

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

EVAN BAYH

APRIL 8, 2004

VIA TELEPHONE FROM INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI,
TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEWED BY JIM WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY #2004-1

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR





Senator Evan Bayh

(Photograph courtesy the U.S. Senate Historical Office)

EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for Harry S Truman National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

Evan Bayh and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript.

RESTRICTION

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ABSTRACT

Senator Evan Bayh (Democrat, Indiana) discusses his visit with Harry S Truman in January 1962 at the Truman Library. Six years old at the time, young Bayh accompanied his parents Birch and Marvella Bayh during a social call in advance of Birch Bayh's run for the U.S. Senate later that year. Evan Bayh remembers the impression Truman made on him that day—with a courtesy to an embarrassed young boy and a gift of a silver dollar—and then compares that meeting with others he had with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson as a youngster. Bayh finishes the phone call with reflections on Truman's character and his impact on national politics in the 2000s.

Persons mentioned: Birch E. Bayh, Marvella Bayh, Harry S Truman, Delbert M. Hearn, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Lady Bird Johnson.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH

EVAN BAYH

HSTR INTERVIEW #2004-1

[Preliminary phone conversation between Williams and Senator Bayh's office not transcribed.]

EVAN BAYH: Hello?

JIM WILLIAMS: Hi, Senator Bayh. This is Jim Williams in Independence, Missouri.

BAYH: Hi Jim. How are you?

WILLIAMS: I'm fine, thanks. First, I want to make sure that you know that I'm recording the phone call.

BAYH: Okay.

WILLIAMS: Is that okay with you?

BAYH: That's fine.

WILLIAMS: Okay. And I don't know how much you know about the purpose of this interview, but back in 1996 I was reading *George* magazine, and you told a story about visiting with your parents here as a boy, and since we do an oral history project at the Truman home about the Truman family, I thought that was an interesting story. Do you remember that story?

BAYH: I do remember the story. Part of it is contained in my mother's autobiography, which was . . . She died in 1979 and it was published posthumously later that year. So I do remember the story, although I was young at the time.

WILLIAMS: You were six, I think, or thereabouts.

BAYH: That's about right.

WILLIAMS: Could you tell it to me in your own words, what you remember?

BAYH: Yeah. The background on it is, my father was thinking very seriously about running for the United States Senate in Indiana, and his election was in November of 1962. My mother, who was originally from Oklahoma, and she had met President Truman . . . She was president, she was governor of Girls State in Oklahoma and then president of Girls Nation and had met President Truman when she went to Washington for Girls Nation. [see appendix, item 1] So she was a big admirer of the former president, and her father, my grandfather, who was a wheat farmer in Enid, Oklahoma, was also a great admirer of Harry Truman's. So my grandfather, at his own initiative, took it upon himself to write a letter to the former president asking if he would, could possibly agree to meet with his son-in-law, who was considering running for the senate in Indiana, you know, to give him his advice. The former president wrote back and said by all means, have him contact me, which is kind of amazing by today's standards. Here's just a humble wheat farmer from Enid contacting a former president, and he said, "Sure. I'd be happy to meet with your son-in-law."

So we drove out from . . . We were living in Terre Haute, Indiana, at the time and drove from Terre Haute to Independence and met with the former president there in the home. I was very young. I think he gave me a silver dollar, which we've kept. I've since been told, although I don't know it to be true, that that was important because he was a frugal individual.

In any event, my mother used to always tell the story—and I think it's included in her book [see appendix, item 2]—that when we were talking to the president . . . I was dressed up in my one little suit, and my mother had admonished me, you know, to be quiet because the president wasn't there to hear me. So . . . but at some point when the president and my father were talking . . . we had some soda pops on the drive out, and I just couldn't wait any longer, so I blurted out that I had to go to the bathroom. Well, she was eternally embarrassed, and President Truman kind of saved me and the day by standing up and saying, "That's all right, son. So do I." And off we went to the bathroom. And so my claim to fame is that I went to the bathroom with Harry Truman.

WILLIAMS: Okay. That's the story that I like, from a young boy's perspective getting to meet—

BAYH: I was going to be in big trouble with my mother, but he bailed me out.

WILLIAMS: So you've already helped explain some letters that I found at the Truman Library. One was from Delbert Hearn. [see appendix, item 3]

BAYH: That's my maternal grandfather.

