

NORTH TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

NUMBER

143

Interview with  
Claud H. Gilmer  
April 6, 1968

Place of Interview: Rocksprings, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

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Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Oral History Collection

Claud H. Gilmer

Interviewer: Dr. Fred Gantt

Place of Interview: Rocksprings, Texas

Date: April 6, 1968

Dr. Gantt: This is Fred Gantt of the North Texas State University Oral History Collection, speaking from the office of The Honorable Claud H. Gilmer in Rocksprings, Texas, April 6th, 1968. Mr. Gilmer's had a long and distinguished career as a member of the Texas Legislature, former Speaker of the House, and very fine student of Texas politics. Mr. Gilmer, I think it's always interesting to know how a person who has had a long service in the legislature happened to get interested in politics in the first place and make the race. Would you comment on that?

Mr. Gilmer: Well, I guess there's a little story attached to that, too. When Coke Stevenson was a member of the House of Representatives, and he represented this district or what was this district at the time, he was an attorney, lived at Junction, and he was over here in Rocksprings attending our early term of court--January or February. And with the district judge and a group of lawyers that day, he mentioned that even though he hadn't announced his decision he had practically decided, he and Mrs. Stevenson, that he was going to run for lieutenant governor--which, of course, meant that he would

not run for re-election as representative of this district. So, we discussed it and someone asked him who was going to run for representative, and he said that he didn't know. He turned around and asked me why I didn't run. I said, "Well, I hadn't thought about it, didn't think about there being an opening." But anyway, he and I both ran; both of us were elected. He was winding up ten years in the House, and I served five terms--ten years--beginning 1939 through 1948. That was the beginning of state politics. I had been County Judge here in the county for three terms, after I'd gotten out of school. I taught school here a couple of years and then ran for County Judge. I took the bar examination. You didn't have to go to a law school then if you could meet certain qualifications of study and otherwise. Why, you could take the bar examination, if you passed it be admitted. And when I passed my bar, why, then I retired from the County Judge's office. I had practiced here about eight years in Edwards County when I ran for the legislature.

Gantt: Do you have any recollections of any interesting events that might have taken place in the campaign for the legislature that we should record?

Gilmer: Yes, sir. It was rather an unusual campaign. There was a man by the name of W. Lee O'Daniel that was running for governor at the same time. And oh, they had Bill McCraw, I believe Earnest Thompson. There were several other well known people in the race, and it started out with a lot of speculation as to who of these prominent people would be in the run-off. O'Daniel was advocating

more smokestacks and less Johnson grass, and playing "Beautiful Texas," and taking his caravan all over Texas, no one paying much attention to him. But I remember then he began to announce at these different meetings these country polls, I mean their polls, rather. And I think he sort of originated this poll business. Anyway, I remember in my campaign, Menard County was in the district then, and along in the . . . oh . . . about the middle of it, I drove into a little country grocery store in Menard one morning where all the country people traded. And the grocer had a blackboard up on the wall by his . . . an old slate, like we used to carry to school, up on the wall by his cash register. And he was . . . he had been taking a poll there. And he had, oh, McCraw, three, Thompson, four, all others so many, O'Daniel, fifty-one--I remember that. He was about four times all the rest of them put together. And I said, "Is this for real?" He said, "It sure is." And O'Daniel about that time began to announce that there wasn't going to be any run-off, and everybody was laughing about that. But it was an unusual campaign; it was the O'Daniel campaign.

Gantt: Did Governor O'Daniel's campaign at all affect your own campaign locally, so far as the issues . . . ?

Gilmer: I think not.

Gantt: Were there any particular major issues in that campaign for your seat in the House?

Gilmer: Oh, not particularly. There was a boy from Junction in the race named M. C. Blackburn. His father had been a representative and he was a pretty formidable opponent; he was a hard worker. He's

presently District Judge at Junction, Judge Marvin E. Blackburn-- I said, "M. C." It's Marvin E. Blackburn. There was a boy in Kerrville by the name of Dent Taylor in the race. And, of course, they were from larger counties; I was from the more isolated, smaller, remote county. And we had a three-way race. In the run-off, then, it was Blackburn and myself, or rather I led the ticket, I believe, and Blackburn was second. Anyway, I was elected. It was a long campaign, but I didn't have an opponent after that. I was re-elected for four terms without opposition.

Gantt: I believe that the same was somewhat true of your predecessor, Mr. Stevenson, who ran several times without . . .

Gilmer: It's odd, but Coke had more or less the same experience. He had a rather strenuous campaign when he was elected; then he served ten years without an opponent for the last four.

Gantt: Can you account for that in this part of the country?

Gilmer: (Chuckle) Well, it was a ten-county district, thinly populated; it wasn't an easy race to make. And it'd take a lot of time if you saw very many people, and there wasn't . . . the pay was small. We drew . . . I believe we started out with five dollars a day, and after a certain period of time, it dropped to two. I remember before my first session of the legislature was over, my secretary was drawing more money than I was. And then another little situation about it was that when you got this scrip, you didn't know when you were going to get the money on it. So you didn't have too many people that were contending for it.

Gantt: Do you have any vivid recollections about your first impressions

as a freshman member of the House of Representatives?

Gilmer: Well, I perhaps would say that the first situation, so to speak, the night of the run-off when my election was assured, I began to be besieged by telephone calls from all over Texas telling me the thing to do was to endorse Emmett Morse, pledge him for Speaker. He was going to be Speaker, and if I didn't get on the bandwagon quick, that I wouldn't get good committees, I wouldn't . . . Well, I knew so little about the legislature, it hadn't dawned on me what was going on besides my own campaign. And so, I thanked them for their advice and their interest, and told them I'd see about it, then I'd get about twice as many phone calls. But finally the Governor called me, Governor Stevenson along later in the night, and told me that he didn't want to start out trying to tell me how to run my business but the man who was running against Emmett Morse, a man named Bob Alexander, had been defeated for re-election. So actually, it was no contest. And he said, "He's going to be Speaker; there's no one else in the picture. And it'll make him feel a little bit better and will serve to introduce you favorably to these people, because it would indicate that you're not too well aware of what the score is and what's going on if you don't respond to a situation where there's no choice." I mean, he was a little more diplomatic perhaps than that, but that's what it boiled down to. So then I sent Mr. Morse a telegram.

Gantt: So far as you recall, was this about the only time that Mr. Stevenson made suggestions in those early days . . .

Gilmer: I don't think he ever made another one. Sometimes I'd go over and

talk to him and ask him for information. Coke was a wonderful fellow to follow, and a wonderful fellow to work with. And he didn't need suggestions, and he didn't presume on anyone else to make them. I appreciated the one that he did make, in that particular case. Of course, O'Daniel had pledged that he was going to increase the pension for the old folks, and he had also pledged that he was going to do it without a sales tax. And so his first session, or our first session, was almost devoted to his various and rather unexplained suggestions about how you are going to pay the old folks without voting the sales tax. And he finally came up with what he called a "transactions tax" which was a kind of a distorted sales tax proposition, but he said it wasn't a sales tax; it was a transactions tax.

