

Vice Presidents of the United States Charles G. Dawes (1925-1929)

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Introduction by Mark O. Hatfield.



I should hate to think that the Senate was as tired of me at the beginning of my service as I am of the Senate at the end.

—Charles G. Dawes

It is ironic that "Silent Cal" Coolidge should have a vice president as garrulous as Charles Gates Dawes. A man of action as well as of blunt words, "Hell'n Maria" Dawes (the favorite expression by which he was known) was in so many ways the opposite of President Coolidge that the two men were never able to establish a working relationship. The president probably never forgave his vice president for stealing attention from him at their inaugural ceremonies, nor did he ever forget that Dawes was responsible for one of his most embarrassing defeats in the Senate. As a result, although Dawes was one of the most notable and able men to occupy the vice-presidency, his tenure was not a satisfying or productive one, nor did it stand as a model for others to follow.

Charles Dawes was not Calvin Coolidge's choice for a running mate. It would have taken a far more self-confident president to want a vice president with a longer and more distinguished career than his own. Dawes had been a prominent official in the McKinley administration when Coolidge was still a city council member in Northampton, Massachusetts. Dawes became a highly decorated military officer during the First World War, was the president of a prestigious financial institution, was the first director of the Bureau of the Budget, and devised the "Dawes Plan" to salvage Europe's postwar economy, for which he received the Nobel Peace Prize. Dawes had a keen concern for foreign affairs, in which Coolidge showed little interest. As an activist in domestic policy, Dawes convinced the Senate to pass the McNary-Haugen farm relief bill; Coolidge vetoed the bill. Dawes was a problem solver, Coolidge a problem avoider. The 1920s might have been a very different decade if the Republican ticket in 1924 had been Dawes-Coolidge rather than Coolidge-Dawes.

Banking, Business and Politics

Born in Marietta, Ohio, on August 27, 1865, Charles Dawes was the great-great grandson of William Dawes, who had ridden with Paul Revere to warn the colonists that the Redcoats were coming. Dawes' father, Rufus Dawes, was a Civil War veteran and lumber merchant who served as a Republican for one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. Young Charlie, who even as a boy had a reputation for "flying off the handle" when something angered him, attended the Marietta Academy in Ohio and graduated from Marietta College in 1884. Two years later he received his law degree from the Cincinnati Law School. While in law school he worked during the summers as a civil engineer for the Marietta, Columbus & Northern Ohio Railway Company.¹

In 1887, former Ohio Governor Rufus Walton hired Dawes to go to Lincoln, Nebraska, and look after his real estate holdings. Dawes was admitted to the bar in Nebraska and opened the law office of Dawes, Coffroth & Cunningham. He established a reputation for handling railroad rate cases under the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 and as a "people's advocate against the railroad lobby." The same year that Dawes opened his law office, William Jennings Bryan started his law practice in the same building in Lincoln. Dawes, who was then twenty-two, and Bryan, who was twenty-seven, attended Sunday services and Wednesday night prayer meetings at the same Presbyterian church and even lived two houses apart on the same street. As a consequence, the two men, from different parties and with very different views on the issues, had many opportunities to meet and debate politics. (In 1924, Dawes would run for vice president against Bryan's brother Charles, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate.) Dawes became director of the American Exchange National Bank, a small bank in Lincoln, which he and other directors fought hard to save during the panic of 1893. As a bank director, he strongly disagreed with Bryan's advocacy of free silver to stimulate inflation and help the indebted farmers. Dawes became so engrossed in the currency issue that he published his first book, *The Banking System of the United States and Its Relation to the Money and Business of the Country*, in 1894.²

"I struck Lincoln right at the top of a boom," Dawes noted, "then it started sliding." The panic of 1893 had undermined his business and banking career in Lincoln, sending him in search of new business ventures elsewhere. Attracted by the utilities industry, he bought control of the La Crosse, Wisconsin, Gas Light & Coke Company, and became president of the People's Gas Light & Coke Company of Chicago. In January 1895, he moved his family to Chicago to make that city the center of his business interests. But within two weeks he met the Cleveland industrialist Marcus A. Hanna, who was promoting the presidential aspirations of Ohio Governor William McKinley. Writing in his diary that "McKinley seems to be the coming man," Dawes was bitten by the political bug. He managed McKinley's pre-convention campaign in Illinois, winning that state's delegates away from the erstwhile "favorite son" candidate, Senator Shelby M. Cullom. Not only did McKinley win the Republican nomination, but Dawes' old friend William Jennings Bryan won the Democratic nomination. While Dawes disagreed profoundly with the logic of free silver, he listened to Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech with a feeling of great pride "for the brilliant young man whose life for so many years lay parallel to mine, and with whom the future years may yet bring me into conflict as in the past."³

