Claire Parish: To start out, just kind of a technicality question. When we wrote our website where you referred to Russia and all the incidents with Russia, as happening with Russia and we got the feedback that we should probably be saying the Soviet Union. Since you are a far greater expert than we are, we figured we could ask you. What do you think, since I know all the books, the Vandenberg Papers at least, always refers to problems with like Molotov as problems with the Russian delegation. So what you think about that?

Hank Meijer: You know, it's a great question because it, you know, today it's Russia and before the Russian revolution it was Russia, but for 70 years it was the Soviet Union and yet Vandenberg used them interchangeably. People would say the Russians or the Soviets and really be talking about the same thing. So I would, if I were you, I think I would talk about Soviet, so the Soviet Union because that kind of places it in time, but one of Vandenberg's big speeches is called "What is Russia up to now?" at the height of the Cold War. So I think they're both right.

Kyle Korte: And then just another question during your research at the Bentley, how did you decide which sources, out of all the sources that are there, how did you decide which were the most valuable and like what to look at?

Hank Meijer: Well you start with Vandenberg's own papers which actually only occupied eight linear feet and that's not very much, I mean for somebody who was a senator for 23 years and a big cheese before that. And so I started going through his papers and then his wife Hazel's papers. And then partly when you're doing research, you're relying a lot on the archivist and who do they know and who did they recommend? And they'll say, well, you should look at the Ralph Smith papers because this guy kept scrapbooks about the

Vandenberg's and newspaper clippings and things for the biography he was hoping to write. And so start with Arthur Vandenberg and then with Hazel Vandenberg and then the Ralph Smith papers. And one thing leads to another. The Bentley Library has all of the governors of Michigan's papers from the 20th century on and so people Vandenberg was seeing was involved with politically like the governor who appointed him Fred Green, his papers are at the Bentley. So you look in the finding aid for Governor Green's papers for any correspondence related to Arthur Vandenberg and then the Howard Lawrence papers. Lawrence was Governor Greens Chief of staff. He later became Vandenberg's campaign manager. And so his papers are at the Bentley and whenever I would run across to a person, a politician or otherwise whose papers I thought might touch on Vandenberg's, I would look at those papers. So Senator James Couzens who overlapped with Vandenberg in the Senate, his papers are there and looked through the Couzens papers and it is kind of like, it's this telescope that keeps broadening the picture. And one of the researchers challenges is always where do you stop because this could go on indefinitely and you're always worried about missing that one letter or one scrap of information that might open another world for you. Is this the kind of thing you're thinking about? I mean, what, what are the great moments for me was in Hazel Vandenberg scrapbooks at the Bentley. Were, she's pasting in clippings and some of it is scrapbooks and some of it is diaries, she might be pasting in clippings or writing in her diary a dinner party they went to, or it might be a tea or a luncheon, a social event in Washington and in the margin in one of those, and I can't remember now if it's a scrapbook or a diary she writes, about who was there, let's say it's a say it's a society tea with a number of women in Washington and then she'll write, um, one of whom is the American wife of the

Argentine ambassador to the US. And she'll write in there, I don't know if I mentioned this at the talk at the library or not, and she wrote a note in the margins: Courtney is writing down everything. So Courtney Letts, her maiden name was Letts, she was from Chicago and so by that point I could finally Google. Google Courtney Letts. Turns out her papers are at the Library of Congress in Washington. So next time I'm in Washington I go to the library of Congress and look up her papers and she has, let's see if I got some of them here, 2000 pages of handwritten journals of her own. And in that she gave me the material that I used for the opening, the preface, of the book where Vandenberg comes stumbling out of the embassy party. That was from her description of that day, buried somewhere on page 1300 of her handwritten papers. So you'd go to her handwritten journals and look at the period when she and her husband were in Washington in the 1930s and just start reading that and come across that reference him coming across their reference to Franklin Roosevelt here or a reference to Vandenberg's mistress there. And those are just those wonderful little moments of discovery that nobody could have predicted, but that grew out of just a little note that I saw in the Hazel Vandenberg papers at the Bentley Library.

Claire Parish: What do you think was maybe the most interesting or valuable source of all this ridiculous amount of sources?