But, of course, he'd broadcast every . . . Finally, they tried to pass an omnibus bill, or a sales . . . it was really a sales tax. But the people that were . . . were trying . . . I mean that were advocating it, I don't think were too enthusiastic about passing it because instead of offering it as a . . . I say the people. I don't know. Anyway, they offered it as a constitutional amendment--not as a statute. And of course, it required a hundred votes in the House since it was offered in the form of a constitutional amendment, and it never got a hundred votes. That was the session, if you recall, when they organized the "fifty-six." At one time it got ninety-four votes, with fifty-six against it. Or at least, it got right at ninety, may have been some absentees. But there were fifty-six that banded themselves together and pledged that



they would never vote for it.

Gantt: These, I believe . . .

Gilmer: They, of course, would be enough to block any constitutional amendment and it was blocked in that session.

Gantt: This is the group that came to be called by the historians the "immortal fifty-six," I believe.

Gilmer: Well, I think they probably supplied that themselves. I don't know. Yes, that's the group . . . by whatever names.

Gantt: Ah . . .

Gilmer: They took a good deal of pride, you know, in the situation.

Gantt: What was your position on that particular amendment?

Gilmer: I voted for it . . . for the amendment. I was not one of the fifty-six. My reasons for it were that if you were going to pay it, you couldn't find . . . and I was . . . I was committed to pay it, too. In fact, we all saw the need of increasing the assistance . . . old age assistance, and most all of us that were running--I know I had--had advocated increasing old age assistance. Certainly there was no more equitable, fairer way of doing it than by a sales tax. The alternatives that were being suggested was income tax, for one, which I was not for. And so it was a matter of what I considered the most effective, best way of doing it, and I just voted for it. Then the next session, why, we . . . they came up with what they called an omnibus tax bill, and it paid the old age assistance. They paid it into what they called a clearance fund, and it still operates on that basis.

Gantt: So far as you . . .

Gilmer: They didn't pay it into the general revenue fund but they set up the mechanics of the thing with a clearance fund.

Gantt: So far as you can recall, was the transactions tax fight probably the most important fight in that session of the legislature?

Gilmer: Well, actually the transactions tax that the Governor . . . Governor O'Daniel advocated was not seriously considered. It was offered by a fellow named Dave Mays from over at Atlanta. It didn't get any vote at all. But the constitutional amendment . . . oh, yes. I don't know how many times we voted on it, and it was getting a majority vote, so therefore, it wasn't being killed; but it was not being passed because it didn't get the constitutional number of a hundred. And the little routine of motions would be, and Ely Thornton down here from Galveston was handling it--he's now an attorney in Houston--but he would get up and his first motion would be he would move to suspend the rules so he could take up out of the order and place on third reading and final passage, SR, Number 12, I believe it was--I don't remember. Anyway, it was a constitutional amendment. And we'd vote, and if we had a majority vote we would suspend the rules, and then we'd put it on third reading and final passage, and it wouldn't get a hundred votes. And then we'd drum along there, and in about a week he'd try it again . . . just . . . That went on and on.

Gantt: You've mentioned some of the people who advocated this. I believe that the record shows that one of the staunchest opponents of the measure was a man who was later to become governor, Price Daniel, the representative from Liberty County.

Gilmer: That's correct . . . that's right.

Gantt: Did you have any sort of relationship with Representative Daniel at that time that you care to comment on?

Gilmer: Well, we were freshmen members. It was his first session and my first session. The principal experience I had with him in that first session, as I recall--and I think it was the first session. It could have been '41. You know when you go to looking back fifteen years or more, why, it's pretty hard to distinguish just the particular year. But he had a bill that he was . . . that he introduced, what they called the Land Vacancy Bill. Quite an operation had developed over filing on vacancies, and people would hunt in the land office. And the procedure by which they filed was rather obscure and they could get them . . . get these vacancies if they discovered them and filed on them at a small amount of their real value, if they had mineral possibilities, principally. And there was a good deal of complaint about it. The land would . . . would have been . . . or did belong to the public free school fund. And if they were getting it for less than value, why, of course, that meant that the school fund, the state school fund, was not receiving its proper consideration. I was interested in it. I lived out here where we had more state lands and . . . in the ranch country, and any improvement in the laws governing the leasing and sale of public school lands, I was interested in. So I helped him pass the bill. It got into a conference committee, and he and I were on the conference committee that worked it out. And the Land Commissioner . . . then Land Commissioner . . . I don't remember who it was.

It was before Bascom Giles, but . . . They were interested in correcting the law. And I became more closely acquainted with him by reason of that. Of course, you get . . . you get personally acquainted. There are a hundred and fifty of you and you don't know much about them when you start, but you spend four or five months working up there day and night together, and you get pretty well acquainted with them.

Gantt: Were there any other freshman members that went in at the same time that you and Mr. Daniel did that went on to later higher positions in government, that you can recall?

Gilmer: Not immediately. I . . . I'm sure there were.

Gantt: Other than the matter of . . .

Gilmer: One . . . one more comment with reference to Price, I succeeded him in the Speaker's office. And, as you know, it's been a custom down there for some time for each Speaker to give his successor a chair. And the one over here that I've nearly worn out, I use it, is the one that Price Daniel gave me. When I went in the Speaker's office, I used the same secretary that he had used, a lady who now works in the General Land Office named Emma Ward. And she had been Price's private secretary, so I just continued her. She knew the routine; she knew the business; and she lived in Austin. You've got quite an operation there to employ personnel in the House. So since she was familiar with all that, why, I just kept her and saved myself from having to learn it, or to learn . . . to find somebody else that knew it.

When Price . . . Price went to the army after that session and

he was in service. And when he came back, he immediately announced for lieutenant . . . for attorney general. He hadn't set up any headquarters; he didn't have anybody working for him, particularly. So, I let him start his campaign. I just told him to use Mrs. Ward. I was . . . the legislature wasn't in session. And so he did until he got his campaign organized. And then when he was elected attorney general--he ran against Pat Neff, Jr., by the way--when he . . . by that time, why, my term of office . . . when his new term started, why, my term had ended, and Mrs. Ward went with him in the attorney general's office.

Gantt: I believe followed him into the governor's office.

Gilmer: Then when . . . well it . . . not directly. They went to Washington.

Gantt: Yes . . . right.

Gilmer: He went to . . . He was elected to the United States Senate, Senator. And yes. She went with him all the way.

Gantt: Do you recall any other matter that might have been of great consequence, other than old age pensions and the financing of them, in this particular session? Was there anything that you were particularly interested in?

Gilmer: No, sir. I don't recall.

Gantt: As a freshman, did you sponsor any legislation?

Gilmer: Oh, I'm sure I did. I don't have any in mind.

Gantt: Mr. Gilmer, a lot has been written and said about the legislative leadership of Governor O'Daniel. Would you comment on your views of Governor O'Daniel's relationship to the House?