Comptroller of the Currency

Mark Hanna put Dawes in charge of the Chicago headquarters, which largely ran the McKinley campaign. Dawes also served on the Republican National Executive Committee as McKinley's "special representative." McKinley's victory led to Dawes' appointment as comptroller of the currency, a post in which he sought to reform banking practices that had led to the depression of the 1890s. McKinley treated Dawes "as a father would a son." Dawes frequently had lunch at the White House with McKinley and his invalid wife Ida and returned for an evening of cards or of playing the piano for the McKinleys' entertainment. (A self-taught pianist, Dawes later wrote a popular piano piece, "Melody in A Major," and when lyrics were added in 1951 it became the well-known song "It's All in the Name of the Game.") More than a companion to the president, Dawes was a trusted adviser. In 1900 when Mark Hanna tried to block the vice-presidential nomination of New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt, it was Dawes who intervened with McKinley on Roosevelt's behalf.⁴

In June 1901, Dawes decided to resign as comptroller of the currency to return to Illinois and run for the Senate. He was assured of McKinley's endorsement, but his resignation did not take place until October, a month after McKinley's assassination. Dawes' political ambitions were thwarted by new President Theodore Roosevelt, who endorsed another candidate, and by the "blond boss" of the Illinois Republican party, William Lorimer. Running for vice president in 1924 and reflecting on his only other run for elected office in 1901, Dawes remarked: "I don't know anything about politics. I thought I knew something about politics once. I was taken up on the top of a twenty story building and showed the promised land—and then I was kicked off."⁵

A day after losing the Senate nomination, the thirty-six-year-old Dawes began to organize the Central Trust Company of Illinois. He became its president and devoted his attentions to banking and to family life until the First World War. Dawes had married Caro Blymyer in 1889. They had two children and later adopted two more. In the late summer of 1912, Dawes suffered the greatest tragedy of his life when his only son drowned at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, while on a brief vacation before returning to Princeton University. Deeply saddened, Dawes and his wife withdrew from most social life and turned to philanthropy. In memory of their son, they founded the Rufus Fearing Dawes Hotel for Destitute Men in Chicago and Boston, and later established the Mary Dawes Hotel for Women in honor of Dawes' mother.⁶

Supplying the War in Europe

When the United States entered the First World War in 1917, Dawes received a telegram from Herbert Hoover, who had organized American relief efforts in Europe and was now serving as Food Administrator. Searching for talented administrators, Hoover wanted Dawes to take charge of grain prices. But instead of a desk job in Washington, Dawes longed to be in uniform. Hoover considered that a mistake. "I can find a hundred men who will make better lieutenant colonels of engineers, and I want you right here," he argued. "No, Mr. Hoover, I don't want to consider it," Dawes replied. A few days later, Dawes at age fifty-two received his commission as a major in the 17th Railway Engineers, bound for France, and, just as Hoover predicted, he was soon a lieutenant colonel.⁷

The American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was commanded by General John J. Pershing, who had known Dawes since the 1890s when Pershing was a military instructor at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. In August 1917, Pershing summoned Dawes to Paris and made him chief of supply procurement for the American forces in Europe, assigning him to head the board that collected supplies and to coordinate purchases to hold down inflation and duplication of orders. Dawes rose to the rank of brigadier general. When the Allied command was unified, General Dawes became the U.S. member of the Military Board of Allied Supply. While representing the United States Army in conferences with other Allied armies and governments, Dawes particularly admired men of action rather than those who simply talked. "Action, then, is everything—words nothing except as they lead immediately to it," he commented, adding, "I came out of the war a postgraduate in emergency conferences."⁸ After the Armistice in 1918, he remained in Europe to oversee the disposition of surplus military property. In 1919 he resigned his commission and returned to the United States. His wartime experiences in negotiating and coordinating efforts with his Allied counterparts left him an internationalist in outlook, advocating ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and United States membership in the League of Nations. After the war, everyone called him "General Dawes," despite his protests to the contrary.⁹