Hank Meijer: The Arthur and Hazel Vandenberg scrap books were probably the most sort of personally intimate and valuable for that reason. There's so many different sources. It's just really hard to say that there was one. I mean you had different forms of Aha moments, but I would say the Arthur and Hazel Vandenberg scrapbooks were the most interesting in that they were a window on everything that was happening in their lives. And so you could look through that window

and find the ambassador's wife's papers or look through that window and say, well, you know, I need to read this or that book about what was going on at that time. But they were the window that I was looking through more than any other. Then all these, not all these books. Probably two thirds of these books and all of these files are what I inherited from the guy who started out doing Vandenberg research and then died back in 1990. So that is what I did. So a third of the book should probably my own additions to that. But if two thirds of the books and all in all the files came from, came from him and again gave me a real good jump on my research. So there's a very famous quote that's often ascribed to Vandenberg were when President Truman presents the idea of the Truman Doctrine where it says United States is going to come to the help of any free nation threatened by outside forces, in other words by communism at that point. And this is like, Whoa, is this if this is going to be our foreign policy, that's a little scary because that could oblige us to do lots of stuff all over the world where we may not want to intervene. So Truman is laying that out with congressional leaders at the White House and one of them is Vandenberg and Vandenberg is alleged to have said, well, Mr. President, if you, you, you have to. What Vandenberg probably said was, you've got to make this case to the American people if you want me of Congress to support you. In other words, we're not going to just give you a blank check to go intervene anywhere in the world without the public buying into the importance of this. One historian with no footnote claimed that Vandenberg told the president, Mr. President, I'll support you, but you've got to scare the hell out of the country. Now that may have collected the temper of the times. In other words, you got to get people's attention that this communist threat is real and we need to be ready to respond. And you know, it implies scaring people. But he had that quote has often

been ascribed to Vandenberg, but there is no evidence that he ever actually said it. And so this professor somewhere in these files has a whole file, on trying to track down if anybody really had proof that Vandenberg told Truman to scare the hell out of the country. Couldn't find anything. So, I didn't have to wonder about that in the way that you would have to if you were starting out cold. But anyway, I'm rambling all over here. I don't know what suits your profession.

Kyle Korte: So how did Vandenberg become a leader of the isolationist movement?

Hank Meijer: He was like so many Americans. He was very disillusioned after World War One, that we had sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers and spent millions and millions of dollars intervening in the war in Europe fighting the Germans alongside the French and the British. And when it was all done in Woodrow Wilson had said, President Wilson in getting us to do that, sort of like scaring the hell out of the country, he said this is a crusade to make the world safe for democracy. And so on that basis, Vandenberg and most Americans joined in that crusade. It sounded like the moral, the right thing to do. In the wake of that, the peace treaty was written so that it was very one sided in favor of the French and the British and sowed seeds of discontent among the Germans who felt very... There was never a...it was never a formal surrender to end World War One, it was just a truce and the Germans felt like they got the short end of the stick and they were very bitter about that. And Adolf Hitler could play on that bitterness in his coming to power. But if you were Vandenberg and a lot of other Americans, you said, where did we go wrong? We thought we were going to make the world safe for democracy. And now we've got all these dictators threatening war everywhere in the 1930s. Hitler and Mussolini and

the Japanese. What went wrong and how did we get into this in the first place? So the Vandenberg was part of a committee that became the Nye Committee. Gerald Nye was the chairman of it in the Middle 1930s to investigate the cause, the causes of American involvement in World War One. Was there a real story here? Was it a conspiracy of bankers? Because we had loaned so much money to the French and the Europeans that we wanted to protect those loans by propping up those governments. Was it a way for the armaments makers and the people who made weapons to make a lot of money and so it was in their interest to have the war. What happened? And so the Nye committee is doing this investigation and out of that grows this conviction that we don't want to get fooled again. We were sort of fooled and tricked to coming into World War One, who knows why, and it didn't have a good result. So we don't want that happen again. So let's be neutral as Americans. So that committee ends up introducing neutrality legislation that the congress enacts. And so that in 1937, there's a very strict neutrality law that says, you know, if war breaks out somewhere in the world, the United States is not going to trade, sell arms, have trade of any kind with those belligerent countries, we're going to be totally neutral. Because the moment you say, well, we'll sell you stuff, but we won't sell your stuff, you're picking sides. So we're going to be totally neutral. And for Vandenberg, that's an outgrowth of disillusionment with World War One and his experience on the Nye Committee. It also aligns with what Alexander Hamilton had George Washington say to the American people in his farewell address that we should avoid entangling alliances. And so neutrality becomes Vandenberg's sort of civic religion, his mantra, we're going to stay neutral, whatever happens over there in Europe, we're not going get into their mess again. And so Vandenberg from the Nye committee, emerges as a real spokesman for the Republican Party,