Gilmer: Well, he . . . he was not an effective force as far as the House

was concerned, and that isn't necessarily peculiar to Governor O'Daniel. Governors that have not had legislative experience have to become acquainted, they have to learn procedure, they have to learn how things operate and why they do this way or that, and there isn't any substitute for experience (chuckle) which they don't have. Of course, they'll get legislative assistants to help them. But I don't know. He was a . . . he was a very peculiar man. And of course he had . . . he had capitalized on the very lack of knowledge because he . . . he was going to kick the rascals out when he got down there, so to speak. And everything that was . . . was there before he got there, of course, was subject to improvement and change.

I give you a little illustration, a little incident--and I don't mean it as critically as it sounds, but it illustrates what I'm talking about. He was real close-fisted about money matters, for instance. And when he got in there, why, he just clamped the lid down. You couldn't hardly get any . . . anything through there that cost money. For instance, I had a bill, and a number of the other representatives had similar bills, that set up a water improvement or water control district. This one was peculiar for Kerr County. It just set up a district. And at that time, you could get the army engineers to come out and do the engineering and . . . and give you a plan of development for a certain area or certain water shed, if you had some agency that the government could deal with. You could get it for almost a nominal cost, but there was a certain amount of money necessary. So, I passed this bill that set up the Upper Guadalupe River Authority, and I think

there was ten or fifteen more over the state similar to that. And I . . . my recollection is that I had a twelve hundred dollar appropriation in it to just do the . . . binding, or the printing or something. There was some requirement necessary before the federal government would authorize the army engineers to research the thing. And this was the estimated appropriation necessary for Kerr County, and there was, as I say, there were six or eight more of similar districts over there. And they passed through the House without even a dissenting vote; they passed through the Senate without a dissenting vote. Then get on Governor O'Daniel's desk, and he'd hold them just as long as he could and then veto them, on account of the appropriation. You'd go in there and talk to him about it. He said, "Well, we're not going to appropriate any money for that kind of thing now."

So mine happened to be in there when this incident occurred. Prior to that, Boss Peterson, who owned or he and his brother owned the Kerrville Bus Company, had a ranch out here between here and Kerrville, and somebody had given him a bunch of buffalo--four or five. And he had one buffalo bull in the group that became obnoxious; he'd charge people on horseback. I don't know, he just got to be a nuisance around the ranch. The foreman finally told him he had . . . just had to get rid of him. And so Boss had the happy thought one night, he said, "Well, I tell you what we'll do. We'll invite Governor O'Daniel to come out and shoot a buffalo. And we'll get the Chamber of Commerce from Kerrville to invite him and we'll make a big thing out of it." Well, they did, and he did. And so he

came out with all the bands playing and flags flying, and killed the buffalo. And then the Chamber of Commerce decided that they would make a rug out of the hide, and they'd mount the head, and so forth. And they arrived in Austin--the legislature was in session --with this thing to present to him plus a portfolio of pictures of him shooting at the bull, and then standing there and posing with him after he had him down, and so forth. They had a lot of pictures taken of it--very glossy and very complimentary to the Governor. So they said, "We want to present these things to him, and will you come with us?"

So I went in there and got a hold of his secretary and she located him and told him what we wanted. And we got him in the ante-room with the people . . . the committee from Kerrville, and they went over and then he demonstrated the whole thing. It took about fifteen or twenty minutes for him to tell about shooting the buffalo, and they took some more pictures, and so forth. So when everything began to kind of thin out, why, I caught him by the arm and said, "By the way, Governor, these Kerrville people might be interested in a little piece of legislation on your desk." He said, "What's that?" I said, "Well, we created this river authority, and I think it got in here just a day or two ago." "Oh, yes," he said, "I believe I heard something about that." He said, "Where is it?" and he began to look around in there, and so I said, "Well, Governor, I want to mention to you. It's got a little appropriation in there--not very much." He said, "That'll be all right." He just grabbed his pen, and he not only signed it, he signed six more in there



that was in the same group in the folder with it. When I went back in there and told those House members that their bills had been signed, they wouldn't believe me. (Chuckle)

But anyway that's a little facetious, but he seemed to act on impulse. He struck a very conservative pose, and, of course actually, he resigned the Governor's office. That's the way Mr. Stevenson got in there. And it isn't to say that he didn't do some good things. For instance, one of the requirements that he made to resign and go to Washington was that he wanted to put the state on a cash basis, going to do away with the deficit. And he wanted a constitutional amendment passed that would prevent us from ever getting on deficit again. And so we just got together, and we passed that silly thing, and the state did get rid of its deficit. And that was one of the things that he decided he was going to do was get rid of this deficit. Actually, the deficit vanished during Governor Stevenson's administration following, and the Governor showed a lot of frugality and thrift and foresight to do it.

Gantt: Did you as a freshman member of the House of Representatives in that first term have any other particular relationship with Governor O'Daniel that you can recall?

Gilmer: No, sir.

Gantt: Was Governor O'Daniel somewhat aloof from the members and not very available?

Gilmer: Well, no, I don't think he purposed to be that way. You know, he was sworn in in Memorial Stadium, and he told everybody to come and bring their horse feed and stay with him at the mansion, and

a lot of them thought he was serious. Maybe he was; I don't know. You never saw such a collection of Model T Fords in your life, and this buffalo that I'm telling you about, he decided that he would have a buffalo barbecue. So he proceeded to broadcast on Sunday morning . . . said, "I killed this buffalo. We're going--me and Mama--we're going to have barbecue over here at the mansion, and I want you to come." And you never saw such a mess. They trampled over every flower in the capitol grounds. Of course, they had to cater the thing. I don't know where the money came from for the meat, but there were thousands of people that flocked in there for this so-called buffalo barbecue. (Chuckle) Because the legislature was invited, too, I didn't go. We didn't go, but he was a showman.

Gantt: Right.

Gilmer: And don't think he didn't do it with a lot of flourish now.

Gantt: One of the things that he was well-known for, too, were his Sunday morning broadcasts at the mansion.

Gilmer: Oh, yes.

Gantt: What was your impression of those?

Gilmer: Oh, well, I never did pay much attention to them. Of course, I wasn't on his "dirty list." I was voting for his propositions. I didn't vote for his transactions tax, but or he would purge them, you know, he would lambast them, and he beat some boys. There were some boys who didn't come back to the next session.

Gantt: You think perhaps then that the calling of the names of people that did not vote for the Governor's programs might have been an effective means of purging.

Gilmer: Oh, yes. You'd hear people talking about it. He was such a good man. Anybody that he criticized had to merit it. Of course, you have to really remember or know his activity prior to getting into politics. I mean, he and the Light Crust Doughboys were a program that nobody missed on Sunday. They'd name babies and have all kinds of contests, and it was one of the feature programs of the state. And this campaign he made was for real because I had newspaper men said, "We didn't believe it, and we told him so." And he said, "Come over to the house." And he said they were bundled and stacked in rooms, and he said, "We just fooled around there and just gave up." He passed that pitcher, barrel, or whatever it was around at these rallies and, listen, they just filled it with money.