In 1920 Dawes supported his good friend, Illinois Governor Frank Lowden, for the Republican presidential nomination, but that prize went to Ohio's Warren G. Harding. In February 1921, however, an event occurred that brought Dawes to the attention not only of president-elect Harding but of the entire nation. A House of Representatives committee to investigate war expenditures called Dawes to testify. Republicans—who held the majority—were clearly eager to uncover any information about "extravagant purchases" in the AEF that might tarnish the outgoing administration of Woodrow Wilson. Journalist Bascom Timmons recorded that Dawes, a busy man, had resented being called by the committee. On the morning that he was due to testify, he walked around the Capitol waiting for the committee to assemble, getting angrier all the time. It took only a spark to set him off. In the course of the interrogation, Representative Oscar Bland, an Indiana Republican, pressed Dawes on how much the American army had paid for French horses.¹⁰

"Hell'n Maria!" Dawes exclaimed, jumping up from his seat and striding to the mahogany table where the committee sat. "I will tell you this, that we would have paid horse prices for sheep, if they could have hauled artillery!" Peppering his remarks with profanity, Dawes lectured the committee on the urgency of getting supplies to soldiers who were being shot at. He recounted how he had cut through the red tape and "had to connive with the smuggling of horses over there," but he got the horses to drag the cannon to the front. Turning the fire on "pinhead" politicians, Dawes roared: "Your committee can not put a fly speck on the American Army. . . . I am against that peanut politics. This was not a Republican war, nor was it a Democratic war. It was an American war."¹¹

Afterwards, Dawes explained that he had "suddenly decided that so far as I could bring it about either the Committee or I would go out of business." His "Hell 'n Maria" testimony took up seven hours for three sessions of the committee, with the official stenographers complaining that he often spoke too rapidly. Dawes' defense of the AEF won great praise from both parties. The newspapers, and especially the editorial cartoonists, loved Dawes' indignant outburst and quaint expletive. His published testimony, even with the expletives deleted, became a Government Printing Office best seller. The incident made him a national figure, and in July 1921, when Congress created the Bureau of the Budget, Harding appointed Dawes as its first director. Adding to his colorful personality, Dawes at this time adopted his trademark pipe. For years he had smoked as many as twenty cigars a day, but during the war a British officer had given him a pipe. Soon after his appointment to the Bureau of the Budget, a newspaper photograph showed him smoking his pipe on the Treasury Department steps. A Chicago pipe manufacturer sent him a new, strangely shaped pipe with most of its bowl below rather than above the stem. Dawes tried it, liked it, and ordered a gross more. From then on, he was rarely seen without this distinctive pipe, which together with his wing-tip collars and hair parted down the middle, reinforced his individualistic, iconoclastic, and idiosyncratic public image.¹²

The Nobel Peace Prize

After spending a year setting up the first federal budget under the new act, Dawes returned to Illinois, concerned about graft and political corruption, especially in Chicago. He organized "The Minute Men of the Constitution," to watch elections and prevent vote fraud. The group opposed the political activities of the Ku Klux Klan, and it also assailed what it considered to be unfair labor union practices. Dawes insisted that his group was not anti-union, but that it opposed the closed union shop. At one point the "Minute Men" had a membership of 25,000, but after his election as vice president the group disbanded.

In 1923, the economy of Germany had deteriorated drastically. Since Germany was unable to repay its war debts, France sent troops to occupy the industrial Ruhr valley. President Harding appointed Dawes to head a commission to study and solve the German financial problem. The "Dawes Plan" offered ways to stabilize the German currency, balance its budget, and reorganize its Reichbank, but the plan postponed action on the most difficult issue of delaying and reducing the German war reparations. Nevertheless, the "Dawes Plan" was recognized as a significant enough contribution to world peace to win Dawes the 1925 Nobel Peace Prize, which he shared with his British counterpart, Sir Austen Chamberlain. Dawes donated his share of the prize money to the Walter Hines Page School of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University.

The Second Choice for the Second Spot

At the Republican convention in 1924, Calvin Coolidge was nominated without significant opposition, but the front-running candidate for vice president, Governor Lowden, had let it be known that he did not want the second spot on the ticket. Nor did the popular Idaho Senator William E. Borah want to be the number two man. A story at the time recorded that President Coolidge had offered Borah a place on the ticket. "For which position?" Borah had supposedly replied. On the second ballot, the delegates nominated Lowden, but he declined to run, as threatened. Republican National Chairman William Butler promoted Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, but Hoover remained too unpopular with the farm states for his price fixing as food commissioner during the war, and the delegates on the third ballot chose Charles G. Dawes for vice president. President Coolidge, who had already sent a congratulatory note to Frank Lowden, accepted Dawes as someone who would add strength to the campaign and who he expected would remain personally loyal to him.¹³