WILLIAMS: Right, and that's the one that set up the visit in December of 1961.

BAYH: Oh, great. Well, I'm glad you have that.

WILLIAMS: And you're right, he did respond exactly as you said.

BAYH: Would it be possible to get a copy of those?

WILLIAMS: Yes. I can send those.

BAYH: Because we'd love to have those just for kind of . . . I'd love to show them to my kid. We have one eight-year-old boy, so I maybe kind of need to have that just in our family records.

WILLIAMS: And you're on the president's engagements on January 3, 1962. [see appendix, item 4]

BAYH: Oh, is that right?

WILLIAMS: Your appointment.

BAYH: You've got it all nailed down.

WILLIAMS: Well, we tried.

BAYH: That was right after New Year's Day.

WILLIAMS: Yes, it was. But he was in the office. You've also answered my question because in a letter from your father on January 8 thanking Mr. Truman for the visit, your father says that "Evan shall always treasure the lucky coin you gave to him." [see appendix, item 5]

BAYH: Oh, okay. Well then my memory is good. He gave me a silver dollar. It was, I think we still . . . As a young boy I had a little tin box that I put precious items in, you know. It could have been an acorn or whatever happened to be important to me. I think I still have that silver dollar someplace.

WILLIAMS: And also your, we have a photograph that your parents sent, a color photograph of them with Mr. Truman. Do you have that? [see appendix, items 6 and 7]

BAYH: I think we have . . . I think so, and I think it's on display in our home now. It's a picture of my parents with the former president? It's like on the steps of the house or something?

WILLIAMS: It looks like it's at the Truman Library.

BAYH: The Truman Library, okay. Well, I frankly . . . It's on one of the bookshelves in our home, and so I see it from time to time, but I never really intently look at it.

WILLIAMS: It looks like your mother has a mink or something over her arm. Anyway, they're all, they're very well dressed. And it looks like there was a little bit of contact between your father and Mr. Truman after that, but not very much as far as I could see. But Mr. Truman did send him an autographed photo in 1966.

BAYH: It could be. I have no knowledge of that.

WILLIAMS: Okay. I just wondered if that had been passed along as well.

BAYH: Not to my knowledge. Unfortunately, my folks had moved several times. Although that's the kind of thing I'm sure they'd save. But we had a terrible house fire a couple years ago, and it started in the attic, so, unfortunately, a lot of things . . . We'd stored family scrapbooks and, you know, pictures, those kind of things. A lot of that got destroyed, unfortunately.

WILLIAMS: You come from a prominent Democratic family. And as a boy, I just wonder how this experience with President Truman relates to maybe some other experiences you had with other political figures.

[Bayh's assistant interjects in the phone call; not transcribed]

BAYH: In what way . . . relates to?

WILLIAMS: Well, did you meet other presidents growing up? Could you compare Mr. Truman to some other people in terms of—

BAYH: Well, I was fortunate . . . I don't want to overplay this. They were all exceptional. This was not an everyday kind of thing; these were exceptional occurrences in my life. Obviously, meeting President Truman was a big deal, and his human touch, both in giving me the silver dollar and in taking me to the restroom, that was pretty special. My interactions with the other presidents were briefer and more formal. When John Kennedy came to campaign in Terre Haute in 1960—this had actually been before the meeting with President Truman—a big crowd came out to meet him at the airport, and my father was there because he was in the . . . I think he was the minority leader at the time in the state legislature. He took me out there, and I was even younger at that time, four or something like that. My parents told me, you know, that I was pretty shy and all I could do was cry [laughing] when they introduced me to John Kennedy, so I'm afraid I didn't carry off that moment with great composure.

But then later, after my father went to the Senate, they were invited to go down to the White House to have dinner with President Johnson and Lady Bird, just up in the private quarters, and couldn't find a babysitter, so the Johnsons were kind enough to say, "Well, bring the boy along." So they took me down there and had dinner. I still remember a couple of things. I remember there were three things from that. Number one, after dinner, LBJ

put his boots up on the table, which my—kind of leaned back in his rocking chair and put his boots up on the table, which my mother informed me when I got home presidents could do but young boys couldn't.

Secondly, they put down a completely mysterious bowl of clear liquid in front of me, which I was, had no . . . My mother had told me, "Look, if you don't know what fork to use, just look at the woman on your left or right and do what she's doing." Well, I looked at this thing. I had no idea what to do, and Mrs. Johnson realized that I'd never seen a finger bowl before and told me what to do, because I was on the verge of trying to eat part of it. So I was glad she rescued me there.