Gantt: Did you ever personally attend any of those rallies?

Gilmer: No, I never did. He didn't come to Rocksprings. By the way he did after he was Governor. Between the sessions he visited the legislators. Just to show you the man was learning something about it, and he went about it just like he was selling something else. Why, he got a highway patrolman, and he and Mrs. O'Daniel toured the state. They came rolling in here one afternoon about 5:00 o'clock. We got a bunch of our friends together, and ate supper with them down at the Ballantine Hotel, and he slept in our guest room, or we moved the kids together, and he got the spare room.

Gantt: Was this unexpected on your part?

Gilmer: Well, I knew he was doing it.

Gantt: You didn't have advanced warning of it . . .

Gilmer: Oh, no.

Gantt: . . . of when he was coming.

Gilmer: Yes, I think he gave his itinerary out. It wasn't a big . . . difficulty.

Gantt: Do you think that really did very much good for his better understanding with members of the legislature?

Gilmer: It helped.

Gantt: While we're on O'Daniel . . .

Gilmer: Of course, that was between sessions.

Gantt: Right. After the session and before the second session.

Gilmer: Yes, sir.

Gantt: While we're on the subject would you care to say whether or not you were an O'Daniel supporter other than . . .

Gilmer: Do you mean when he first ran?

Gantt: Yes, when he first ran.

Gilmer: No, I didn't vote for him. I don't remember now who I did vote for. Ernest O. Thompson, I think. No, I didn't vote for him.

Gantt: By and large . . .

Gilmer: I wasn't necessarily negative about him. I just didn't know him.

Gantt: By and large how would you evaluate O'Daniel as a governor?

Gilmer: He wasn't a bad governor. He was not a rounded governor. In his appointments he didn't select people . . . the criteria seemed to be that they had to be personal friends of his and good supporters and have not have had any previous affiliation or connection with anything that had gone on before. He got people out of the blue that you'd never saw before.

Gantt: Many inexperienced people.

Gilmer: That's right. It didn't necessarily mean they were not good people, but they were people who had to learn what they were supposed to do completely. And it was a totally unpredictable thing. For instance, the vacancy that he filled in Washington of this United States Senate seat. He selected Sam Houston's, what, grandson or son?

Gantt: Son.

Gilmer: Son? Well, that old man probably couldn't tell you whether the sun was up or had gone down. I mean he was in his dotage. It was not practical.

Gantt: Right. And you think there were probably other appointments that would fall in the same category?

Gilmer: Well, I don't remember any particularly but . . . . You see, he would utterly amaze people with his appointments. There just wasn't any . . . . They just didn't fit in many instances. I don't mean to say that they were all bad, but they didn't show a lot of astuteness for his position.

Gantt: You spoke earlier of Mr. Stevenson's suggestion that you support Mr. Morse for the speakership. What were your relations with Speaker Morse during that first session?

Gilmer: Oh, they were friendly. I got along with Emmett fine. Of course, he was from Houston. I was from out west. Our interests weren't necessarily common, but no problems.

Gantt: In looking back on your first term as a member of the House then what would you think was the high point of that first term as far

as you were concerned?

Gilmer: Getting elected. (Chuckle) No, it's just a process you go through. There wasn't necessarily any high point. You have to go down there and get acquainted and learn the rules. You have to learn the legislative processes, and you have to find out whether you like it or not. I've seen freshman members go down there and by the end of the first term, why, they're completely frustrated, and they go home and quit.

Gantt: Obviously, this was not your position.

Gilmer: No, I sort of liked it. I thought it was all right; I enjoyed it. I was nearly forty years old when I went down there. I wasn't just a kid. I think you benefit by it more if you are somewhat experienced when you get there. That would be true of anything.

Gantt: Right.

Gilmer: Because there isn't any use in sending someone to a legislative school and thinking he'll just step in there and take over, because he just has to learn how the thing works, and he has to win his place with those people that are in there, too, and . . .

Gantt: During that first term, did you ever have any thoughts that some day you might be speaker of the house?

Gilmer: No, sir; I didn't think so.

Gantt: You didn't have this in mind as a long-range goal?

Gilmer: (Chuckle) I was rather different from Price--he announced he was going to be governor before he'd been there very long. He came down there with his flight plan. No, I worked it out as I went along, I guess.

Gantt: Were there any particular considerations that you had about running for a second term, or was it pretty well just a matter of course?

Gilmer: I guess so. Coke had served a number of terms and it had been the custom that if you got down there the people didn't see a need to change particularly.

Gantt: In this part of the state, this was sort of an unwritten tradition that you would likely serve several terms.

Gilmer: Well, not necessarily. It was customary, but I don't know about it being traditional.

Gantt: Well, in 1940, you and Governor O'Daniel and Lieutenant Governor Stevenson were all up for second terms. I take it you didn't really have a campaign for re-election since you didn't have an opponent?

Gilmer: No sir. You announce in the papers and you'll be invited to a few political rallies. If you don't have an opponent, you don't worry. You go to some of them and I did.

Gantt: Do you have any particular recollections about the state-wide contest of 1940 that might be of significance . . .

Gilmer: No, sir; I couldn't even tell you who the candidates were. I know who the successful candidates were, Governor O'Daniel and Governor Stevenson.

Gantt: As the second term came along then, had you found any particular area that you were interested in as far as sponsorship of legislation was concerned?

Gilmer: No. I was interested in highway legislation. I had been a County Judge, and of course we lived out here where roads meant a lot to us, and I had been interested in that subject. Back in those days,

the state had assumed to pay a portion of county obligations that had been incurred in building roads that later became state highways. This county voted a bond issue and built roads that were county roads, since that bond issue on them, and then later on they became state highways. And of course there were other roads that were made state highways and were built by the state's paying the entire construction cost. Well, those counties which had done a lot of their own road building felt like that in equity they should be reimbursed. So they passed, and I think Governor Stevenson helped work that out when he was in the House, what they called the "Bond Assumption Act." And they dedicated or allocated one penny of the state gasoline tax on this bond assumption thing, and they came out here and went over our records and went to all the counties and evaluated or segregated the amount of their indebtedness that went on state highways and then other funds that were spent. And they set up a figure that the county was entitled to be reimbursed, and then they also set up a figure that the state would pay on their unmatured bonded indebtedness, for road purposes. And every year the state would pass what they called the "Bond Assumption Act." It was a recurring piece of legislation, and since that was a continuing program and a developing program, why the people who issued bonds became interested in it, and the counties didn't participate equally, and then the highway department's money was being spent and they had an interest in it. So one of our good donnybrooks every year, legislative activities, shall we say, rather than donnybrook, was this bond assumption thing.



