee Deer Park's blossoming as a summer capital. Elkins was still out in the cold, however, and West Virginia still had two Democratic senators and no legally elected governor. The mess at Charleston continued to exercise a baneful influence over Elkins' future. The Democrats had managed to reelect Senator John E. Kenna over Goff by a single vote

⁸³ Elkins to Harrison, February 19, 1889, with enclosures, Harrison Papers.

⁸⁴ Davis to Elkins, February 20, 1889, Davis Papers.

⁸⁵ Harrison to Elkins, February 22, 1889, Elkins Papers.

after a month of balloting. But they were not yet ready to risk their unstable majority on a solution to the gubernatorial quarrel. They appointed a legislative committee to examine the returns; meanwhile the incumbent clung to his chair.⁸⁶ With Democratic control of the state courts and militia there was little Goff's supporters could do short of violence except wait out the Democratic maneuvers in the almost certain knowledge that he would eventually be counted out. In these circumstances Goff became something of a national partisan hero. When the Democrats, by further discreditable proceedings, managed to seat their candidate in February, 1890, Goff became a popular feature on the Republican banquet circuit.⁸⁷ With Republicans across the state and nation calling for his vindication it became all but impossible to dislodge him in West Virginia until some appropriate means of compensation became available. Harrison therefore found it advisable to delay the ultimate recognition of Elkins' demands indefinitely.

However the President did not hesitate to make good on his promise to take care of Elkins "in other ways." In supporting the latter's struggle for the West Virginia leadership he stopped short only of moves that could be publicly interpreted as an affront to Goff. During the first weeks of the administration Attorney General Miller promised Goff the final say in West Virginia patronage,⁸⁸ but Harrison promptly overrode him. The first important local appointment made, that of district attorney, went to Elkins' nominee. Goff and his friends presented another man, Harrison confided to Elkins, "but I told them they were too late."⁸⁹ Other West Virginia appointments reflected Elkins' influence, and even Davis took precedence over Goff when he extended his protection over a Democratic officeholder whose place Goff wanted for one of his own followers. Recognizing "the ex-Senator's kindly feeling toward our party in West Virginia," Secretary Windom informed Goff that it would not be "good politics" to contravene his wishes.⁹⁰

Had Elkins been in a less desperate mood he might have been grateful for these omens of eventual success. But his career had been stalled too long and his expectations aroused too sharply for patience to prevail. He endured Harrison's first year in office with a

⁸⁶ For the contest in detail see Jacobs, "Gubernatorial Contest of 1888-1890," 181-210, 263-311; Smith, *Goff*, 182-83, 190-206.

⁸⁷ Leonard M. Davis and James A. Henning, "Nathan Goff—West Virginia Orator and Statesman," *West Virginia History*, XII (July, 1951), 334-35. See also Wheeling *Intelligencer*, February 15, 1890, quoting *Washington Post*.

⁸⁸ Smith, *Goff*, 190.

⁸⁹ Harrison to Elkins, April 5, 1889, Elkins Papers.

⁹⁰ Elkins to John W. Mason, March 4, 1889, Mason Papers; clipping from Philadelphia *Record*, March 19, 1889, *ibid.*; Wheeling *Intelligencer*, March 3, April 8, 1889; Davis to William Windom, April 11, 1889, Davis Papers; William Windom to Nathan Goff, July 5, 1889, Nathan Goff Papers (West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University Library).

mounting sense of frustration. Shortly after the inauguration he informed the President that the nature of his Cabinet appointments "has produced a chill that is already felt, and it is feared will be followed with the same results that Hayes' course brought about."⁹¹ When the administration encountered difficulty securing the confirmation of Whitelaw Reid and Murat Halstead as ambassadors, Elkins traced the problem to "several members of the Cabinet . . . who are without experience in public affairs . . ."⁹² "Many people think Harrison will have to look out for Blaine in 1892," he remarked to Davis in August. "Had he stood by his friends he would not have this to bother him." While Davis hosted the presidential entourage during a two month visit to Deer Park in September, Elkins sulked in New York. He feared the President was tiring of him, he said. In October he vented his injured feelings to Davis in a discussion of whether there was any point in further representations to Harrison. "Not a day passes that some leading Republican does not speak of his injustice to me," he stated; Elkins thought that Davis himself should feel aggrieved. "Suppose the case were reversed and as your good friend I had urged you to support a warm democratic personal friend—& you did it in a way that could not be denied & all with his knowledge & consent—then suppose after success, he refused to make proper recognition. It seems to me I would resent such conduct & treatment, & signify my displeasure."⁹³ Davis' reply to this outburst has not been found, but apparently he was willing to be more patient.