and then this is happening at the same time that the Republican party is decimated in the 1930s in the elections, so they're down after 1934 I think to only 17 Republicans in the Senate for a couple of years. And so in a tiny minority, you rise very quickly in your seniority. And Vandenberg in 1934 was the only Republican senator from a major industrial state who was reelected. So his prominence rises at the same time that he is coming out of the Nye committee as a spokesman for isolationism. And then the leading isolationist in the Senate is a guy named William Borah, Senator Borah from Idaho. And he's older and he dies early in 1940 I believe. And Vandenberg was sort of his protégé and he was Vandenberg's mentor. So when he dies, Vandenberg is kind of the undisputed spokesperson for Senate Republicans and he's an ardent isolationist spokesperson on foreign affairs and leading isolation. So that when it comes time in 1939 when Borah is not in the best of health to fight Roosevelt on the repeal of the arms embargo and the neutrality act, Vandenberg is leading the fight. And so that kind of marks his identification is the leader of the isolationists.

Claire Parish: How would you say he shifted from that isolationism to internationalism? Would you say that would be a sudden shift or more of a gradual change in his life?

Hank Meijer: Definitely gradual, it was a lot of baby steps. So Pearl Harbor temporarily shifted it for everybody because you couldn't say, well, we're going to stay out of the war after you'd been attacked. So some isolationists would say, well isolation isn't mandated right there, but it really just kind of stopped the debate because now we all had to fight a war. For Vandenberg, I think it's started with Pearl

Harbor because that was a real wakeup call that, hey, we could be attacked. The Japanese, in this case only halfway across the ocean, but they can come halfway across the ocean and attack us, attack American soil. So that was a first step and then another step was Vandenberg's, nephew, Hoyt Vandenberg was a very young, hot shot, became a general in the army air force, and the air force was kind of the new frontier in how wars were fought. It wasn't even its own department then, it was part of the army, but he could see the effects of long range bombing and things like this that America could no longer be assured of being safe behind the oceans, which the isolationists always clung to. And so that's happening along the way. And then again in 1943 right in the middle of the war, the Republicans have to figure out how they're going to campaign in 1944 because in 1940, the isolationists are left behind with the outbreak of war in Europe, public opinion shifts and Wendell Willkie, who is not an isolation, gets the Republican nomination. So now three years later, they're looking ahead to 1944 and thinking, you know, some of us are isolationists, some of us are all in with Roosevelt as interventionists. What's going to be our platform, what are we going to run on? What can we agree on so that we can mount a campaign as a unified party and have some shot of recovering seats in the Senate, maybe of challenging Roosevelt for the presidency? And so that's when the Republicans convene this meeting on Mackinac Island to figure out what their foreign policy is going to be in 1944, and they put Vandenberg as the leading Republican spokesman for foreign policy is in charge of finding a compromise. And so that's when he takes all these leading Republican elected officials and gets them to agree on an expression of support for something like what becomes the United Nations. And these are some of the same people who had fought the League of Nations after World War One. So he gets that

agreement on support for a postwar world organization and that pulls him further from isolation to talking more about international solutions. And not only is the compromise pulling in that direction, but there's also a lot of the presses and the media is enthusiastic about it. So he becomes, in the eyes of kind of what today we would call the media elite, the Washington press corps, he gets viewed with the new degree of respect. And his ego really likes that. So it kind of feels good to be moving away from isolation to be in the middle ground. And so that pulls him further. And then in 1943 because the tide of the war is turning and the Allies are beginning to liberate countries and territories that have been occupied by the Germans and the Italians and the Japanese, they have to figure out what do we do with these newly liberated territories that were ravaged by war and people are starving, have to come in with some relief. And it's not going to be just United States, it's going to be the Allies who were fighting the war are also trying to get together to figure out how to provide relief and govern these liberated territories. And so Roosevelt calls a conference call for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. He calls this conference in at the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia with all these representatives from all of our allies in the war to figure out what to do with these liberated...help these liberated territories. Vandenberg and a lot of the isolationists as you're saying, wait a minute, we're negotiating with these other countries. This is like you're talking about a treaty here and that requires a two thirds vote of the Senate. Roosevelt just can't decide to call everybody together and say, well, what's the world going to look like as we liberate these countries? So they have a lot of Senate debate over this and Vandenberg finds another compromise. He basically negotiates with the State Department and the administration and said, okay, we won't treat this as a treaty because this is just a

short term temporary fix for countries that need help, but it's also something that you've got to come to Congress for, get our approval. You can't just decide this on your own so all you need is a majority, not a two thirds vote to set up this rehabilitation administration. And in those negotiations, again, a compromise that pulls Vandenberg closer to working with other countries and postwar solutions and then toward the end of the war, Vandenberg is very suspicious of Roosevelt, when Roosevelt's about to go to Yalta for the summit conference with Stalin and Churchill to make some decisions about the United Nations and set a meeting for that and that sort of thing. Vandenberg gives his big speech in the Senate and calling for a postwar treaty to keep Germany and Japan from ever being military threats again. Basically, we're going to demilitarize them. We're not going to let them have armies and we're going to promise each other that we're not going to let them attack us. He makes that proposal and Roosevelt goes to Yalta and realizes as he's putting together the American delegation to the UN that he can't ignore Vandenberg and expect to get Republicans to buy in to approving the United Nations Charter, he has got to appoint Vandenberg to the UN, the American delegation to start to create the UN.