And I had more or less taken the position of, of representing the highway department's interests in that particular phase of legislation. And it developed, for instance, to the extent, I mean, the use or abuse of it you might say. I had a county up here that voted a bond issue with a provision in the bonds that they were not to be paid by county funds but were only to be paid if the state assumed and paid them and to the extent that the state assumed to pay them. In other words, they were indirectly creating a state obligation by voting a bond in this particular county. And they called me up there and wanted me to tell them that I'd make those things eligible for this program. And, of course, I couldn't do that. But that became quite a contention, and the fact of the business is when the last session that O'Daniel was in terminated in a legislative stalemate of the assumption of this--the long session wound up without us having passed the bond assumption bill. And then O'Daniel went on to Washington, and about the first thing that Governor Stevenson had to do when he came in was to call the legislature into special session for the purpose of passing this bond assumption thing.

Now, I think I handled that bill in the House, and the man who had led the opposition to it was a boy who later became state senator from Greenville, G. C. Morris. And he and I had more or less opposed each other in our positions, and the legislature had ended in a deadlock on it. Neither one of us could pass our bills. So Governor Stevenson called that session, and before the session started, why I got hold of G. C. Morris. Charlie Simons, a news-

paper man in Dallas, was the Good Roads Association secretary in Austin at the time. And he and Coke were good friends. Weldon Hart later served in that same position. In fact, that's where he is now. So I got hold of G. C. beforehand, and we met in Austin before this special session and worked out a compromise bill. And I think that legislative session set a record as being the shortest one up to that time that had ever been held. And of course, it got Governor Stevenson off to a good start. They say O'Daniel was here, and they couldn't solve this problem, and now he went to Washington and Governor Stevenson comes in and calls a special session, they get it done and go home in eleven days. As I remember.

Gantt: This was your first special session, then that . . .

Gilmer: I believe that was the first special session.

Gantt: I assume that . . .

Gilmer: As far as I remember I believe that was the only one. I don't remember serving in another one. They weren't popular in those days (chuckle).

Gantt: I have read Governor O'Daniel refused to call one because he said that if they can't accomplish what they're to accomplish in 163 days, I believe that year, why expect them to do something in 30 days.

Gilmer: That sounds just about right. That's in line with what I've been telling you about him. That would be expected.

Gantt: I assume, as you have said earlier, that because of your close friendship with Mr. Stevenson and the fact that he was from your part of the state that you were quite pleased that it happened that he came into the governor's office.

Gilmer: Yes, sir. I was entirely satisfied with that development.

Gantt: Was there anything in the special session other than the highway matter that you thought might be of some major importance?

Gilmer: I don't remember anything else that comes to mind. Of course, we did pass the Omnibus Tax Bill--paid the old folks.

Gantt: I noticed that the speaker in that session was Homer Leonard. What was your relationship to him?

Gilmer: Well, we were good friends. You know, I got to running for speaker that session, and W. O. Reed, and a fellow from Amarillo named Jack Little, perhaps MacAllister, myself, and Price Daniel was running. He was running from the day he got there. And we were fooling along, you know, being easy about it, and showing a lot of consideration for each other except for Price, I'm talking about. He wasn't in our group. He was running all by himself over there. And he gathered a group of young fellows together. He had been one of the Young Democrats, I think, active in their work. I remember Durwood Mansford was one of the group, and a boy named Joe Sa\_\_\_\_, who's an attorney in Crockett, and Ed Price who's on the Insurance Commission now. And they had all been with him in the Young Democrats organization, and I would bet you looking back now that he had been encouraging in their decision to run for the House. Price was a fellow who studies these things. He'd put his stake down way out yonder and then work towards it. He's a pretty good organizer, a hard worker. So, anyway, he had a group of these young fellows who were with him. And we were just running a sort of a easy-going campaign.

I remember one thing about Price that was an innovation. On

this speaker's thing, I think there was a time when the speaker's race, I mean, the office rather sought the man. And a bunch of people who didn't plan to run or be speakers would cast around to see now who among us would make the best speaker. And finally they'd pick out one, and so then they'd carry around what they called a petition. And they would all sign a petition asking this man to be speaker. And that was the conventional way to do it. That's the way they all did it. Of course, you could pledge a man by telephone, by wire, or by a letter, but sooner or later, you'd sign his petition, they'd call it. And that's the way Homer did it, that's the way Emmett did it, and I presume that's the way they did it before that time. Price got a new little wrinkle. He'd have them sign a little card. Then if they wouldn't sign the first card, he'd have second pledge cards. In other words, then if they couldn't get a man to give him a pledge card, why then they'd all go to work on him, saying, "Well, now you're going to vote for Joe Blow, all right, that's fine. Joe's a good boy. But why can't you give me a second choice so that if Joe withdraws, why then I'll get your vote. And so he began to gather up these first ones, and then he began to gather up these second ones. And it dawned on me one day that we weren't in a very good situation, we four or five fellows out of Homer's group more or less.

Incidentally, Price never did quit running. When Coke came in there--I'm going back a little bit, this is a little confused--Price was running for his second term. When he got down there he started running for speaker for the next term, not against Mr. Morse,

but for the next term. Well, Homer was way out front, and he was elected. So when Stevenson came in, why he called on this harmony thing, why he called Homer Leonard, and Price in and said, "Now, why don't you boys get together, and let's get all set up for an active term here, and Price, you can't win." And he said, "No, I agree that I can't," and so he withdrew, and Homer, then, was elected by acclamation. But the next morning after that, Price was running again. He had his eighteen odd pledges, and he had about that many boys working the floor every morning, and they'd meet and discuss and figure and he was picking them off, you understand. So along down the line, why, I got these boys together one day and told them, I said, "We are getting nowhere, and we're going to all get beat, and this thing . . . it's going to get away from this . . . from our group if something's not done." "Well, what do you suggest?" I said, "Let's all go in here and tell Homer Leonard that we want him to run for a second term, and we'll help him and we'll go to our individual pledges and pledge him. And we can put him out in front of Price and then maybe he can win." And so we did, and we put him out in front of Price but he didn't win. Price just kept on a'digging, and he beat Homer. Homer ran for re-election but he wasn't elected.

Gantt: Do you think that the fact that Mr. Daniel just kept . . .

Gilmer: Of course, that was his second term we're talking about.

Gantt: Right.

Gilmer: I'm getting really ahead; I'm in the '43 term, rather than the '41.

Gantt: Do you think that Mr. Daniel . . .

Gilmer: 'Cause Price was elected to the '43 term.

Gantt: Right . . . Mr. Daniel's "stick-to-itiveness" here had something to do with the fact that he beat Mr. Leonard in 1943?

Gilmer: Yes. He just worked at it. Homer didn't . . . Homer's a real nice fellow--very witty, very able, one of the most polished, fastest moving Speakers I ever saw.

Gantt: Well now, you indicated a minute ago that a long about this time that you had decided that you would run for Speaker . . .

Gilmer: Well, I was running in this . . . I was running for my third term. That's what I was doing.

Gantt: Could you indicate some of the considerations that caused you to want the Speakership, and so on?

Gilmer: Oh, I don't know. I . . . of course, you . . . anyone would enjoy it. Some of your friends will urge you to run. People on the outside would want to know, "Are you . . . are you going to run? Will you run?" It grows on you like running for any office, I guess. There isn't any sudden moment when you just made up your mind that's what you're going to do. It's kind of grows on you.