Another who counseled patience was Blaine. He warned Elkins that Harrison was "a man with whom nothing is gained by argument or urgency at the wrong time." Blaine had sufficiently roused himself to express regret to the President over Elkins' absence from the Cabinet. "His single reply was that residence alone stood in the way—*alone* was quite distinctly expressed."⁹⁴ It is doubtful that Elkins was entirely reassured by this information; he could do nothing to strengthen his geographic position until Harrison found something to do with Goff. Blaine was convinced, however, that Harrison would act when the time was ripe. Meanwhile he urged Elkins to do nothing that would lead to an open breach with Goff in West Virginia: "Away and beyond the present contest & of far greater importance, lie two Senatorships," one for each of them. In the meantime Elkins should take steps to make his residence in the Mountain State appear more plausible, like voting there is the 1890

⁹¹ Elkins to Harrison, March 8, 1889, Harrison Papers.

⁹² Elkins to Murat Halstead, April 9, 1889, typed copy, Elkins Papers; original letter is in Murat Halstead Collection, Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, Cincinnati.

⁹³ Elkins to Davis, August 29, September 19, October 28, 1889, Elkins Papers.

⁹⁴ Blaine to Elkins, August 15, 1889, *ibid.*

election. Above all he should rely on Davis: "He will always be your most judicious adviser & strongest support in W. Va."⁹⁵

Either the counsel of patience had its effect on Elkins' relations with the administration, or Secretary Windom, thinking to oblige Elkins, got his wires crossed, for the spring of 1890 saw a conciliatory gesture toward Goff—the appointment of his brother, Charles J. Goff, as treasury agent in the Pribilof (Seal) Islands of Alaska. This was a post of dubious appeal, it would seem, but one of Elkins' many speculative ventures, the North American Commercial Company, had extremely delicate business arrangements pending in the islands. With Elkins' help the firm had recently secured a twenty year license on the Pribilof fur seal fishery. Elkins thus took a lively interest in Alaskan matters, but whether he gave advance approval for young Goff's appointment cannot be determined.⁹⁶ His subsequent disapproval would figure prominently in the denouement of his West Virginia campaign.

In any event Elkins did not allow the opportunity to turn a profit on furs to distract him from his quest for a Cabinet post. When a vacancy occurred on the Supreme Court in December, 1890, he urged Harrison to elevate Attorney General Miller, then to reshuffle his Cabinet to afford recognition to those "known as Blaine men, but who became Harrison men and brought about your nomination."⁹⁷ The President ignored this advice, but Elkins offered it again when Windom's death in January, 1891, created another vacancy. Elkins was put forward by New York and West Virginia politicians as Windom's successor, but he was not interested in the time consuming Treasury post. Instead he wanted Harrison to transfer Secretary of War Redfield Proctor and so create the vacancy he really desired.⁹⁸ The least he could do, Elkins informed the President, was to give the Treasury portfolio to Whitelaw Reid or someone else among those "early friends who joined the cause when doubtful and helped to make success certain."⁹⁹ Harrison took this much of his advice when he reached into the Blaine wing for the new secretary of the treasury, Charles W. Foster of Ohio, an admirer of Elkins who helped to promote both his Alaskan adventure and his Cabinet prospects.¹⁰⁰

Following Foster's appointment, Elkins requested an interview

⁹⁵ Blaine to Elkins, [February?], 1890, *ibid.*

⁹⁶ Davis to William Windom, March 29, 1889, Davis Papers; San Francisco *Chronicle*, February 27, March 1, 1890; New York *Times*, March 1, 1890. See also note 109.

