

McKay's 'Open-Door' Press Policy Remains Despite Controversies

By A. ROBERT SMITH
Statesman Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Nearly three years in office marked by almost constant controversy have not deterred Secretary of Interior Douglas McKay to retreat from his open-door press policy or seek refuge from the din of dispute. Now, as when he entered the cabinet, McKay will grant interviews to accredited newspaper reporters and answer their questions on any subject, no holds barred. A favorite McKay admission is, "There are three people you never want to pick a fight with — a traffic cop, your wife and a newspaper."

For his frankness and accessibility, McKay is admired and well liked by reporters who cover the Department of Interior and have the job of digging out what is going on within its many bureaus.

This side of the picture appears to have no chance of being presented in the congressional investigation that got underway this past week into the information policies of the Eisenhower administration. The inquiry began with testimony from leading editors and reporters who've charged that the public's right to information has been infringed upon by many government officials who have

clamped down on the flow of information to the press. The committee, which has just published a document showing McKay to be the only cabinet official who held no news conferences this past year, is now getting the administration's side of the story from various department heads. But the committee said it has no plan for calling Interior Department officials.

McKay has held but one formal press conference since entering office. That was in 1953 when he announced he would not intervene against Idaho Power Co. in the Federal Power Commission hearings on Hells Canyon. But what McKay does that not all cabinet officers have been willing or able to do is to grant private interviews with reporters who requested them.

This open-door press policy permits reporters to ask McKay questions when they are most timely, rather than when the secretary may choose to call a press conference. The press conference is a device for handling many reporters at one time—an indispensable device for the president and other top officials who would be swamped with requests for personal press interviews if they granted them.

Policy Unchanged
McKay's press policy was advised by Larry Smyth, his information director until he returned last spring to his Portland newspaper job. It has continued without change under Smyth's successor, William C. Strand, former city

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SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Two transports will bring more than 1,700 U. S. servicemen home from the Orient this week. The Gen. Edwin D. Patrick will dock Tuesday after calling a Manila and Guam, with 294 airmen, 72 Army and 68 Navy men. On Thursday the Gen. C. G. Morton, from Yokohama, will arrive with 708 members of the air force, 141 Army, 83 Marines and 54 Navy.

editor of the Washington Times Herald and ex-editor of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. Within the experience of this reporter, McKay's assistant secretaries and the heads of the various agencies under the Interior Department have met the press squarely and without refuge to the familiar words, "no comment."

Secretary of State Dulles must necessarily rely upon the press conference, for several hundred American and foreign correspondents cover his department. He usually holds one each week he is in Washington. He held 20 the past year.

Labor Secretary Mitchell holds one every other week. He held 25 last year. Defense Secretary Wilson and Agriculture Secretary Benson each had 18, while Attorney General Brownell had 7.

Only a few cabinet officials have done as McKay does, seeing reporters for interviews as they request. They include Treasury Secretary Humphrey, whose office said he also held about 30 press conferences in the past three years; Commerce Secretary Weeks, who had three of four press conferences; and Postmaster General Summerfield, whose office had no exact record but guessed he had "about 15."

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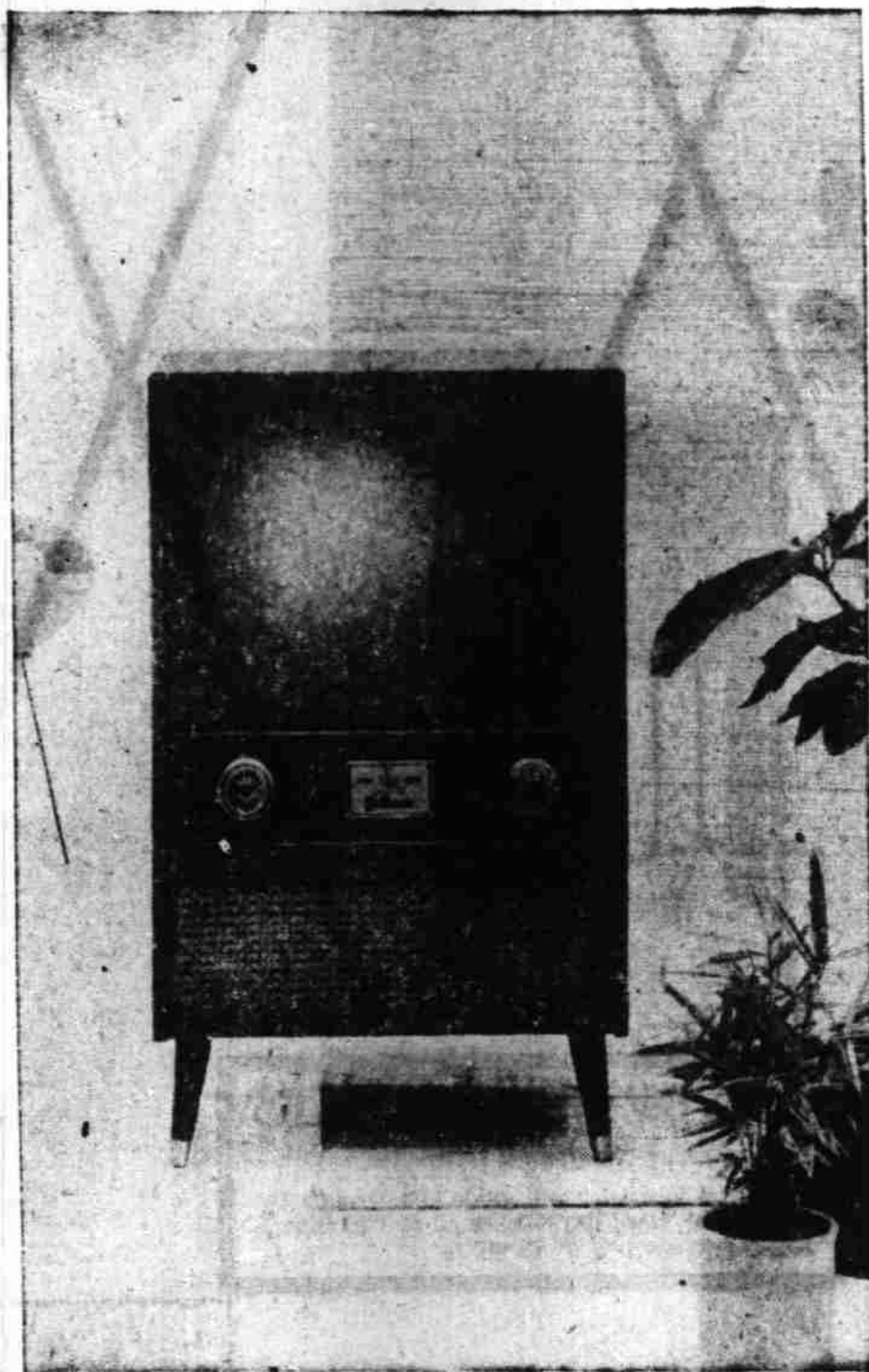
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