

## Judge Reggie and Uncle Earl

During the 1956 campaign, Uncle Earl was faced with a problem many felt he couldn't solve: Television. Earl never could speak effectively on the radio. He couldn't read from a script, and he couldn't ad lib or speak to a mike. He had to be on the stump and looking at a live audience to do his thing. A few tapes were made, unknown to him, while he spoke to big gatherings and they were very, very good. But Earl couldn't use the electronic media, period. That is, he could not personally use it. He had solved the radio problem in 1948 by letting others, myself and Mary Evelyn Parker included, do much of his radio campaigning.

In 1956 he had to find a way of using television or get beat, for his main opponent, Mayor Chep Morrison, was very good on TV and used it like a professional. Earl enlisted the support of Edmund Reggie, city judge of Crowley, and Camille Gravel, the prominent attorney from Alexandria, to do his TV campaigning. He couldn't have chosen better. Reggie is a wonderful speaker, possessing all the qualifications that any modern speaking authority would demand. Gravel was just as good. They were young, intelligent, very photogenic, and not only knew how to speak and how to project, but they had enough political savvy to adapt their rhetoric to the job at hand, electing Earl Long governor. And they contributed greatly to Earl's 1956 victory.

Since Reggie and Gravel were not 100 percent altruistic in giving their services for good government, they were among the first in line to get their rewards when Uncle Earl was sworn in as governor and got the key to the whole patronage warehouse.

One of the plums Judge Reggie thought he deserved was a big retainer from some theater owners, who, he claimed, were being double taxed. They paid a tax on movie films when they purchased or used them, and they had to pay a sales tax on the tickets they sold to patrons who came to see the films. Reggie had promised to help get one of the two taxes repealed and claimed Uncle Earl had authorized him to tell the amusement people such would be done when Earl became governor. So when the 1956 legislative session opened, Reggie had a bill drafted that, if passed and signed, would have repealed one of the so-called double taxes.

After the bill was introduced, the commissioner of Revenue and other fiscal experts told Earl that the state could not repeal the movie tax without replacing the lost revenues with some other tax. Earl had promised to impose no new taxes, so he had to make a decision and make it quickly. He told his legislative leaders to kill the bill designed to repeal the amusement tax.

I was in Earl's office when Reggie burst in and demanded that the governor keep what Reggie called a solemn promise. Uncle Earl was as cool as a cucumber and explained to Reggie that the state budget couldn't stand any tax cuts, especially one like Reggie proposed for the picture shows. Reggie's voice, ordinarily modulated and smooth, got high as he told Earl how embarrassed he was and how much face he would lose over the turn of events. He waved a letter in front of Earl and said, "Governor, you let me write all those movie-house owners this letter, and I told them you said that you would repeal one of those taxes. What can I tell them now?" The question precipitated one of Earl's deathless lines, which has become apocryphal — but I heard him say it to Reggie.

Uncle Earl looked up and sort of smiled as he said, "Tell them that I lied."

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