And then, when they started talking politics, or whatever, again Mrs. Johnson kind of figured out that I probably—I was ten at the time, something like that—wouldn't be too involved in that, so she took me into their bedroom and turned on the television and gave me something that I'd never seen before, which was a remote control for the TV, which I was convinced, you know, the CIA must have produced [?]
—it looked like a James Bond thing to me at the time, because they were not very common back in those days.

So those were my memories of that. Of course, since then, in my own public career, I've met several presidents, but during my youth, those were, you know . . . President Truman obviously had a great common touch with people and was very kind to me as a young boy when he had no particular reason to be, other than just the kindness of his heart.

WILLIAMS: Do you ever think about him now when you're making public policy, as a senator?

BAYH: From time to time. You know, I refer—right now, with national security being such a big issue, and some people questioning whether the Democratic Party is strong enough on national security, I always point out that, you know, it was Harry Truman who drew the line in the sand against the spread of global communism. Our party, traditionally, has had a reputation for being very strong in national security matters. As a matter of fact, John Kennedy claimed that the Eisenhower administration, in some respects, hadn't been strong enough. So I do fight him in that regard. It's only been since Vietnam that we've had a reputation for being, in some people's minds, inadequate on national defense and security. So I do refer to Truman.

Of course, his desire to try and provide national healthcare is an idea whose . . . perhaps not through a government-run program, but whatever vehicle, the recognition of the need to try and ensure that everybody has access to quality healthcare is very topical. But more than that, just his reputation for forthrightness and a willingness to make difficult decisions that might be unpopular at the time, but in the full course of history are borne out. So I do think about that from time to time.

WILLIAMS: Well, I'd like to thank you for taking your time today, and I will send you the file that I've accumulated from the Truman Library.

BAYH: Well, it's so kind of you to think of calling, because this would be great just to show my own children some day, just to have in our family archives.

WILLIAMS: Well, it's a nice interview for us to have, too.

BAYH: Thank you.

WILLIAMS: Thank you.

BAYH: Good luck!

WILLIAMS: Okay, thanks.

BAYH: Do you have our address here? I'll tell you what, can I give you our home address? After this doggone anthrax and all that, our mail gets sent somewhere to be irradiated and has to be opened. Do you have a pen handy?

WILLIAMS: Yes, I do.

BAYH: Our home address is 5170 Tilden Street, and that's in Northwest Washington, and the zip code is 20016.

WILLIAMS: Okay. I'll do that.

BAYH: Thank you so much.

WILLIAMS: Thank you

BAYH: Take care.

WILLIAMS: Okay. Bye.

BAYH: Bye.

END OF INTERVIEW

APPENDIX

1. Marvella Bayh with President Truman, from Marvella Bayh with Mary Lynn Kotz, *Marvella: A Personal Journey* (New York, 1979).

Sally McTague and I present President Harry Truman with a Special Citation from Girls' Nation.



2. Marvella Bayh's account of her family's visit with President Truman on January 3, 1962, from Marvella Bayh with Mary Lynn Kotz, *Marvella: A Personal Journey* (New York, 1979), 77.

At Christmastime, we took a break, driving to Oklahoma to visit my parents. Daddy, ardent Democrat that he was, was all wrapped up in our campaign. He'd even picked up a pen and written to former President Truman: Could his daughter and her husband the candidate stop by to see him on our way home? Truman's invitation, in response, was one of our Christmas presents. Mother and Daddy drove with us as far as Independence, Missouri, where we all spent an afternoon.

Mr. Truman was grayer, of course, than when I'd met him at Girls' Nation—but still feisty. He told us a story about the Republican opponent, Senator Capehart, and then said, "Of course, I can't be quoted on that."

Evan (who had just turned six), dressed in his best clothes and filled with instructions on how to behave, sat quietly on the sofa beside "Gran" while the former President told his Capehart story. There was not a word out of Evan, which was unusual, but rewarding to a parent. After about forty-five minutes, however, Evan spoke out in a loud voice: "I have to go to the bathroom." I was undone. It was not a whisper, but an announcement. But Harry Truman got out of his chair, walked over to Evan, and took his hand. "You know, son, I do, too. Let's go." And Truman took Evan to the bathroom.