Kyle Korte: What do you believe was Vandenberg's motivation during his work for the United States?

Hank Meijer: For a lot of politicians, including Vandenberg, there's always ego, like I want to do big stuff, would make a big name for myself, and he absolutely was one of those people. But as time went on, I think he recognized more and more that his generation was in a unique position to set the stage for the next several generations of whether we would have peace or not and what that would mean for the United States and that sense of being involved in something so

significant, I think kind of was the Abraham Lincoln's great quote about appealing to the better angels of our nature. That sense of being part of creating a new world order after the war imbued him with a great sense of responsibility and he was a very civic minded character. And so, while it gratified his ego to be in the middle of things, he also recognized that that he could have a unique responsibility to be one of the key people figuring out what would give the United States the best shot at maintaining a free world on our terms.

Claire Parish: How do you think that Vandenberg's childhood and his other works before the Senate contributed to his actions in the Senate later on?

Hank Meijer: Childhood, of course, it's a little tricky to say I don't want to play armchair psychologist. You could say that because his father nearly went bankrupt and he had to go to work when he was nine years old, that the household when for being secure to being very insecure. And so you're looking for security in your life. Again, how do we rebuild it? A stable household? Now, it's a big leap, but let's try to make it to say after the war, the world is in a shambles. And how do we try to rebuild a stable world? Is there something there, I don't know, but that would be in terms of childhood and he was also a very hard worker from a very early age. So I would say those were pieces of his childhood. You know, he'd always been interested in international affairs. This guy, when he was 16 years old in 1900, he was going to be a senior in high school because he graduated when he was 16, he won a speech contest talking about one of the very first international peace conferences was held in I think 1899 in the Hague in the Netherlands. And he gave a speech about that. So here he is as a 16 year old talking about international relations and talking about some of the ingredients that would go into the United Nations 50 years later. So that’s childhood. And I

think his early career in the newspaper business, newspapers were so much more important than they are now. I mean now we've got so much different media and while the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post still have a lot of influence, people turn to so many other sources of social media and broadcasting and everything else for their news and their opinions. It wasn't that way 100 years ago. Newspapers were the dominant source of information for everybody. And so if you ran the editorial page of a newspaper, you could influence a lot of opinion and so, because he became an editor when he just before he turned 22 and because he was a good self-promoter as well, it was very active in politics and he'd write an editorial about the League of Nations or about this or that issue and fire it off to politicians and senators. And sometimes he was trying to butter them up. You'd write an editorial praising something that one of them did. They would read it and pay attention because what he said influenced thousands of readers. And during the debate over the League of Nations, right after World War Two, he is writing editorials trying to find a compromise, trying to find it. The Republicans want some reservations. They don't want to just accept the League of Nations covenant, the Charter, without making a few tweaks to it and Woodrow Wilson says, no, no, no. I helped write this thing. We're not going to change it. We're not going to change it up a word of it. You just, you guys, you congress accept it. Congress says eh, forget it buddy. We're not going to just take it because you tell us to. We want to tweak it a little bit. And so Vandenberg is trying to help for ways to tweak it and save it and sending letters to Henry Cabot Lodge at the Foreign Relations Committee, or excuse me, sending editorials to him and being listened to, having Lodge say that you know, I'm going to borrow some of your phrases and Lodge is Wilson's chief antagonist. Having William Howard Taft, he was also

a Republican, but campaigning for the League of Nations come to Grand Rapids and Vandenberg is writing front page editorials to get his attention and he gets Taft to change his claims that he got Taft to change his mind from saying no, we can't change a word on the charter to say, well, yeah, we need to approve it. We need to be part of the League of Nations, but we need to tweak it a little bit, you're right. And so, this is in 1919 and 1920, 1920 Warren Harding runs for president against Wilson's successor. And one of the big issues in the campaign, the big foreign policy issue is, should the United States join the League of nations or not. And Vandenberg writes this speech for Harding that says, well, only if we get some reservations. And, and so 25 years before the UN meeting, he's already influencing the debate on world affairs. So it's like, I think he gets the Senate figures well of course I'm going to be in the middle of the postwar debate because I'm used to doing that. So I think that's how his, his career help shape it.