Gantt: When . . . at what point, really, did you decide that you would actively seek the Speakership? During your second term, do you suppose?

Gilmer: Yes, sir. That's when, I'm telling you, that we boys were running and . . .

Gantt: Right.

Gilmer: . . . then we bowed out and let Homer run for the third term.

Gantt: Right . . . right.

Gilmer: I mean, for a second term. And Price was . . . so that would . . .

that would be during the second term, and of course, meaning for the third term.

Gantt: Right. So by 1942, then, you were about ready to run for your third term from this district. Governor Stevenson was a candidate for re-election, and so on, and of course the United States had just gotten involved in World War II.

Gilmer: That's right.

Gantt: I take it that because of the war situation that there really was very little political campaigning that year.

Gilmer: Ah . . . there wasn't much out here. Of course, the governor had no serious opposition. I didn't have any. The people weren't interested much in politics . . . had other things they were concerned about. Yes, it didn't amount to much.

Gantt: During this . . . during this session at the time, in which Mr. Daniel was running, or rather was serving as Speaker . . . we've already discussed the race for the Speakership. Would you give me your impression of Mr. Daniel as a Speaker of the House?

Gilmer: He made a good one. Actually, we helped him even though we hadn't supported him in his race for Speaker. I say "we." I mean what you'd call the "Homer Leonard group," the ones I've mentioned and others--Hartzog and different ones come to mind.

Gantt: Better spell that for me.

Gilmer: H-A-R-T-Z-O-G. He was from Calhoun County. He's county judge at Calhoun County presently. So you can look his name up in the directory. But when Price came in there, he . . . he announced when he . . . when he was . . . when the session started . . . he

announced two objectives. One was that there would be no tax bill in his session . . . no new tax. The second one was that they would adjourn within the hundred and twenty days; we would not exceed the constitutional limit and have a longer session. Well, I was pretty conservative in my ideas and objectives, and I've come from that kind of a country, so that just suited me fine and it suited the legislative leaders of my inclinations, we'll say. It suited Governor Stevenson (laughter) and that's just what we did. So we made no problems for him. In fact, we made it possible for him to do just that.

Gantt: I notice that one of the major accomplishments of that particular session was to . . . in addition to not passing any new taxes, was to reduce the cost of state government. Governor Stevenson has indicated on many occasions that this was one of his main interests --economy in state government. Would you say that that's probably one of the major things that happened during that session?

Gilmer: Well, I guess that certainly would be one of them. I don't recall anything else of any . . . that would be called noteworthy here in 1968. Of course, it was a war year, and you had a deficit. We were still paying the deficit. I remember in the early part of the session several of us who had helped frame . . . pass and frame the constitutional amendment that, as we say, put the state on a cash basis, went in there . . . the provision provided for issuing bonds. Because, in other words, if you were going to have a deficit and not carry it forward, why, you had to do something about it. So we . . . we had a provision, it's in the constitution, that would



by issuing state bonds that would be retired over a period of time. And so the amendment had been proposed in 1941, had been adopted. We came back in 1943, and the logical thing to do . . . we still had some deficit there, of course. The logical thing to do was to issue these bonds. Went in there and talked to Coke about it, and he said, "Well, let's just wait." And he'd keep putting us off. He wouldn't submit it as a subject . . . special subject. Well, by the end of the session it became apparent that the growing revenue --of course, war activity increased the income to a certain extent. And then, he was paying off these appropriations. So it became obvious that we'd get rid of the deficit without issuing any bonds, and that's exactly what we did.

Gantt: Now during this session, what was your own position in seeking the speakership for the next session? Were you running at this time for Speaker?

Gilmer: Oh, yes. Yes, sir, I was.

Gantt: Any particular activities that you recall?

Gilmer: Well, no. You have, you know, your folks that are helping you. A boy named Albert Jones from Valley Mills, a boy named Jeff Stinson-- I say a "boy;" they were men, of course--from Dallas, were my particular friends . . . Henry Ramsey from Ballinger. But they . . . they work for you. I was . . . and Ed Price was running again. He was a member. Dallas Blankenship was running . . . from Dallas. A representative from Fort Worth named Salty Hull was running. There were several people in the race. But little by little we began to sort of put the thing together.

Gantt: Were you pretty well assured, then, by the end of this session of the legislature in 1943, that you . . .

Gilmer: No. It didn't come that fast.

Gantt: You had to run during the interim.

Gilmer: During the interim. Oh, yes.

Gantt: Now, at this particular stage, you had served two regular sessions with Governor O'Daniel, and a special session and a regular session with Governor Stevenson. Would you compare the methods of operation of these two men as Governor, and their relations to the legislature, and give some views about the effectiveness of . . . in relation, one to the other, and so on?

Gilmer: Well, there wasn't much comparison. I've discussed Governor O'Daniel a little bit, and that's not as critical as it sounds, because as far as the end result is concerned, he wasn't a bad governor. He did some very noteworthy things. Maybe he did some things that someone with a lot of experience and know-how wouldn't have done. Governor Stevenson was entirely different. He was very conservative and he was very unpretentious. You could see him anytime you wanted to. He knew the legislative process; he had served in the House a number of years . . . in the Speaker . . . Speaker's office. He was twice Speaker, by the way. He had been lieutenant governor for a number of years. His wife was very popular . . . well known. So he just got along as smooth and as easy as you could imagine. He had no big program. He wasn't trying to change everything or bring . . . come in with a lot of innovations. He wanted to put it on a business basis and cut down expenses, avoid taxes . . . new taxes.

And he did.

Gantt: This philosophy was pretty much your own political philosophy at that time?

Gilmer: At that time . . . particularly in a war year.

Gantt: I suppose it could be said that Governor Stevenson's administration being a war administration, probably did not bring forward as many innovations as it might have otherwise.

Gilmer: Well, there has been a tremendous change in what you expect of government. At that time, the office of government was considered to be . . . you saw that there was law and order, you provided protection for people, and made property secure. You weren't supposed to . . . people worked out their own way, and were free to do it without either the government helping them or hindering them. You've had a complete about-face, now. In fact, I wouldn't try to interpret what are the present objectives of government. It seems to be the idea that they can do all things for all people at the same time, regardless of whether they're consistent or not.

Gantt: Mr. Gilmer, this brings us to the point and time in which you were elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. What was your feeling upon your success in this race?

Gilmer: Oh, well, I was, of course, very pleased about it, and appreciated it very much--anyone would. It was a wonderful experience.

Gantt: How did you proceed to get things going as Speaker?

Gilmer: Well, they don't need much operation to get going. Of course, your first job is to announce your committees--select them and announce them. You've got some key positions to fill--Chairman of the

Appropriations Committee, Chairman of Revenue and Taxation Committee, State Affairs (they call that the Speaker's committee), Membership, of course, and so forth.

Gantt: May I interrupt here and ask you what were some of the considerations that you took into account in appointing the committees?