When the unexpected news came over the radio, Dawes was back at his birthplace of Marietta, Ohio, delivering the commencement address to his alma mater. "There is one recollection I shall always treasure," he later wrote. "It is of the gathering of thousands of the people of the town, the next day, to hear me speak briefly from the front porch of the old family home; and the church bells of the town were rung in honor of the occasion. Some people may claim that the vice-presidency does not amount to much, but just then it seemed to me the greatest office in the world."¹⁴ During the campaign, Coolidge maintained his stance of speaking infrequently and keeping his remarks as bland and inoffensive as possible. He left it to Dawes to attack the Democratic candidate, John W. Davis, and the Progressive candidate, Wisconsin Senator Robert M. La Follette. Dawes entertained his audiences with the type of "Hell'n Maria" speeches they expected, shaking his fist and denouncing La Follette—whose platform among other things advocated allowing Congress to overturn Supreme Court decisions—as a demagogue and dangerous radical "animated by the vicious purpose of undermining the constitutional foundation of the Republic." Dawes went so far as to suggest that La Follette was a Bolshevik, although La Follette had publicly rejected Communist support and had been attacked by them.¹⁵

Coolidge and Dawes were overwhelmingly elected in 1924, winning more votes than the Democratic and Progressive candidates combined. "When Coolidge was elected President the world desired tranquility," Dawes noted in his journal, "—a reaction of its peoples from the excesses of war."¹⁶ But tranquility was not Charles Dawes' style.

An Assault on the Rules of the Senate

At his swearing-in in the Senate chamber in March 1925, Dawes was called upon to deliver a brief inaugural address, a tradition that dated back to John Adams in 1789. What the audience heard, however, was far from traditional. As the Senate's new presiding officer, Dawes addressed himself to "methods of effective procedure," rather than any particular policies or programs. He then launched into an attack on the Senate rules, "which, in their present form, place power in the hands of individuals to an extent, at times, subversive of the fundamental principles of free representative government." The rules of the Senate, he declared, ran contrary to the principles of constitutional government, and under these rules "the rights of the Nation and of the American people have been overlooked."¹⁷

Dawes focused his attack on filibusters, which at that time were being carried out most frequently by the small band of progressive Republicans, such as Robert La Follette, Sr., and George Norris, who held the balance of power in the Senate. Dawes declared that Rule 22, which required a two-thirds majority of those present and voting to shut off debate, "at times enables Senators to consume in oratory those last precious minutes of a session needed for momentous decisions," thus placing great power in the hands of a minority of senators. "Who would dare oppose changes in the rules necessary to insure that the business of the United States should always be conducted in the interests of the Nation and never be in danger of encountering a situation where one man or a minority of men might demand unreasonable concessions under threat of blocking the business of the Government?" he asked. Unless the rules were reformed, they would "lessen the effectiveness, prestige, and dignity of the United States Senate." He insisted that "reform in the present rules of the Senate is demanded not only by American public opinion, but I venture to say in the individual consciences of a majority of the Members of the Senate itself." He concluded by appealing to senators' consciences and patriotism in correcting these defects in their rules.¹⁸

Since Dawes had not given advance copies of the speech to the press or anyone else, no one had anticipated his diatribe. In the audience, President Calvin Coolidge attempted indifference, but could not hide his discomfort. Dawes had managed to upstage the president's own inaugural address, which was to follow at ceremonies outside on the Capitol's east front. As the senators proceeded to the inaugural platform, they talked of nothing else but their anger over Dawes' effrontery, making Coolidge's address anticlimactic. After the ceremony, Dawes compounded the ill will when he joined the president to ride back to the White House, instead of returning to the chamber to adjourn the Senate. In the Senate chamber, there was considerable confusion. Senator James A. Reed of Missouri noted that the Senate did not adjourn, nor did it recess. "It simply broke up."¹⁹

Most senators were less than receptive to Dawes' advice. "Dawes showed as little knowledge of the Senate's rules as he did good taste," snapped Democratic minority leader Joseph T. Robinson. "It was exactly what should not have been said," added Robinson's colleague from Arkansas, Thaddeus Caraway. "I regret that such occasion was perverted into a farce," complained Senator Claude Swanson of Virginia. "I have an opinion of the spectacle but do not care to express it," was George Norris' response, and Republican majority leader Charles Curtis declined to make any public comment on the vice president's remarks. But while the senators disapproved, columnist Mark Sullivan observed that the public was delighted. Sullivan described Dawes as a hero who had finally made a dent "in that fine old encrusted Senatorial tradition, buttressed by antique rules and practices, and solemnly defended by conservative and radical Senators alike."²⁰

