

A Sooner for vice-president?

By Paul Y. Anderson

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MEET Josh Lee, the Rover Boy of the United States Senate. Sooner or later you would meet him anyhow, if you attended Democratic political meetings, or listen to patriotic speeches on the radio. His is the story of the country elocution teacher who made good. There's a smile on his lips, and a song in his heart, and why not? F. D. R. is in the White House, Josh is in the Senate, and all's well with the world. If the time comes when all is not well, Josh will know what to do: He will make a speech about it. It will be a beautiful speech, too.

Thus for him, the future stretches away in an endless and enticing succession of public gatherings, where bands play, flags flutter, and strong men and lovely women fall raptly silent as the chairman clears his throat for the last time, steadies the pitcher of ice water on the table, and concludes his introductory remarks as follows:

"And now, fellow Americans, it is my privilege and pleasure to present to you, on this momentous and historic occasion, our honored guest and principal speaker, the eloquent and distinguished Senator from Oklahoma—the Honorable Joshua Bryan Lee." (Prolonged applause.)

This is the role in which destiny cast him, and for which he has groomed himself in a thousand dress rehearsals. Two fateful facts stand out in the autobiographical sketch which he prepared for the Congressional Directory. Writing of himself in the third person, as the authors of such sketches invariably do, he says:

"Christened Joshua, and later given the middle name of Bryan, after the Great Commoner . . . though almost entirely self-supporting throughout his college career, he engaged in forensics, and won the National Collegiate Oratorical championship in 1916."

His graduation from Oklahoma University coincided with the declaration of war against Germany, but the war was not long to divert him from his chosen course. Soon after his return from France, he was made head of the newly created Department of Public Speaking at his Alma Mater. From that day until he took his seat in the Senate last January his progress was as steady and assured as

ambition, industry and a dulcet voice could make it.

Everyone in Oklahoma likes Josh Lee, they say, except possibly the men he beat for the Senate. His 45 years sit lightly upon his square and youthful shoulders. His manner is engaging, his smile affable, and he is as modest as it is possible for a professional orator to be. It would be difficult to harbor a spiteful thought against one overflowing with good will toward all the world, including the birds and bees, the calves and colts, the pigs and chickens.

Yet there must be some significance in the fact that immediately after the outbreak of hostilities on Capitol Hill over the President's plan to pack the Supreme Court, both sides unhesitatingly listed Senator Lee as among those "sure" to vote for the plan. According to all available evidence, including his own emphatic testimony, they did so without receiving a word of confirmation from him.

"I haven't told a living soul how I intend to vote," he assured this correspondent. "Enough trouble comes down the road and raps on my door with brass knuckles without me running out to meet it. I don't expect to say a word until the roll is called in the Senate."

Informed that every available list made by canvassers for either side showed his name among those "certain to be for the President's plan," he rejoined:

"The canvassers are listing me on their own responsibility." A little later he added:

"Did you ever see a man swing with all his strength, when there wasn't anything there to swing at? He looked foolish, didn't he? That's what sometimes happens when a man talks too soon. There is a possibility that the court plan will be

in a different shape when it comes to a vote. I intend to wait."

"Don't you intend to speak on it?" asked the interviewer, with actual surprise.

"I do not," was the reply, "I have already violated the rule that a new Senator should be seen and not heard, but I don't expect to violate it on this question."

"I have made up my mind before I came to the Senate that there is no such thing as a general specialist. I think I am qualified to speak on a few things—agriculture, education, veterans' legislation—and when the time comes, I shall discuss them."

Now, the theory is virtually undisputed that Senator Lee would rather make a speech than do anything else known to man. Hence, this temporary self-imposed silence might be galling, but for another circumstance. James Aloysius Farley, always with an eye for practical detail, was quick to discover a party asset in the new Senator's taste and talent for oratory.

Within the last three months Josh has become Democratic Spellbinder No. 1. When a Jefferson Democratic Club needs a speaker, Farley knows where to turn. Consequently, the Oklahoma Demosthenes already has been heard in such widely separated states as Michigan, Missouri, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Florida. He will be heard again. And again.

His rise, as has been remarked, dates from his appointment as professor of public speaking at Oklahoma University. To be a teacher of elocution is one thing; to be its tireless exponent and practitioner is another. Josh was both. Wherever two or more persons were gathered together within the boundaries of the state, he was likely to be found addressing them, if his class was not in session.

He became the darling of Rotary, Kiwanis, the Lions, the Civitans, the Junior Advertising clubs and the more gregarious posts of the American Legion. No patriotic program was complete without him. No meeting of educators or agriculturists, no convention of organized labor, had cause to adjourn until the members' ears had been caressed by his cadences. And such cadences.