Kyle Korte: How did his childhood heroes like Theodore Roosevelt and Alexander Hamilton influence his work?

Hank Meijer: I think Theodore Roosevelt was inspiring because Roosevelt believed in public service and was very public spirited and it gave you a sense of idealism. This guy was a ball of fire, a bundle of energy and, you know, enormous ego also. But really trying to do what he thought was in the best interests of the country with major ambitious ideas for reform and, you know, just an exciting charismatic figure who would infuse someone your age with just a sense of idealism. If I see him in government, it must be a noble thing to do, to be in government, something we may not have quite as much of today. And so I think that's where Teddy Roosevelt came in. And then Alexander Hamilton again, he was orphaned when he was young, worked as a clerk in the Caribbean on a little

island near where he was born, arrived in the US with adults who are going to help them get an education but otherwise penniless and completely self-made man, self-made person. And in a way that again was inspirational to a young guy from a little city in the Midwest whose parents were running out of money when he was a kid. He could see that self-made character. I mean, if we think about people like Washington and Jefferson, I mean, they were wealthy, plantation owning families and it was a whole different ballgame. Hamilton was this young striver kind of coming from nowhere who showed you can really get ahead and be a leading voice in government and was also a brilliant writer and thinker and so he was just a great hero for Vandenberg to worship. And oh, by the way, even though you actually, his no entangling alliances, as I understand it, and it's not my specialty, was to keep us from hooking up with France in some of the European wars. He might have been happy to align with England, he was kind of an anglophile. But his no entangling alliances idea was what stuck with Vandenberg. Hamilton and Roosevelt are both these charismatic and idealistic figures. They're sort of heroic with their energy at all they achieve and they're inspirational because they set a really high standard for public service.

Claire Parish: How do you think Vandenberg compromised with the Soviet Union while he worked with them? And do you think there is more conflict or compromised when they clash during conferences or things like that?

Hank Meijer: I think he seemed to find the right tone of willingness to compromise but very clear eyed and realistic about how tough they were and that compromising to easily wasn't going to get you anywhere. And again, for someone like Vandenberg, the also his generation was very much influenced by what happened before

World War Two, when they would have viewed the British trying to compromise with Hitler at Munich. That appeasement say that didn't work. And so we're not going to appease the Russians just because they make this or that demand. I mean, we've got to be realistic, we're not going to send our soldiers over to liberate Poland, but we're not going to just automatically roll over and say, yeah, you know, this free elections you talked about that. Don't worry about them. We're going to keep hounding them and pressuring them. And that, that was the prevailing, the emerging ideology in the United States that Vandenberg really spoke for. And so he was willing to talk with the Russians but he wasn't going to cave too quickly and that was kind of the right, the right balance I think.

Kyle Korte: What was Vandenberg's most significant action to ensure bipartisan foreign policy?

Hank Meijer: It wasn't so much a single action as a continuing practice. And so that same effort within the Republican Party to get compromises like at Mackinac, he applied within the Senate to get compromises between Republicans and Democrats. And so in the case of the Marshall Plan to get bipartisan cooperation, I would say he did two notable things. One, he commissioned the Brookings Institution, the Big Washington think tank, and it was like one of their first really big jobs to do a study of how the Marshall Plan should be structured and run. Should it be run out of the State Department? Should it be independent of the rest of the government? How should it be structured? And because he knew he needed to put that together to sell it to the congress and not make it look just like a Truman project. And so he had a lot of research done and did a lot of research about how the Marshall Plan should be run. And then when it came time for hearings in Congress, he did exhaustive

hearings. A one of the slams on, like, tax reform or a lot of major recent legislation is that it didn't get debated a lot. We just deal with it, the party and control rams it through Congress. Vandenberg held hearings basically said we'll listen to everybody's point of view. And so if some, you know, Democratic congressman had some obscure economists who had a point of view about the Marshall Plan, Vandenberg would let him testify before the Foreign Relations Committee. And so you kind of wear down the opposition by listening to them and incorporating some of their thoughts where you can. And so it was that combination of prep work and a willingness to listen. That helped with the Marshall Plan and then in a lot of compromising, I mean, Dean Acheson at the State Department would complain, you know, we send over the Marshall Plan, you know, the administration requesting x billions of dollars over five years Vandenberg said, no, no, no, no, no. That ain't gonna fly. We're going to take, you know, a fraction of that. We're going to do it, give it to you one year at a time. And with that Vandenberg could sell it to opponents in the Senate while at the same time keeping the program moving so that's the Marshall Plan. And then along comes NATO and he is going to type out the NATO resolution himself and write it and then he's going to be able to say, well, you know, back when we did the UN, we have this regional agreement with Latin America for mutual defense and this is just like that. We're just going to do it with us and Europe. He would have hearings on NATO and would invite in senators who were members who were, might have been isolationists or opponents who worked on the Foreign Relations Committee, but who he knew would be potential opponents and let them come in and ask questions of the generals and the diplomats of what they've got in store so that you, you give them access. Maybe you win them over or at least you neutralize that at a very early stage in the process