An Irritated President

After upstaging the president on inaugural day, Dawes compounded his error by writing to inform Coolidge that he did not think the vice president should attend cabinet meetings. President Harding had invited Coolidge to cabinet meetings on a regular basis, but Dawes did not believe that Harding's action should necessarily set a precedent for future presidents. He took the initiative by declining even before Coolidge had offered him an invitation. "This was done to relieve him—if he shared my views—of any embarrassment, if he desired to carry them out," Dawes later explained, "notwithstanding the fact that he had accepted Harding's invitation." Dawes dismissed suggestions by the "busybodies and mischiefmakers" in Washington, who imagined "unpleasant relations between Coolidge and myself." What Coolidge thought is less certain. In his *Autobiography*, Coolidge counted his experiences in the cabinet as being "of supreme value" to him when he became president and suggested that the vice president should be invited to sit with the cabinet, if he was "a man of discretion and character so that he can be relied upon to act as a subordinate in that position." The implication was that Dawes did not fit that description. In addition, Coolidge never mentioned Dawes by name in his memoirs.²¹

Coolidge also felt irritated over an incident that occurred on March 10, only days after Dawes started presiding over the Senate. Up for debate was the president's nomination of Charles Warren to be attorney general. In the wake of Teapot Dome and other business-related scandals, Democrats and Progressive Republicans objected to the nomination because of Warren's close association with the "Sugar Trust." At midday, six speakers were scheduled to address Warren's nomination. Desiring to return to his room at the Willard Hotel for a nap, Dawes consulted the majority and minority leaders, who assured him that no vote would be taken that afternoon. After Dawes left the Senate, however, all but one of the scheduled speakers decided against making formal remarks, and a vote was taken. When it became apparent that the vote would be tied, Republican leaders hastily called Dawes at the Willard. The roused vice president jumped in a taxi and sped toward the Capitol. But enough time intervened to persuade the only Democratic senator who had voted for Warren to switch his vote against him. By the time Dawes arrived there was no longer a tie to break, and the nomination had failed by a single vote—the first such rejection in nearly sixty years. President Coolidge angrily held Dawes responsible for his most embarrassing legislative defeat, and the rest of Washington could not resist teasing the vice president over the incident. The Gridiron Club presented him with a four-foot high alarm clock. And Senator Norris read a parody of "Sheridan's Ride" on the Senate floor:

Hurrah, Hurrah for Dawes!
Hurrah! hurrah for this high-minded man!
And when his statue is placed on high,
Under the dome of the Capitol sky,
The great senatorial temple of fame—
There with the glorious General's name
Be it said, in letters both bold and bright,
"Oh, Hell an' Maria, he has lost us the fight."²²

Stimulating a National Debate

Dawes bore the criticism surprisingly well. He was never a man to shy away from controversy, and he enjoyed being at the center of attention. He also enjoyed occupying the Vice President's Room behind the Senate chamber, which he found impressive, with its tall mahogany cabinet, Dolly Madison mirror, Rembrandt Peale portrait of

Washington, and chandelier that once hung in the White House. When the Senate was not in session, large delegations of visitors would tour the corridor outside his office, and since the door was generally kept open for better ventilation they would always "stop and peek in." The senators, too, would stop and talk with the vice president who took such an active interest in their rules and proceedings. But Dawes found it curious that conversation always seemed to get around to whether "this or that Senator will be willing to concede the right-of-way to this or that piece of general legislation as a measure of surpassing public importance." He remained convinced that, by allowing unlimited debate, the Senate rules granted an intolerable power to the minority.²³ Rather than cease his criticism, Dawes continued to seek public forums to denounce the Senate filibuster. During the summer recess in 1925, he toured the country addressing public meetings on the subject. He pointed out that filibusters flourished during the short sessions of Congress, held between December and March following each congressional election, and that these protracted debates tied up critical appropriations bills until the majority would agree to fund some individual senator's pet project. He frequently cited a filibuster by Senator Benjamin Tillman that brought a \$600,000 appropriation to South Carolina. Dawes praised the work of Senators Francis Warren, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and Reed Smoot, chairman of Finance. "It is they and their like who perform most of the difficult, disagreeable and necessary work, speaking only when they have something to say and accomplish." By contrast to such "constructive" senators, he had no use for legislative showmen, radicals, and filibusterers.²⁴