Harken, for example, to the following

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OKLAHOMA NEWS PHOTO

Senator Josh Lee, in the center, and Jim Farley, on the right, as they appeared recently in Oklahoma City for a Democratic rally

passage culled from the opening bars of a recent speech over the radio:

"This morning I went to my office fairly bursting with joy of living. The sun was shooting his golden arrows over the tops of his buildings and as I came up to Capitol Hill, Old Glory greeted me from the flagpole on the top of the nation's Capitol. As I saw the national banner fluttering in the morning sunlight, I received an extra charge of patriotism.

"I thought of what it had cost to place that flag above the Capitol of the United States. I thought of the dreams and hopes and tears—yes, of the blood, that it represented. In my imagination, I saw again Francis Scott Key, as he stood on board that British man-of-war in the harbor of Baltimore City, a few miles from here, and strained his eyes at the crack of dawn to determine whether the American flag or the British flag waved above the city."

Now it is possible that those were the thoughts which the Senator had as he approached his office that morning. No one is in a position to refute his statement, because he alone knows. The most that can be said against the probability is that if those were his thoughts, they were strangely unlike the thoughts which occupy most Senators. The average Senator's thoughts would be more like this:

"Oh Lord, how many of those poisonous bores will I have to see this morning? . . . If that damned secretary of mine got drunk again last night I'll fire him.

. . . Guess I'll have to go to the White House again about that judgeship . . . Wonder if there's really going to be a WPA strike out home. . . Roosevelt ought to get rid of that fellow Hopkins, and appoint a man with some practical experience. . . Next time Joe Robinson bawls me out I'll tell him where to head in—doesn't he realize I have problems of my own? . . . Better check up on the old fox (his colleague)—looks like a little chiseling is going on."

Among observers whose duties take them regularly to Capitol Hill in the morning, the sight of the sun shooting its golden arrows against the dome is likely to provoke a reflection upon the amount of skulduggery which goes on under the dome. The fact that Senator Lee has been able to close his mind to all such crass and morbid thoughts is a tribute to the purity of his soul, or something like that.

It is true that he "got his judgeship," as the crasser and more morbid ones are prone to phrase it, only a few weeks after he entered the Senate. Congress during the last session created a position for a roving Federal Judge, for three Oklahoma districts, but Senators Thomas and Gore got their wires crossed in the matter, and the position was not filled. When this session convened, Lee succeeded Gore and President Roosevelt promptly filled the post by appointing 33-year-old A. P. Murrah, a charter member of the youthful and dynamic political organization known in

Oklahoma as "Josh Lee's Rover Boys."

No aspersion is intended for Judge Murrah or the Rover Boys. The former has a reputation as a brilliant and precocious lawyer, and the latter demonstrated during the last Democratic senatorial primary that a derisive nickname is insufficient to offset the organizing efforts of a determined band of youths who have taken unto themselves a political idol. Indeed, the entire episode goes to show that youth and energy will be served.

A number of lessons may be drawn from that senatorial primary campaign. It was a honey. In addition to the veteran Senator Gore, seeking renomination, and Josh, seeking promotion to the Senate from the House—where he had served one term—the chief contestants were Governor E. W. Marland and Gomer Smith, a Townsendite. They went to it in the good old-fashioned way.

Josh, traveling in a trailer, traversed incredible distances, and made a fabulous number of speeches. Or, if you wish to take the view of the disgruntled ones, he made the same speech a fabulous number of times. In any case, he got around and was heard by a tremendous number of voters. To a Washington friend who wished him success on the eve of the campaign, Senator Gore confided:

"I'm going to be licked, and I know who's going to win—that young Josh Lee."

At that time it was generally supposed by outsiders that the race would be between Gore and Governor Marland. How much those outsiders knew about it was revealed when the Governor and Senator ran, respectively, third and fourth. Josh and Smith, the Townsendite, entered the run-off, which Josh promptly transformed into a run-away.

"How did he do it?" Oklahomans were asked. "Josh is a wonderful speaker," was the standard reply.

"What did he speak about?" the more curious persisted. "Oh, he spoke about a lot of things—agriculture, education—subjects like that."

"What did he say about them?" At this point the Oklahoman would scratch his head, and say: "I don't just exactly remember what it was he said, but he certainly makes a wonderful speech. Wait till you hear him in the Senate."***

Among those who know and like him, which seems to include nearly everybody in Oklahoma, a multitude is convinced of his complete sincerity. Some say he really believes that in oratory there is salvation. It is a comforting belief, although if all that is required to solve the problems of an industrial society is a healthy pair of lungs and something to stand on, considerable earnest thinking is being wasted by others. ***

In some quarters there is a suspicion that Josh, in being so kind and accommodating to Farley and the administra-

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