instead of having your opponent sitting out there and wait for you when you bring the legislation to the floor of the Senate and then shoot it down. Let's see if we can get these guys in to understand what their opposition is win some of them over or change some language, but make sure that when we bring it to the floor, we've done everything we can to incorporate their thoughts. Anyway. I think those would be examples.

Claire Parish: At the end of his life, there's a lot more conflict around bipartisan foreign policy. Do you think that his absence from the Senate might have contributed to that?

Hank Meijer: Absolutely. Either two things going on, one is that he had to be careful because particularly after the Republicans who thought they were going to win everything in 1948, they thought they were going to beat Truman and hold on to their majorities in Congress and instead Truman upsets Dewey and the Republicans lose their majorities in Congress. That leaves a lot of Republicans really angry. And so they're going, you know, what do we blame? Well, maybe we've got to blame Vandenberg because maybe he was too cozy with Truman. Maybe we should have been more critical. I mean, just like Truman didn't campaign against Vandenberg in 1946 when he was running for reelection. Vandenberg had a hard time criticizing Truman's foreign policy because he'd done so much to help create it. And so some of the Republicans were resentful of Vandenberg. He almost succeeded too well at bipartisanship and blurred their identity. And so, um, so there's that going on and then he goes off the scene and there is no other Republican with his kind of stature who can either challenge or agree with the administration. So you got simmering resentment and you've got nobody who's kind of a unifying force in the senate anymore for people to rally around, for Republicans to rally around and then

you've got things that were never part of all the great bipartisan work which was oriented mostly toward the UN, but then mostly toward Europe with NATO and the Marshall Plan. And now you've got civil war in China and that was never really a part of bipartisan cooperation. But you've got Republicans who blame the administration for losing China as if somehow we could have kept the communists from taking over and so that creates bitterness between the parties and then a war breaks out in Korea and geez what's going on here. We've got Truman goes to war. He hasn't asked us for a declaration of war and so again, and Republicans saying we can campaign against that and our next election and so those things are all in. And then then you've got Senator McCarthy coming along and he's just attacking not only Democrats but even, well, I mean George Marshall was part of the Democratic administration, but was nonpolitical. McCarthy is a Republican attacking all these Democrats and accusing them of being soft on communism and a lot of the Republicans, bad analogy with Trump, but a lot of the Republicans in Congress don't necessarily want to speak out against McCarthy because he's driving the Democrats crazy and they kind of liked that even though they think oh God is really overdoing it and the guy's full of it half the time. But we're seeing polarization happen because of China, because of the war in Korea, because of McCarthy and Vandenberg is not there to either to effect that and he wouldn't have affected China much. But he might've said to McCarthy, you know, don't try to tell me Marshall is soft on communism. I've been working with this guy. He helped us win the war. I've negotiated with the Soviet team. He's not soft on communism. Vandenberg might have been one of the few first people who could have stood up to him and stopped that. And Vandenberg would have been someone Truman would have consulted or had to consult on Korea and he could have gone back

to the Republican caucus and said, yeah, you know, it's a miserable thing, but we got to be doing what we're doing and you know, the President is the best he can or whatever. So the, the absence of Vandenberg I think definitely made that worse.

Kyle Korte: How did Vandenberg become a leader internationally?

Hank Meijer: It was really starting with the UN. He was so involved in diplomacy in a way that I don't think any senator has been before or since I mean, I say Tom Conally, his democratic counterpart, was with them too, but the administration didn't really need Connally because they were Democrats. They could get the Democratic vote. They needed Vandenberg because he led the Republicans and Vandenberg was smarter and more forceful than Conally too. And so the UN broadens him out in a way. I mean, suddenly he is acting in a way negotiating with the Russians and other countries and then Truman's decision to ask him and Connally to go to Paris for the postwar peace conferences after World War II means that he's involved in diplomatic negotiations for the next several months. I mean, he gets back to Grand Rapids is the day before the election when he's running for reelection in 1946. By that time he has spent hundreds of days negotiating on behalf of the United States. I mean really playing a kind of a State Department role. And then when he's chairing the Foreign Relations Committee, he's really recognized as the person all this important legislation has to go through. I think that would be the case.

