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Pennington to Wayne Morse, June 25, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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June 25, 1947.

Hon. Wayne L. Morse,
Senator from Oregon,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Morse:--

"Consistency is the refuge of little souls" is a proverb which, like all others according to Old Gorgon Graham, needs to be looked at on both sides. The implication seems to be that great souls do not need or at least do not resort to such a refuge; but they cannot be inconsistent with impunity, if for no other reason than that there are so many little souls in the world. For a man who has been so outspoken not to say violent in his opposition to filibustering under any pretext to resort to the filibuster himself, no matter what his reasons, lays himself open to attack so completely that I regretted deeply to learn that you had done it.

I know the reasons why you felt that this filibuster was different. That's what the proponents of every war tell us. And that's what every other filibusterer says. You've pretty effectively ended any influence you may have against filibustering, it seems to me. If when you sought cloture on any matter before the senate in the future I were a member of that body, I'd simply quote your action in this recent debate and I'd think the rest of the senate, your own party as well as the opposition, would laugh you down.

When you declared, or at least the paper said so, that you'd vote in a certain way if every citizen in Oregon were against your action, it seemed to me that you were going unnecessarily far in your statement. How a man could be sure he was right if every other man in the state disagreed with him -- well, it would require a great wealth of self confidence, not to use a harsher expression. But I took that for merely a Morsean exaggeration, and did not comment on it, to you nor to anybody else. A man ought to stand by his convictions, and if he cannot do that and remain in office, he ought to take the consequences and see somebody else in the office he has lost by fidelity to his convictions.

I'm not at all sure that you may not be right in your feeling that there are impossible things in the present labor law. If there are, you as a man of influence among men of labor unions have a great opportunity to show to labor that it is their own abuses and disregard of the public interest which have brought about the present law. If you wanted to debate the question, for ten hours or for twenty, I should not quarrel with that. But to resort to the filibuster, which you have so ably and forcefully denounced -- well, you've alienated a lot of your friends that I hate to see you lose. And you have done it fruitlessly, as it seems to me. You could have registered your objections to the law without resorting to the filibuster.

I have watched your career with interest ever since you took the lead in the opposition to the W. J. Kerr regime in Oregon higher education. I did not know as much about the merits of the case when you demanded the resignation of the head of the Board of Higher Education and the resignation of Dr. Kerr. The action was so unusual that it focused a lot of attention on you. But I still was uncertain, reserving judgment on you, till I heard you in your speech in Newberg when you were a candidate for the senatorial nomination. Then I was ready to support you against the field.

Most of your actions in the Senate have had my entire approval. I hoped that you might be the mediating influence that would help to bring out a law that would curb the evils of labor activities without at the same time making matters worse by going too far. That you tried to do this I am ready to grant without argument. But resorting to the filibuster which you had so violently denounced -- well, it is very hard for your best friends to take, and I feel that I ought to say so, to you and not to your enemies.

With the hope that the bad things about the law which you fought by the method you have denounced may be found to be less serious than you fear, and that these evils may be corrected by other laws passed when there has been some more sober second thought and some experience as a guide, I am

Sincerely your friend,

Levi T. Pennington.