Gilmer: Well, appropriations, for instance, you consider the qualities of the individual; you consider what may be his legislative position. If his main purpose in coming to the legislature is to get a big appropriation for a certain pet project, why, he'll want to get on the committee to get a favored position. You, looking at the overall, of course, don't want to deny him his opportunity, but you don't want to give any special treatment, so to speak. You've got the whole thing to look at, and all the responsibilities. If you are going to give preferred treatment to a few, why, then, you've got a lot of boys out there that've got to get what's left. You consider for appropriations whether or not they have state institutions in their district. It's more or less traditional that you put representatives that have major state institutions--the University, for instance. Some member of Travis County delegation will be on your appropriation committee in order to be conversant with the needs of the University, which is a big institution. Same thing applied to College Station . . . A&M . . . beginning to apply to Lubbock. So, it's a twenty-one member committee, and you'll probably have seventy-five applications for it. When you appoint your tax committee, for instance, why--your Revenue and Tax Committee--you'll have to consider what your probably duties of that committee are

going to be. The individuals and things like that . . . that's one of the large . . . big jobs and tedious jobs is arranging the personnel of these committees.

Gantt: I have heard it said that sometimes in some years, that a promise of a committee appointment sometimes is used to secure a vote for the Speakership. Do you think this is a very prevalent practice?

Gilmer: Oh . . . yes. I presume that it's . . . it's indulged in to a certain extent. I . . . of course, when you . . . when you're having a hard race for Speaker, why, I guess you use all the means that you think will get the job done, in the way of inducements. You've got to sell your members on your merits, and, of course, you're showing a lot of judgment when you promise a man a position on a committee. He's got to be impressed with your judgment when you tell him that. Actually, I . . . I'm being a little facetious about that. Actually, there isn't as much of that as you would imagine. If you know your man and have confidence in him, and that works both ways, it isn't necessary. I mean, it's more or less understood that you're going to depend for your major spots on the men that you have confidence in, that you have worked with, and have proven able and trustworthy in the past. Those kind of people don't have to sit down and bargain over what they're going to get or not get in the way of assignments.

Gantt: Although the Speaker does have the full authority to appoint the committees and the chairmen of the committees, does the Speaker usually consult with anyone else other than the individual member?

Gilmer: Sometimes . . . sometimes. Sometimes he'll have a little sort of

a "kitchen cabinet" group, so to speak. It's . . . there's no set way of doing it. Some Speakers won't let anybody in there even to see what they're doing, and another one'll want everybody to look at it, so they, perhaps, share the responsibility.

Gantt: Since you've brought this up, which approach did you use?

Gilmer: I more or less did it myself. The mechanics of it . . . I forget now how many committees we had in the twenties. They range all the way from five to twenty-one members. I had the name of the members printed big on cards. I got back there in the Speaker's office, or apartments, rather--a number of big rooms. We lived in the capitol, by the way, as you, of course, know. And so I started arranging these committees just like somebody playing on the floor. I'd put these names down here and as I would determine . . . you take the Appropriation Committee. When I determined the chairman, why, I put him at the head of the list, the Vice Chairman is next. Who are going to be your other members? If you know who ten of them are going to be, why you put ten of them down there. Of course, you have a need of balancing the committees. And when you get through, why, if you have given . . . you usually . . . and then you have asked for requests. Here's a fellow that comes in here, and he made five requests, we'll say, and three of them are major committees. You don't give him all of his three, if there are a number of requests for it. If a man has Appropriations, why, then you're not going to give him very many other major assignments, because that committee meets continuously. And if he gets State Affairs, why, he's not going to get some of the other preferred assignments. You try to

balance the work and balance the preferences. And so, in a way, to see what you were doing, both as to the identity . . . 'course, you can do it on tablets, but I just got them all down on the floor.

Gantt: What about freshman members that were just elected?

Gilmer: Well, of course, you have to guess at them. You . . . you have your own impression of them. You can find out something about their experience, if they've been county officers, if they were lawyers, or school teachers or business people, and you just have to determine their qualifications by what information is available, and you'll interview them; they'll come and see you. That was one of the strenuous things that you had to do because after you come in there, before the legislature actually starts, why you'll set up a headquarters somewhere--I put one in the Driskill Hotel. And you're almost there around the clock. As late as you want to work at night, there will be offices full of people out there, to see you. And members and other people discuss not only membership of committees but legislation--all the things that shape up to a session of the legislature.

Gantt: Would you say that the appointment of committees is probably the most important thing that the speaker has to do?

Gilmer: Well, it's one of the important ones. Of course, there isn't anything else that's comparable to that. The day-to-day conduct of the House, of course, is an important thing, making out the calendar, granting requests for special recognition. You have to choose, you've got . . . You have what you call suspension of rules days. Monday was a day in which you would recognize members to take up

bills out of order, if they could get a majority vote. Now, you have to pass on the merit or need of the legislation the situation. You can't let everybody have their run. So presiding over the House is a pretty important part of it. Holding the confidence of the members, and the good will, not to have situations develop that are harmful or hinder the work to be done, of course, those are rather general, intangible things but they're all part of it.

Gantt: In looking at the speakership overall as a position of importance in state government, would you say that the speakership is a rather powerful position?

Gilmer: Definitely.

Gantt: How would you compare it with the Lieutenant Governor's position in the Senate, for example?

Gilmer: Well, it's just an opinion. I guess it's about on par in reality. It always seemed to me to be a little more important than the Lieutenant Governor's office for the reason that the House of Representatives is a big, unwieldy, cumbersome agency. The Senate is a kind of a streamlined . . . you can predict the Senate. You can . . . you pretty well . . . you tell your leadership--you've got thirty-one members, it will fall to a pattern pretty fast. A hundred and fifty people are a hundred and fifty people, and to operate in the House, to direct its thinking, to hold it on target, to keep it functioning in a correlated way with the other agencies of government is not as simple as it might be. The most important influence in the House of Representatives is the Speaker. If he functions, it more or less revolves then. You've got a central force, so to speak. And the



fact that there's no other comparable agency and no other equivalent as far as the Speakership is concerned, no other comparable agency to the House, and there's no equivalent to the Speaker's office. As being in contact with it, or is it being dependent on the philosophy, the direction, the objectives that the Speaker may have. If he wants it run in circles, it will pretty well run in circles, and they may not know why but that's what they'll be doing.

Gantt: I take it in view of what we've already said about your relations with Governor Stevenson that while you were in the Speaker's position, your relationship with him was a very good one.

Gilmer: That's right.

Gantt: . . . a close one . . .

Gilmer: Yes sir. No problem.

Gantt: Sort of a team effort, maybe in getting legislation . . .

Gilmer: Well, yes. Without it, without a text so to speak, we didn't need one.

Gantt: What do you recall as being some of the most important matters to come before the House during your term as Speaker?

Gilmer: Oh, I don't know anything of any special importance. Of course, the annual Appropriations Bill. We had this bond assumption thing, of course, but it was routine after we got the agreement worked out. Rural education--they were just service measures to operate the state government.