Claire Parish: What would you say is the influence of the Vandenberg Resolution on later events?

Hank Meijer: It enabled the United States to join NATO to commit our support to the protection of the Western democracies, which sent a clear

message to the Soviet Union. That just because you outnumber the smaller European countries of the continent, you can't just throw your weight around, you can't just decide, you know, we want all of Berlin. We're going to stand up to you, and so it really, it was a big part of the...I don't know if you've talked at all about the containment theory after World War Two, of the solution Vandenberg was a part of, that George Kennan and the State Department really first defined was: we're not going to appease the Russians. We're not going to try not to go to war with them. We're just going to be very forceful about saying guys don't push us. And the Vandenberg Resolution and NATO really was instrumental in the United States being able to adapt that response, which led to the Cold War stalemate for decades and ultimately led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Kyle Korte: Can you explain the connection between an Article 51 of the UN Charter and NATO?

Hank Meijer: Yes. Article 51 grew out of that, as I understand it was the article that Vandenberg was concerned about, that there was a debate when the charter was being drafted about whether you could have regional security agreements, which Vandenberg was all for because since the Monroe Doctrine in 1820 or whatever, the United States' position was we don't want foreign powers interfering in the western hemisphere, that's our backyard. You guys, French and British at the time, stay out of it. Now, Russians stay out of it. And if you were a Latin American country looking to the United States for protection against potential communist influence, then you wanted a treaty where, you know, if we get communist pressure in Chile or whatever, we want to be able to call the United States for help. You know, if at the time, and sometimes the threat was certainly exaggerated, but the aim of the Soviets in theory was to foment

international revolution. That was the ideology that they operated on. And so if you're a little country in Central or South America and you're kind of worried that, you know, I've got communist revolutionaries in my country and you know, for all we know the Soviets are going to supply them with aid and they're a threat to our country. We want to be able to call them the United States for help. And so it was a mutual thing, but a lot of people have written, including in the US State Department when the UN was created said we don't want these. We want to get away from spheres of influence and power blocs. If the United Nations is really going to work, we can't have the world split up into all these little subgroups because the Russians are going to have theirs in Europe and we're going to have ours in America. And so Vandenberg had some resistance within the State Department to the idea of this mutual security in the Western Hemisphere. But he pushed that through and that became a template or a pattern then for NATO to say, you know, we're not doing this as an aggressive act. We're getting together for a mutual security in Europe just like we did in the western hemisphere. And so without Article 51, the UN might have had a charter that said you can't do that, but Article 51 said you can do that. So that's where that comes in.

Claire Parish: What was Vandenberg's role in the Pan-American Conferences and the creation of the Rio Pact?

Hank Meijer: So if I'm, if I'm not mistaken, there had been, there had been a meeting. Was it the Act of Chapultepec or something in Mexico City? I think early on in World War Two and then everything got kind of put on hold in the war but there was still this desire for a regional security treaty. And so then before the war even ends comes the UN Charter and so the Rio Pact then was kind of getting back to this project we'd been working on when the war started for

a mutual security treaty. It's now allowed under Article 51, so let's create it. And so the Rio Treaty was designed to do that and that was just like with the European peace treaties, Vandenberg and Connally went along as members of the US delegation with Secretary of State George Marshall. They'd gone to Europe with James Burns who proceeded Marshall, now they go to Brazil with Marshall as secretary of state. And so that was where they kind of fleshed out...that was between the creation of the UN and the creation of NATO. So it kind of fleshed out what the regional security treaty would look like in the western hemisphere. And I like to think of the story that it was as important as anything for the fact that Marshall and Vandenberg, and in this case their wives, spent a few days together, close socially, and it allowed Vandenberg and Marshall to bond more, which was also on the eve of the Marshall Plan hearings, a Marshall Plan legislation in the Senate. So a side effect of the Rio Treaty conference was to get Marshall and Vandenberg closer together. And that paid big dividends when it came time to create the Marshall Plan. If I'm not mistaken, Marshall outlines the Marshall Plan at Harvard in June of '47, the need for helping with European reconstruction. And then in August of '47 is the Rio Conference of the Rio Treaty. And then later on in '47 and into '48 comes all of the debate over how big the Marshall Plan should be, what it should look like and how are we going to get it through this, through the congress.

Kyle Korte: How did his involvement in the conferences and the Rio Pact reflect his other achievements in protecting American interests abroad and regional security?