Dawes' campaign stimulated a national debate on the Senate rules. A significant rebuttal to his assertions came from the political scientist Lindsay Rogers, who argued that filibusters served a useful purpose. Too much legislation was hammered out in committees that met in secret, where powerful corporate interests held sway, and where progressive reformers had little influence. Rogers pointed out that "the powers of delay given individual Senators force into pending bills some amendments that the Senate leaders would not accept were they free to act as they desired." He also pointed out that despite the filibuster, the Senate got a "creditable amount of business" done each session. Changing the rules would be inadvisable, since it would silence the minority and allow the majority to act unimpeded.²⁵

Although the Senate did not change its rules during his vice-presidency, Dawes noted with satisfaction that it invoked cloture more frequently than ever before. After 1917, when the cloture rule was first adopted, the Senate had voted to cut off debate on the Versailles Treaty in 1919 but failed to invoke cloture on tariff legislation in 1921 and 1922. During the Sixty-ninth Congress, which ran from 1925 to 1927, the Senate cast seven votes on cloture, and three times gained the two-thirds majority sufficient to cut off filibusters. Not until the Ninety-third Congress, from 1973 to 1975, after a rules change had reduced the majority needed to vote cloture from two-thirds to three-fifths of the members, did the Senate equal and surpass that number of successful cloture votes.

Farm Relief and Banking Reform

Dawes also personally intervened in other attempts to cut off debate, and his efforts led to the Senate's passage of bills that extended the Federal Reserve banks and would have provided farm relief. Agitation for farm relief became a pressing issue during the 1920s, when American farmers were shut out of the general prosperity of the era. After the First World War, farm prices had fallen and never recovered. Members of Congress from midwestern and plains states therefore formed the Farm Bloc, consisting of some twenty-five senators and one hundred representatives. Holding the balance of power in Congress, they promoted legislation to solve the problem of distributing surplus farm produce. Each year between 1924 and 1928, Senator Charles McNary of Oregon and Representative Gilbert Haugen of Iowa, both Republicans, sponsored the McNary-Haugen bill to permit the federal government to buy crop surpluses and sell them abroad while at the same time maintaining a high tariff on the importation of farm goods. The result would have raised prices in the United States.

Robert M. La Follette, Jr., who had succeeded his late father in the Senate, led a filibuster against the McFadden-Pepper bill to extend the charters of the Federal Reserve Banks. By holding up passage of the bank bill, La Follette sought to pressure the Senate to vote on the McNary-Haugen bill. The only way to break this logjam, as far as Dawes could see, was to form a coalition "between the conservatives favoring the bank bill and certain radicals favoring the farm bill." The vice president intervened, calling representatives of both groups to a meeting in his room. One of the participants, Pennsylvania Senator George Wharton Pepper, commented that "by sheer force of his

personality, [Dawes] forced an agreement that both measures should be voted upon. This agreement was carried out. Both bills passed." Pepper gave Dawes the chief credit for enacting these bills, as did Senator James E. Watson, the Indiana Republican who would soon become majority leader. In the course of a speech on equalization fees, Watson noted, "This explanation of the equalization fee was prepared by the Vice President, who is a supporter of the McNary-Haugen bill." Although Watson deleted this indiscretion from the *Congressional Record*, alert reporters in the press gallery had already publicized the statement. Dawes' interest in this legislation did not further endear him to President Coolidge, who twice vetoed the McNary-Haugen bills that his vice president had helped the Senate pass. Coolidge complained that "the McNary-Haugen people have their headquarters in [Dawes'] chambers."²⁶

An Irksome Job for a Man of Action

As a man of action, Charles Dawes found the job of presiding over Senate debates "at times rather irksome." He felt more comfortable in executive and administrative positions with "specific objectives and well-defined authority and responsibilities." He preferred clear statements of fact to speeches that appealed to prejudice or emotion. As presiding officer, he enjoyed making decisions about rulings from the chair and took some pride in the fact that the Senate had never overturned one of his decisions, but he attributed much of his success to the Senate's young journal clerk, Charles Watkins. Watkins had studied the rules and compiled the *Senate Precedents*, making himself "the actual parliamentarian" of the Senate. "Senate precedents are almost always conflicting, and when Charley Watkins gives me a choice of precedents to follow, I sometimes make my own decision. But it is chiefly upon his advice that I act." A decade later, Watkins became the Senate's first official parliamentarian, a post he held until his retirement in 1964.²⁷