⁹⁷ Elkins to Harrison, December 10, 1890, Harrison Papers.

⁹⁸ George W. Atkinson to Harrison, January 31, 1891; Patrick Ford to Harrison, February 6, 11, 1891, *ibid.*; Elkins to Davis, February 5, 1891, Davis Papers; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 4, 5, 1891.

⁹⁹ Elkins to Harrison, February 20, 1891, Harrison Papers.

¹⁰⁰ Charles W. Foster to Elkins, November 13, 1891, Elkins Papers.

with Harrison and was invited to the White House for a "family dinner" on Sunday, March 8, 1891.¹⁰¹ What the two men said over their cigars was apparently not recorded, but on the President's desk were two items that must have greatly interested his guest. One was Secretary of the Interior John W. Noble's resignation, which Harrison apparently declined to accept.¹⁰² The other was an act recently passed by Congress establishing the new circuit courts of appeal, with one new judgeship in each of the nine federal circuits.¹⁰³ At this point West Virginia's interest in the new judgeships centered on William P. Hubbard, the candidate of the Wheeling bar, and Edwin Maxwell, a state judge and Goff's former law partner. Goff himself was uninterested in the post, and in any case Virginia Republicans were said to have the inside track on the fourth circuit appointment.¹⁰⁴ Elkins, however, had seized on the judgeship as the means of disposing of Goff. He discussed the matter with Davis before seeing Harrison and possibly also talked with C. B. Hart, who sent up a trial balloon bearing Goff's name in the Wheeling *Intelligencer* on March 6.¹⁰⁵ Harrison evidently did not commit himself, but by the end of March "incoming West Virginians" at Washington were stating with assurance that Goff was available for the appointment: "He has been the Republican gubernatorial candidate in the State at great financial sacrifice and is said to be quite willing to let some one else bear the brunt of future battles."¹⁰⁶ There was no mistaking who that someone else might be, particularly after a series of developments in April pointed toward the eventual fulfillment of Elkins' ambition. On April 8 Senator George F. Edmunds of Vermont announced his resignation from the Senate, to take effect on November 1. Within a few days speculation had it that Secretary Proctor would resign from the Cabinet to succeed Edmunds and that Elkins would take Proctor's place as secretary of war.¹⁰⁷ This is indeed what happened, although Edmunds' timetable postponed the conclusion for several months. On April 30, however, with the dismissal of Charles Goff from his post in Alaska, the clouds parted to reveal once and for all the outcome of Elkins' drive for supremacy in West Virginia.

Behind young Goff's removal lay the sordid complications typical of such politico-economic enterprises. Goff's predecessor as treasury agent, a pliant Democrat named George Tingle, who was in the

¹⁰¹ Harrison to Elkins, March 8, 1891, *ibid.*

¹⁰² John W. Noble to Harrison, March 5, 1891, Harrison Papers.

¹⁰³ New York *Tribune*, March 7, 1891.

¹⁰⁴ Washington *Post*, March 19, 20, 1891; Smith, *Goff*, 225-26.

¹⁰⁵ Davis to J. B. Summerville, March 8, 1891, Davis Papers; Wheeling *Intelligencer*, March 6, 1891.

¹⁰⁶ Washington *Post*, March 24, 1891.

¹⁰⁷ Wheeling *Intelligencer*, April 8, 10, 13, 1891.

employ of Elkins' company, had for years contradicted the claim of conservationists that the Alaska seals were in danger of extinction.¹⁰⁸ On his arrival in the Pribilofs Goff discovered that the opposite was true. The time had come, he stated in his 1891 report to Secretary Foster, "when . . . imagination must cease and the truth be told"; the herd was dangerously decimated and further killing should be halted if it were to be saved.¹⁰⁹ Foster's response was to fire Goff and replace him with Joseph Stanley-Brown, an old friend of Elkins and Blaine, who—in the words of one irate conservationist—"never saw a seal or knew what one looked like until he was sent up there in 1891"¹¹⁰ The administration later designated Stanley-Brown as a "seal expert" on the American delegation to the Bering Sea Tribunal in Paris.¹¹¹