Hank Meijer: These educated him. It made him more comfortable. He and his wife always loved to travel, so they traveled abroad more often than the average American or the average senator, but it makes a big

difference when you feel like you are directly involved in negotiations. It's a lot easier to be arguing for the results than it is if you're sitting back in Washington and the diplomats come and report to you that we did this and so, and we want you to put this through congress. It became much more personal for him. He had a lot of hard work and emotion invested in these international agreements.

Claire Parish: How would you say Vandenberg reformed and united the Republican Party?

Hank Meijer: I don't think he did. At the height of his power, he was able to unify a party that had been historically in two different camps on a lot of foreign policy and so he kind of patched things together for a while, but if we go back to 1940 with Wendell Willkie, Vandenberg and Taft are on one side and Willkie is on the other over whether the United States should intervene in Europe or how isolationist we should be. In 1950, we're back to some of that same debate again as Vandenberg is fading from the scene and so I don't think he really reformed it, I think he held together a coalition a during a very crucial time because 1940 to 1950 was both the war and then all the big postwar stuff of the Marshall Plan and NATO and the UN and the Truman Doctrine. That all happened in that decade and his being able to hold the party together was a crucial part of that. But we're kind of now back to where we were in 1940. I mean, Rand Paul became very articulate arguments as an isolationist. I mean he's reluctant to vote for the new secretary of state nominee because Mike Pompeo when he was in Congress was very interventionist and so you've got those same, the kind of the same forces at work again and there isn't a Vandenberg figure who could kind of make them sit down together and say, guys, we got to figure out how we can agree on this or you know, Democrats are going to

eat our lunch next time around or the world's going to go to hell in a hand basket or whatever it might be. But because those tensions are back at it again.

Kyle Korte: How does Vandenberg's legacy carry on today?

Hank Meijer: He becomes a symbol of bipartisanship. What it means is when, and we see it more if the White House, if the executive branch belongs to one party and the congress is controlled by another party, then the call goes up: Where is there a Vandenberg of today. There's no other name that gets employed like that. And it happened, I remember it happened when Clinton was president and the Republicans had control of Congress and I think Clinton was, it might have been something like aid during the Balkans war, aid for intervening in Kosovo or something and Clinton didn't have anybody on the Republican side he really felt like he could work with. And then, let's see, before that, George H. W. Bush, I think with the, I get my Iraq wars confused, I think it was the first Iraq war. The Democrats were in control of Congress and a Republican was in the White House and there was the operation Desert Storm had to be approved by the, of went to Congress to approve that to get the Iraqis out, Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, and if I'm not mistaken, only a handful of Democrats, the Democrats were in control of Congress, but Bush got just enough Democrats to go along with the Republicans to like a one vote majority to support that intervention. And so it meant that there was nobody like Vandenberg in the Democratic Party that Bush could go to and say, you know, how could we put together a coalition here that'll get the widest possible support? So I think it's more a symbolic legacy because sadly his other great virtue would be he would always talk about looking for compromise. His other great virtue would be compromise and that has gotten increasingly difficult to achieve.

Claire Parish: So what would you say we can learn from Vandenberg today, maybe about compromise?

Hank Meijer: That it is the, in some ways, the highest expression of how a democracy or republic works instead of being a dirty word where people can't compromise because they're too principled. Maybe I'm getting far afield, and I have to apologize because I got to excuse myself here in a bit, but the mean people will say, you know, we believe in the principles of the founding fathers and we're not going to compromise, but if Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson didn't compromise, there would never been a United States of America because one was a northern abolitionist who didn't believe in slavery of the other was a southern slaveholder apart from many other philosophical disagreements. I mean, we have a Senate with two senators from each state and a congress that's based on proportions of the population because we compromised between the small states and the large states. I mean compromise is all the way through the DNA of our country and yet today it's like we're not going to compromise. It doesn't work. It can't work like that. Anyway, so I think that would be the lesson for today to rediscover the need to compromise. And of course the challenge there is with the nature of the electoral system, it used to be that Vandenberg could get away with it because we really liked the idea of having a senator who we might not agree with on everything, but who just was so important in the world. It felt good for Michigan to have somebody who was a big cheese and we don't regard our senators with that kind of respect anymore almost so we want Debbie Stabenow or Gary Peters to vote how we expect them to vote and they better not compromise or if somebody is going to mount a primary challenge and knock 'em out, and even if the compromise allowed them to theoretically do greater things.

Kyle Korte: I think that's all our questions.

Hank Meijer: Good. As you can tell him, I'm losing my voice, so it's probably a good thing. Great. Well, I hope that helps you.

Claire Parish: Thank you so much for your time.

Hank Meijer: You Bet. Oh my pleasure.