Dawes similarly bristled over the social requirements of the vice-presidency, and as one Washington hostess recorded, "his social tactics, no less than his insubordination to the Senate, brought down blame upon him in Washington." Although he frequently dined out and entertained generously, it was always on his own terms. He would arrive late, leave early, and smoke his pipe at the dinner table. Caro Dawes also disappointed Washington's social set. Lacking the stamina that Mrs. Thomas Marshall and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge had shown for attending a continuous procession of luncheons and receptions, Mrs. Dawes declined many invitations. She never seemed to enjoy "presiding over the Ladies of the Senate," and looked visibly relieved when her guests departed. Yet even her critics conceded that her "manner was sweet and gentle, her conversation cultured, and her dignity unimpeachable," providing a gentle counterpart to her "Hell 'n Maria" husband. The vice president's estrangement from the president further shaded his social standing. As one Senate wife later confided, "I have always had a feeling which many share, that a slightly different attitude on the part of the Coolidges might have done much to relieve the strain so far as the Dawes were concerned."²⁸

In 1927, President Coolidge stunned the nation with his announcement that he did not choose to run for reelection the following year. Although pundits debated whether Coolidge wanted to accept a draft, his announcement opened a spirited campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. Although Dawes was frequently mentioned for the presidency, he announced that he was not a candidate and instead favored his longtime friend, Illinois Governor Frank Lowden. The nomination went instead to Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, whose supporters considered putting Dawes on their ticket as vice president. But President Coolidge let it be known that he would consider Dawes' nomination as a personal affront. Instead, the nod went to Senate Majority Leader Charles Curtis of Kansas. For the third straight time, the Republican ticket swept the national election.²⁹

A Travesty Upon Good Government

As Dawes' term of office approached its end, a senator told him how much the members of the Senate thought of him, adding "but the Senate got very tired of you at the beginning of your service." Dawes replied, "I should hate to think that the Senate was as tired of me at the beginning of my service as I am of the Senate at the end."³⁰ At about this time, Dawes attended the annual Gridiron Dinner. He and his successor, Charles Curtis, were ordered to stand while the "Dawes Decalogue, or the Letter of a Self-made Has-Been to His Successor" was read, listing several commandments drawn from "the depths of my experience":

Don't steal the first page on Inauguration Day, and you may be invited to sit in the Cabinet.
Don't be afraid to criticize the Senate. You know how much it needs it. The public likes it and the Senate thrives on it. . . .
Don't try to change the Senate Rules.
Don't buck the President if you want to stay more than four years.
Don't do your sleeping in the day time.³¹

Ironically, Dawes spent his last days in the Senate watching another filibuster, napping on the couch in his office and responding when the quorum bells rang. When the Senate dispatched its sergeant at arms to "arrest" absent senators, Dawes considered listening to the profanity of the arrested senators as they were brought in "one of the few pleasant incidents of such proceedings." He noted with some dismay that the galleries were filled to watch the filibuster and grumbled that "a travesty upon good government in the Senate is regarded as an amusement rivaling a picture show." In his farewell speech to the Senate on March 4, 1929, Dawes reiterated his objections to the Senate rules, saying, "I take back nothing."³²

Dawes had resigned as chairman of the board of the Central Trust Company of Illinois when he was elected vice president. After his term in Washington, he returned as honorary chairman, when it merged to become the Central Republic Bank & Trust Co. He became chairman of a financial commission to the Dominican Republic, and chairman of a committee to finance the exposition "A Century of Progress, Chicago, 1933." In April 1929, President Hoover appointed Dawes U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, a post he held until 1932. He was scheduled to head the American delegation to the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, Switzerland, when President Hoover persuaded him to take charge of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which Congress had just created to assist corporations and banks in need of relief from the Great Depression. Dawes' national standing rose so high that some Republicans talked of dumping Vice President Curtis from the ticket in favor of Dawes as a "rip-snorting, hell-raising" candidate to boost Hoover's chances of reelection. Then in June 1932, Dawes abruptly resigned as chairman of the RFC. His own financial base, the Central Republic Bank of Chicago was near collapse and required a ninety million dollar loan from the RFC to keep it alive and to keep the entire Chicago banking structure from collapsing. Dawes had to resign to avoid a conflict of interest.³³

Dawes, whose early career was shaken by the panic of 1893, was now confronted by an even greater financial crisis, one that shook his natural self-confidence and ended whatever remaining political chances he might have had. Reporter Thomas L. Stokes met Dawes shortly after his resignation from the RFC and found him "a dejected, dispirited man." Dawes was distributing a typewritten statement to the press predicting business improvement. "That's all he had to say," wrote Stokes. "He was manifestly uneasy and nervous, not the hail fellow, the 'Hell and Maria' I had known about Washington for several years. I wondered at the time what was wrong." Several days later Stokes heard rumors about the shaky banking situation in Chicago and then about the RFC loan. Eventually the Central Republic Bank was placed in receivership and liquidated. Dawes reorganized it as the City National Bank & Trust Company of Chicago and paid back the RFC loans. He remained associated with the bank until he died at the age of eighty-five, on April 23, 1951.³⁴