Birch was thrilled to meet Harry Truman, to elicit his encouragement. "Tell you what, Birch," he said. "You win that nomination and I'll come up to campaign for you."

3. Delbert M. Hern to Harry S Truman, December 15, 1961, with news clipping, and Truman to Hern, December 21, 1961 (Papers of Harry S. Truman, Post-Presidential Name File, Box 50, Folder "Bayh, Birch A.," Harry S. Truman Library).

2024 West Okla.
Enid, Oklahoma.
December 15, 1961

The Honorable Harry S. Truman
Independance, Missouri.

Dear Mr. Truman:

I have experienced the strong urge to write you at times in the past few years. The enclosed newspaper article with a picture of yourself and our daughter furnished the impetus that overcame the usual recurring reasons why I haven't written before.

Mr. Calvin Bergdall, the author, is a long time employee of the Enid Postal Service. He is very attracted, by nature, to writing and in after work hours has produced many magazine and a few daily newspaper articles; some of them being rejected and a considerable number being accepted. Calvin worked for me farming when Mrs. Bayh was a chubby farm girl also helping in the seasons labors.

7/ Mrs. Bayh having come to us in 1933, (Valentine's Day), was introduced to Political affairs through the Fireside Chats by F. D. R. I suppose the order to either get things done or stop them in time for the family and help, to be seated about the radio in time for a Fireside Chat impressed upon her so early in life the direct influence of high level government upon those seemingly so far removed.

We, as a family, have been ever so grateful for the way you shouldered the ponderable duties that suddenly befell you early in 1945.

Now for a bit of present day political chatter. Should our son, Rep. Bayh, succeed in capturing the Democratic nomination for U. S. Senator from Indiana, he will be pitted against Senator Capehart in an off year election in a normally Republican State. We do not have sufficient finances ourselves to campaign for the Senate. However, others with no strings attached, are supporting

3/ the campaign regularly and it is well on its way and seems to be gaining steadily State-wide. Indiana's nomination by Convention, brings about so much political in-fighting, the real situation is often difficult to evaluate.

Rep. Bayh, Mrs. Bayh and son Evan will experience the Holidays here in Evid with us. I do not know for sure the exact date of their return, by Auto, to Indiana except that it will be during the first ten days of January. Could you, by any chance, receive them for an hour or two — one of the early days of January?

If so, they can plan their return by way of Independence. It would be an inspiration of magnitude for them and it is very likely your advice concerning political tactics would be invaluable.

The kids (Rep. + Mrs. Bayh) know nothing of this request and if it be granted, it will be an unusual Christmas present from you and I.

4/1
I sincerely expect this letter to find you in good health. Please convey our best wishes to your First Lady, Daughters, Son & Grandson.

May the Holidays and All your days be warmly rewarding to all of you. I remain,

Sincerely Yours,
Albert M. Hers

1950 Girls' Nation President

By Calvin Bergdall
(Oklahoman Correspondent)

ENID—An Oklahoma farm girl named Marvella Hern went to Washington 11 years ago and was elected president of Girls' Nation.

There's a good chance she'll be back in Washington a year from now as the wife of a United States senator.

Marvella is Mrs. Birch Bayh jr., now 28 years old, mother of a 5-year-old son and the wife of one of Indiana's fastest-rising young politicians. She met her future husband because she wasn't content to rest on her laurels after she won the Girls' Nation presidency, the highest honor available to an American high school coed.

She came back home to Enid and entered the Oklahoma Farm Bureau's extemporaneous speaking championship. She swept through the state competition and into the national finals at Chicago.

Birch Bayh was in Chicago, too, representing Purdue

University in the speech contest.

"I didn't win," he told a friend after the contest, "but I do expect to win the girl who did."

That winner, of course, was Marvella Hern. And Bayh already had made considerable progress toward winning the winner before the Chicago contest ended.

Marvella's mother was ailing and her father went along as chaperone. He's a wheat farmer and Bayh had a degree in agriculture.

He talked farming with the girl's father, bought him a box of his favorite cigars, and courted the girl, who in addition to being brainy was a winner of more than one beauty contest. They were married eight months later in the First Methodist Church of Enid.

Bayh, too, already was something of a celebrity. The Reader's Digest had run an article about him in 1948 entitled "GI Ambassador."