The whole story of Elkins' seal bonanza was not known at the time, but enough was known of his interest in the matter to lend Charles Goff's dismissal the appearance of a direct Goff-Elkins confrontation, from which the latter clearly emerged the victor. The significance of the incident was not lost in West Virginia. The *Wheeling Intelligencer* cautiously admitted its bearing on state politics and then left further discussion to the Democrats.¹¹² Elkins sought to conciliate his rival, blaming the hubbub on the Democrats and disclaiming to Goff responsibility for his brother's removal. Goff accepted the explanation although he has been warned long before by friends in Alaska of what to expect.¹¹³ Actually Goff had already seen the handwriting on the wall and had determined to accept the judgeship if Harrison offered it; after his exchange with Elkins and an interview with him in New York in May, his availability took on the aspect of a campaign to secure the appointment, a campaign that had Elkins' vigorous support. Some of Goff's friends felt it was wrong for him to abandon the field in West Virginia without a struggle. But he was tired of the political wars, and when Harrison finally tendered the appointment, he opted for the dignity and security of the bench.¹¹⁴ With him went all significant opposition to Elkins' leadership of West Virginia Republicans.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ U. S., *House Reports*, 50 Cong., 2 Sess., report 3883, 162-68.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Ernest Gruening, *The State of Alaska* (New York, 1954), 90-91. For a lengthy and detailed view of the situation in the Pribilofs by Charles Goff's assistant see Joseph Murray to Nathan Goff, October 1, 1890, Goff Papers.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Charles C. Tansill, *The Foreign Policy of Thomas F. Bayard, 1885-1891* (New York, 1940), 502n.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*; Elkins to Davis, February 27, 1893, Davis Papers. For further details on Elkins' Alaskan adventure see *Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 22, 1890; *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 16, 1891; *New York Times*, May 1, 2, June 16, 1891.

¹¹² *Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 30, 1891.

¹¹³ Goff to Elkins, May 22, 1891, Elkins Papers; Joseph Murray to Goff, October 1, 1890, Goff Papers.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Goff*, 227-28.

¹¹⁵ For a complete discussion of this point see Williams, "Davis and Elkins."

The outcome of the Goff-Elkins rivalry was foreseen as early as April, but in drawing events to a conclusion Harrison exploited all his talent for irritating delays—"conscious non-action" as one irate Republican senator described it.¹¹⁶ The President dawdled nine months and then nominated only six of the nine judges Congress had expected to take office on January 1.¹¹⁷ Eventually Harrison sent Goff's name to the Senate along with the others on December 16.¹¹⁸ As for the War Department, Proctor's resignation was announced in August. Elkins shortly afterwards visited the President at Cape May, New Jersey, a move that most interpreted as clinching the matter.¹¹⁹ Still the weeks rolled by and Harrison failed to act. Something of Elkins' former anxiety returned in November when Proctor's resignation took effect. At Elkins' request, Russell Harrison, Secretary Foster, and other insiders renewed the campaign of pressure on the President.¹²⁰ Another month went by, however, before Harrison revealed his decision. He sent Elkins' name to the Senate on December 17, the day after Goff's nomination. The new secretary was confirmed on December 22.¹²¹ It was three years to the day since Davis had set out for Indianapolis in 1888.

While the significance of Elkins' appointment for West Virginia was well understood, observers at the time were more interested in its implications for the coming presidential campaign. By 1891 dissatisfaction with Harrison among party wheelhorses and workers across the country had produced a much talked about movement to place Blaine at the head of the ticket in 1892. The favorite interpretation of Elkins' promotion saw it as part of a deal between Blaine and the President: Harrison had named Elkins as a favor to Blaine in return for which Blaine agreed to support the President's re-nomination. The story was attributed to Russell Harrison and had it further that Elkins had resisted the President's call to the Cabinet until his acceptance was approved by both Goff and Blaine.¹²² However, one observer, the Washington correspondent of the *New York Herald*, was inclined to doubt the official version of Elkins' appointment, although he dutifully reported it. "They [Blaine and Elkins]

¹¹⁶ Charles B. Farwell to Harrison, January 4, 1890, Harrison Papers. Another observer wrote of Harrison's procrastination: "whenever he [Harrison] did anything for me it was done so ungraciously that the concession tended to anger rather than please." Shelby Cullom, *Fifty Years of Public Service* (New York, 1911), 249.