Historians have concluded that if Dawes was not really a leader, he acted like one. As vice president, he would not accept direction from the president, and whenever his views did coincide with Coolidge's his lobbying on behalf of administration measures was more likely to hurt rather than help. Dawes' forthrightness and tactlessness incurred the anger of many senators. Although his "bull-like integrity" won Dawes recognition as an outstanding vice president, that quality antagonized the Coolidge Administration more than aiding it. As for Dawes, he believed that the vice-presidency "is largely what the man in it makes it." And for his part, he made the most of it.³⁵

Notes:

1. Paul R. Leach, *That Man Dawes* (Chicago, 1930), p. 32.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-48; Bascom N. Timmons, *Portrait of an American: Charles G. Dawes* (New York, 1953), p. 26; Charles G. Dawes, *A Journal of the McKinley Years* (Chicago, 1950), pp. vii-viii; Dawes was also the author of *Essays and Speeches* (1915), *A Journal of the Great War* (1921), *The First Year of the Budget of the United States* (1923), *Notes as Vice President* (1935), *How Long Prosperity?* (1937), *A Journal of Reparations* (1939), and *A*

Journal of the McKinley Years (1950).

3. Timmons, p. 18; Dawes, *A Journal of the McKinley Years*, pp. 51, 89.
4. Charles G. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President, 1928-1929* (Boston, 1935), p. 49; *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York, 1958), p. 7; Dawes, *A Journal of the McKinley Years*, pp. 232-33.
5. Leach, p. 102.
6. Dawes, *A Journal of the McKinley Years*, pp. 443-49.
7. Leach, p. 149.
8. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, p. 10.
9. Leach, p. 467.
10. Timmons, pp. 194-95.
11. The "Hell 'n Maria" reference does not appear in the hearing transcripts. As the subcommittee chairman explained: "Objection has been made by members of the committee to the fact that at the request of the witness, Mr. Dawes, the many fluent expressions of profanity were omitted from the transcript." U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Select Committee on Expenditures in the War Department, *War Expenditures*, 66th Cong., 2d sess (Washington, 1921), pp. 4427, 4492, 4515; Timmons, pp. 195-98; Leach, pp. 175-78.
12. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, pp. 10-12; Leach, pp. 186-88.
13. Claude M. Fuess, *Calvin Coolidge: The man From Vermont* (Boston, 1940), pp. 345-46.
14. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, p. 18.
15. Donald R. McCoy, *Calvin Coolidge: The Quiet President* (Lawrence, KS, 1988), pp. 254-59; William Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-32* (Chicago, 1958), p. 134.
16. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, p. 32.
17. McCoy, pp. 264-65; U.S., Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 69th Cong., special sess., p. 3.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 8; Fuess, p. 361.
20. Leach, pp. 249-50; Mark Sullivan, *Our Times: The United States, 1900-1925* (New York, 1935), 6:634-36.
21. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, pp. 163-64.
22. Richard Lowitt, *George W. Norris: The Persistence of a Progressive, 1913-1933* (Urbana, IL, 1971), pp. 279-80.
23. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, pp. 154, 169.
24. McCoy, pp. 268-69; Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, pp. 110, 288.
25. Lindsay Rogers, *The American Senate* (New York, 1926), pp. 188-90.
26. Dawes, *Notes as a Vice President*, pp. 62-70; McCoy, p. 323; Leach, p. 273; see also George Wharton Pepper, *In The Senate* (Philadelphia, 1930).
27. Dawes, *Notes as a Vice President*, pp. 107, 179-80.
28. Frances Parkinson Keyes, *Capital Kaleidoscope: The Story of a Washington Hostess* (New York, 1937), pp. 140-43.
29. "Heap Big Chief," *American Mercury* 17 (August 1929): 404.
30. Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, p. 255.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 304, 316.
33. David Burner, *Herbert Hoover, A Public Life* (New York, 1979), p. 275.
34. Thomas L. Stokes, *Chip Off My Shoulder* (Princeton, NJ, 1940), pp. 329-30.
35. McCoy, p. 247; Dawes, *Notes as Vice President*, p. 4.