The story told how he had taken vegetable seeds overseas with him when he was a private first class in

Love to Testify As State Rests In Lawton Trial

LAWTON — The state rested its case in the William C. Love embezzlement trial here Thursday and the defendant is scheduled to take the stand Friday.

Love, former administrator of Comanche County Memorial Hospital, is charged with embezzling more than \$7,000 of the hospital employes welfare fund.

32 Testify

Thirty-two state witnesses have testified in the two days of trial. The witnesses included Don Kephart, acting superintendent of the



Marvella Hern Bayh is shown, right photo, with President Truman in 1950 and to

From Enid Still in Limelight

the Army. In those lean early years of the Allied occupation, he fed the village of Hungen by organizing German children into a vegetable garden competition.

The son of an Army colonel, he had been president of his senior class and his fraternity at Purdue, captured a national award as an outstanding undergraduate student and taken the Danforth Fellowship awarded to the leading agricultural student.

He also won the Purdue light-heavyweight boxing championship.

The young Bayhs settled down to farm 450 acres of Hoosier land, but that didn't last but a couple of years. Then friends asked Bayh to run for the state legislature.

Marvella, a veteran of Girls' State and Girls' Nation politics, was all for it. Bayh won election and two years later, at 28, was the youngest house minority leader in the state's history.

At 30, he was speaker of the house, the state's

most powerful legislative position. He reverted to minority leader again this year when the Republicans regained legislative control.

Once he decided on a political career, Bayh went all out. He did three years of post graduate work at Indiana University while serving as speaker of the house, and earned his Doctor of Jurisprudence degree.

Marvella received her B. S. degree in education at the same commencement exercises. She's second vice-president of the Indiana State Democratic Women's organization now and expects to campaign as hard as her husband does next year when the demands of 5-year-old Birch Bayh III will allow it.

The Bayhs already are hard at work in their Terre Haute home, mapping his campaign for the Democratic U. S. senatorial nomination next year.

"My greatest asset in politics has been Marvella," says Bayh. "Her encouragement is invaluable, and her naturalness wins us friends wherever we go."



day with her family.

Lively Debate Sparked By Snyder City Election

By the State Staff

SNYDER — A lively election looms here Tuesday when Snyder votes on replacing its three-man town board with a five-man, mayor-council type of city government.

Supporters of the proposed change deny dissatisfaction with the present city board of trustees is behind the move, but one current member of the board says he is against the proposal.

Joe Summers did not sign a statement in the Kiowa County Democrat entitled "Here Are the Facts If the Election Carries" which was signed by the other

ing cleaning and repairs for the city water storage tank, additional water storage, weekly garbage collections, daily street sweepings, and action on drainage problems.

"We need to get up and go now!" the ad said. "Why do we delay action on things we know must be done now?"

Opponents of the proposed change have charged in ads that more employees will be required, increasing expenses, if Snyder adopts a city manager government form.

"This will mean an in-

government plan say it is impossible to tell whether water rates will be raised because it is impossible to say who would be candidates for the city council or what their positions would be when it came to acting on financial issues.

Dr. Allgood said the government change has been advocated for two years and that it just happened to come to a vote during the terms of the present three trustees.

The election was called after a petition carrying more than 100 signatures was presented to the town

December 21, 1961

Want to Come in

Want to stop by to see Pres. during early part of January.
Bayh is state Rep. in Indiana and is running for Demo. United States Senator from Ind.

Dear Mr. Hern:

I appreciated most highly your writing me as you did and was glad to get the clipping from the Enid paper, concerning your daughter and family, Mrs. Birch Bayh and Representative Bayh of Indiana.

If Representative and Mrs. Bayh will telephone me when they are in this area, Clifton 2-1061, my secretary, Miss Conway, will be glad to set a time for them to come in.

Any morning during the first part of January will be all right for them to come to the Library here in Independence to see me and I will be in town at that time as far as I know now.

Sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN

Mr. Delbert M. Hern
2024 West Oklahoma
Enid, Oklahoma

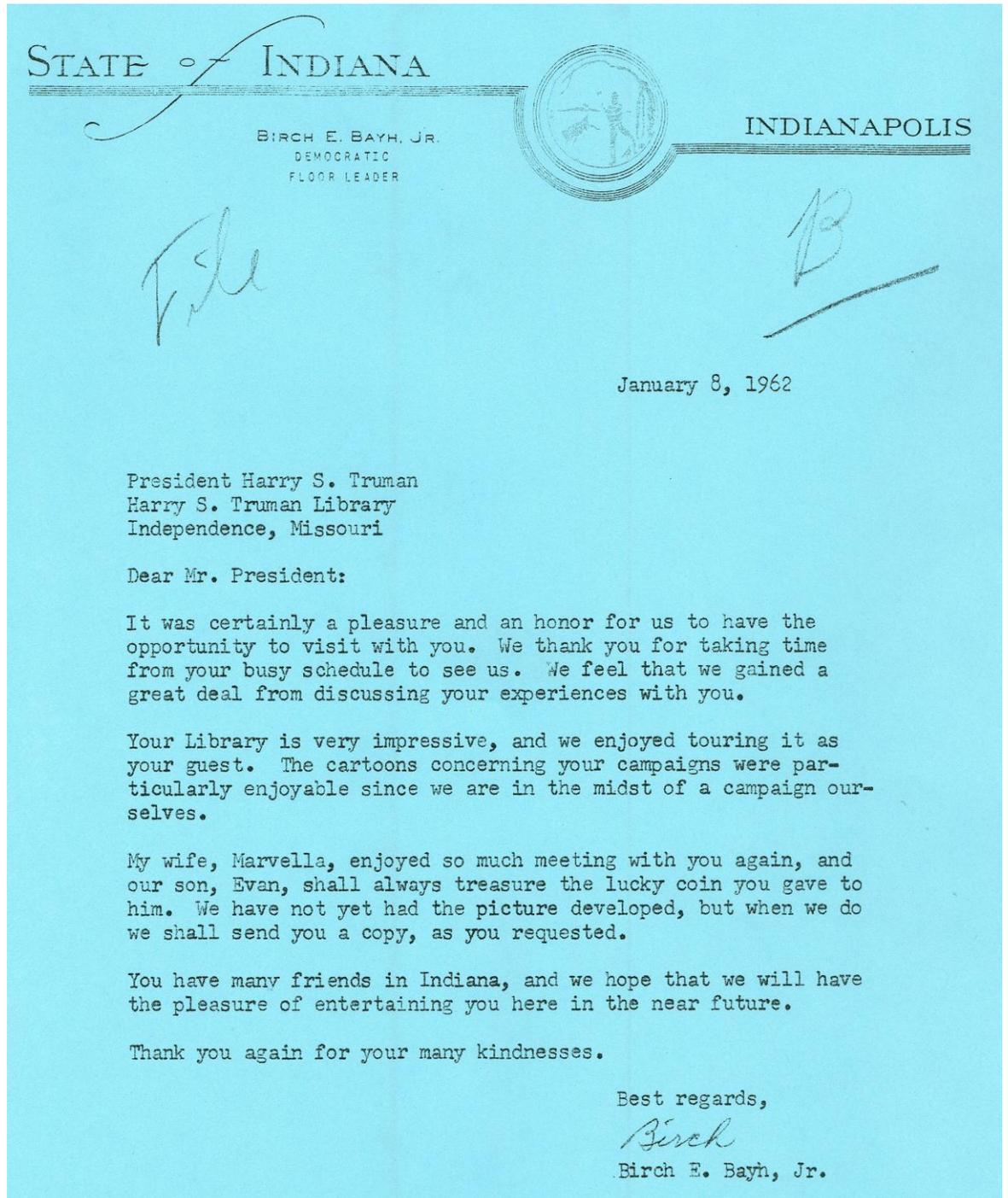
4. Truman's engagement calendar showing the Bayhs' appointment on January 3, 1962 (Papers of Harry S. Truman, Post-Presidential Daily Engagements File, Box 4, Folder "Daily Engagements 1962 (folder 1)," Harry S. Truman Library).