¹¹⁷ *New York Tribune*, March 8, 1891.

¹¹⁸ *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 17, 1891.

¹¹⁹ Clipping from *New York Tribune*, enclosed in Russell B. Harrison to Elkins, August 15, 1891, Elkins Papers; *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 29, 1891.

¹²⁰ Charles Foster to Elkins, November 13, 1891; Garrett Hobart to Elkins, November 14, 1891; Russell B. Harrison to Elkins, November 17, 1891, Elkins Papers.

¹²¹ *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 18, 23, 1891; Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 396-97.

¹²² *Wheeling Intelligencer*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, all December 18, 1891; see also various clippings, scrapbook, Elkins Papers.

are still good friends," he observed, "but I have strong grounds for the statement that Elkins is no longer the zealous adherent of Blaine that he was a few years ago. . . . Elkins' acceptance of the place means that he will bend all his energies to the renomination of Harrison. . . . I mean the renomination of Harrison against everybody, even Mr. Blaine himself."¹²³

The New York *Herald* correspondent was correct, as the events of 1892 showed. Evidence abounds of Blaine's and Elkins' continued friendship, but its earlier warmth had inevitably cooled under the disappointment and frustration of each man.¹²⁴ Blaine had contributed nothing but advice to Elkins' drive for the Cabinet; as late as August, 1891, he was still unwilling to intervene actively in Elkins' behalf.¹²⁵ Thus Elkins attained his goal less because of Blaine than despite him and had every reason to cast his lot with the President without reference to Blaine's future plans. That is precisely what he did. When Blaine formally disavowed his candidacy in February, 1892, most of his supporters continued as they had done in 1888 to work for his nomination.¹²⁶ But Elkins took him at his word and threw himself into Harrison's campaign for renomination. Indeed it was said to be Elkins who carried an ultimatum from Harrison to Blaine in June, 1892, instructing him either to repudiate his supporters or to get out of the Cabinet. Whether or not this was true, Blaine's resignation three days before the national convention and the pathetic attempt of his supporters to carry the convention by storm found Elkins "sorry for his [Blaine's] sake," but his loyalty to the President was unshaken.¹²⁷ The price of his loyalty had less to do with the presidency than with West Virginia. Elkins assumed unchallenged control of the state Republican party during the losing campaign of 1892, and when the GOP finally turned the corner to victory two years later, he went on to become the first Republican senator from West Virginia since Reconstruction.¹²⁸ By building the most powerful political organization in the Mountain State's brief history, he retained the seat until his death in 1911, becoming a charter member of the Senate's Republican "Old Guard." Harrison had won a "strong and valuable friend" in exchange for the mastery of a single state.

¹²³ New York *Herald*, December 18, 1891.

¹²⁴ One revealing development was the disposition of Davis' and Elkins' private patronage. In the spring of 1890 Emmons Blaine resigned his position with the West Virginia Central Railroad after a dispute with the partners. Later the job was again offered to Harrison's son-in-law, J. Robert McKee. Elkins to Davis, January 30, 1890, Elkins Papers; Davis to Elkins, March 26, 1890; Davis to Emmons Blaine, April 12, 1890; Elkins to Davis, February 5, 1891; Davis to Elkins, February 7, 1891, Davis Papers.

¹²⁵ Blaine to Elkins, August 30, 1891, Elkins Papers.

¹²⁶ Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, 398-402.

¹²⁷ Muzzey, *Blaine*, 470-72; Elkins to Davis, June 10, 1892, Davis Papers.

¹²⁸ Williams, "Davis and Elkins," 160-64, 169-71, 202-206.