LAST MONTH		JANUARY—1962							NEXT MONTH	
DECEMBER		Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	FEBRUARY	
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							5	6	7	8
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31										
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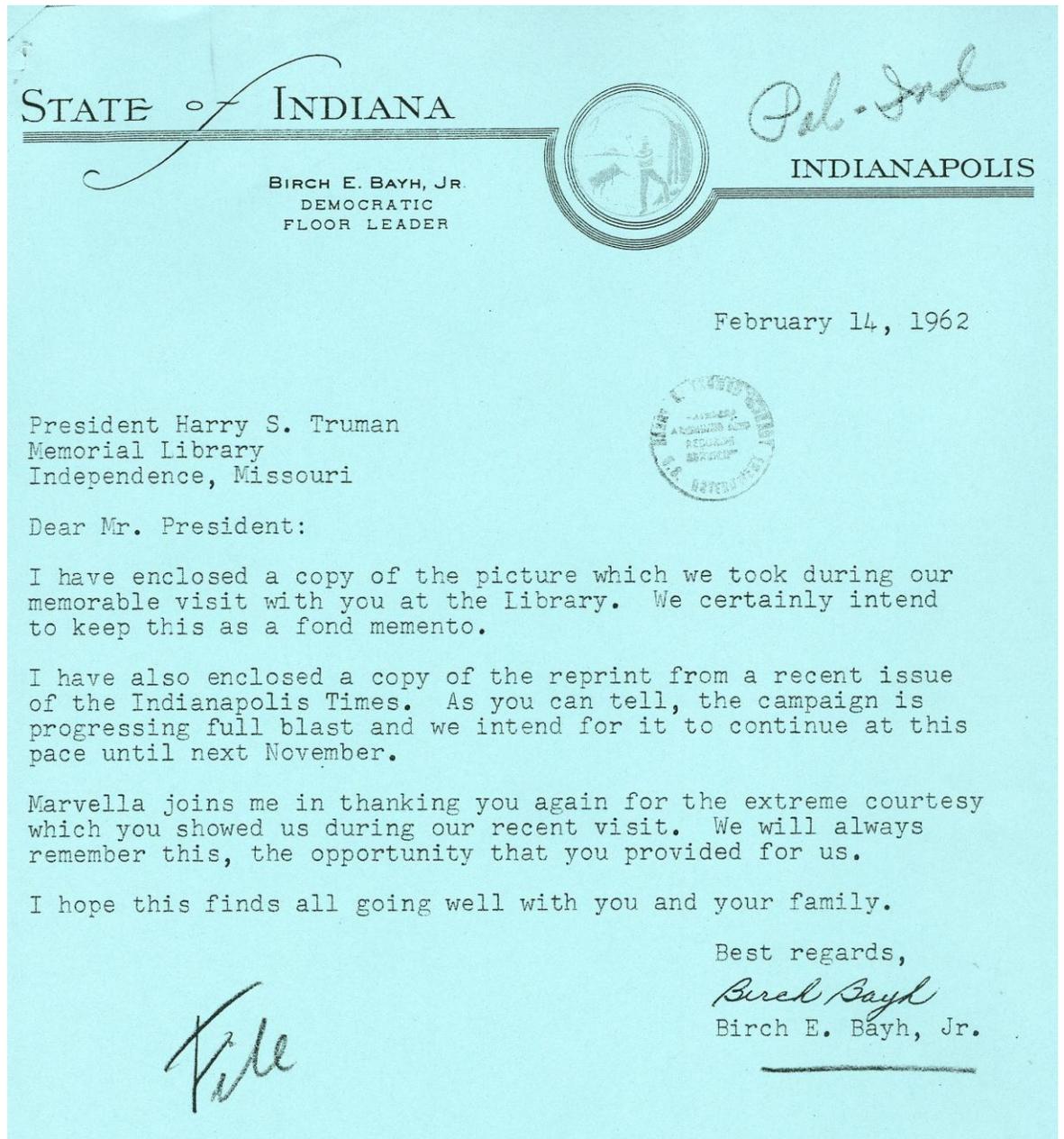
WEDNESDAY	3	JANUARY
ENGAGEMENTS	MEMORANDA	
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3	WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 3, 1962	362
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5. Birch E. Bayh, Jr., to Harry S Truman, January 8, 1962 (Papers of Harry S. Truman, Post-Presidential Name File, Box 50, Folder "Bayh, Birch A.," Harry S. Truman Library).



6. Birch E. Bayh, Jr., to Harry S Truman, February 14, 1962 (Papers of Harry S. Truman, Post-Presidential Name File, Box 50, Folder "Bayh, Birch A.," Harry S. Truman Library).



7. Photograph of Birch E. Bayh, Jr., Harry S Truman, and Marvella Bayh, in the office suite at the Harry S. Truman Library, January 3, 1962 (Papers of Harry S. Truman, Post-Presidential Name File, Box 50, Folder "Bayh, Birch A.," Harry S. Truman Library).\