Gantt: Of course, this was also still during the World War II period.

Gilmer: That's right. Yes, it was just a kind of a "mind the store" proposition.

Gantt: Your later legislative record indicated that you had a very continuing interest in public education in Texas. Were you very concerned about the educational system along about this time?

Gilmer: Do you know the story about that?

Gantt: No, sir.

Gilmer: I served one term in the legislature after I was Speaker, and I served the session in 1947. Incidentally, an interesting incident with that was that my deskmate was Preston Smith, who is now Lieutenant Governor and running for Governor . . . he was serving his second term. His first freshman term was when I was Speaker, and he proved his good judgment by supporting me for Speaker. (Chuckle) And then as . . . this last session that I served, he and I were deskmates and I got very well acquainted with him. W. O. Reed succeeded me in the Speaker's office from Dallas, and he came all the way out here to ask me if I would serve as chairman of his appropriations committee. And I told him I would. I didn't want to just deadhead through there. One of the precedents in the House of Representatives is that no Speaker serves, I mean, a former speaker don't serve on any committee. He just . . . he's just an elder statesman. He just walks around, you know, looks at them with a knowing eye, and don't work or something--which didn't appeal to me.

So when Mr. Reed came out here and asked me if I'd be chairman of his appropriations committee, why I told him yes, I would. I was serving and I was going to quit after this term, but I wouldn't mind doing it. Never had been on the committee, had never been chairman. So I undertook it. This fellow Dallas Blankenship, who

had opposed me for the Speaker's office--he is now district judge in Dallas--had a bill in the legislature in the House to increase teachers salaries. The mechanics that he had employed to do it was that he was going to appropriate a lump sum of money out of the state treasury. He was going to put it in the state apportionment fund--the state is divided into all the districts--all the school districts--on a scholastic . . . a resident-scholastic basis. Not attendance in school, but on the residence basis. And then he was going to write a provision in here that this money, this new money, would have to be applied on teachers' salaries in a lump sum basis to all the teachers.

Well, now, you . . . traditionally, if you're chairman of the appropriations committee, your job is to fight all the appropriations. You've got to finance the state, you've got to keep the courts financed, of course, you've got to keep the state hospitals operating. You've got to pay state employees at least the wages they're drawing. But these people that come running in here with these new and brilliant ideas that cost money, you meet them at the door, you know, and bow. So, if I followed through in the traditions of the chairman of the appropriations committee, why it's my business to fight Dallas Blankenship on his appropriation to increase teachers' salaries. And so, we were contending about it a little bit. Of course teachers have got a pretty strong organization, and they had one then. And they're not easy to oppose legislatively. Of course, these people who will encourage you to fight somebody else, you look around for them, and they aren't helping you, they're just encouraging you.

They say, "Let's you and him fight." So, but of course I knew all that, I've been through it too many times, but in the course of the contention here, Beauford Jester was governor, his Senator was James E. Taylor, he was state Senator from a little town called Kearns. And, of course, the governor was interested in trying to hold the line on state appropriations--he didn't want a big tax bill started in his term . . . and this means of increasing teachers salaries, that was kind of a new thing.

Now theretofore the main method of getting school money had been to increase the rural aid bill and to put some money in there and write a situation that would fit your district, and insure that you'd get some of that new money that you were getting in the appropriation bill, in the state aid . . . rural aid bill. And that would have been really the only money that had been used to supplement these other revenues up to that time. So, while I'm contending with the teachers and this Blankenship increase, coming back and forth from Austin to Rocksprings, the superintendent of the schools in Kerrville starts contacting me--a man named Moore, H. A. Moore, I believe his name was, but at least his surname was Moore. He was getting his doctor's degree at the university and writing and researching for his thesis in public school education with emphasis on the financing of public school education, the use of the money, the efficiency of the system, and so forth. And so he began to tell me how wrong this Blankenship bill was in principle. He said that it's just--you're going at it the wrong way. And I said, "Well, what ways should you arrive at?"

And he began to explain to me the basic principles as developed in his research and with some other teachers who were working with him, a very few, that state aid would be fine, but it ought to be based on building up the program, on standardizing it. I remember one instance, several instances that he illustrated it with. One of the valley counties with a high Mexican population had built its school building, its school properties improved without issuing a bond issue. More than . . . only a third, in round figures, two-thirds of their scholastic population was not in school. And yet they were using their state apportionment that they already had to build buildings. In the Teacher's Outlook, I mean the Outlook which is the teacher's magazine, there was a feature article on the school system of El Paso. And it showed page after page of the buildings that they had built without issuing bond issues. Of course, El Paso was a Mexican area, and they weren't sending their children to school. So, Mr. Moore came up in proving his point to me with the principles that are really incorporated in this Gilmer-Aiken school program, that is, that there should be a minimum standard set for education. That the state aid should be based on scholastic attendance and not on just residence, scholastic . . . average daily attendance in school. And the counties, in order to be partners in the thing, the school districts should participate, based on their ability to pay.

He didn't have the formula that is expressed in this Gilmer-Aiken bill. So this fellow began to educate me on these principles, and I'm fighting Dallas Blankenship, you know, and he begins to . . .

I begin to fight him with some facts. And Jim Taylor whose got the same job in the Senate as I have in the House became interested in it, and he and I would go in and talk to Governor Jester, and I had this stuff that my superintendent was giving . . . preparing for me or furnishing it. So he and I came up with an alternative. It was not in the form and with the completeness that the Gilmer-Aikin program came into--I mean, covered, but basically it incorporated the principles, and I introduced it in the House and he introduced it in the Senate, and, of course, I got nowhere. The state teachers organization were thumbs down on it, and they were beating the bushes for the Blankenship bill. And when the Blankenship bill came up in the House, why, on the first vote I think I got twenty-three against it. When it went out of there on the final vote, there was one negative vote which was mine.

And, Lord, I was the villain all over the state, as far as these teachers were concerned. I know my daughter who was doing some substitute teaching here in Rocksprings, and she went to San Antonio to a teacher's regional meeting, and they wouldn't sit within twenty feet of her. I mean, she was ostracized, to show you how things can happen. But, before that session was over, I wrote in the . . . I wrote a resolution, a joint resolution, House and Senate, that proposed an interim committee to study public school education. Of course, this Blankenship bill just rolled through there. Governor Jester called Senator Taylor and I over to the mansion one night, and said, "I'll veto it if you ask me to." And I said, "Why, they'll pass it over your veto." He said, "You think they will, if I go

on the radio and explain it?" And I said, "I sure do." And Senator Taylor agreed. So, I don't think he signed it. I think he just let it go without his signature. But anyway I told him that I felt it ought to be dropped where it was. So after I had mulled it over in my mind, I wrote this resolution that set up the committee.

Now Senator Aikin has always been the champion of the teachers, I mean, he's led the fight for them. He was my personal friend. He and Coke Stevenson were real good friends. And Mrs. Stevenson and . . . the first Mrs. Stevenson (the one who died with cancer) and Mrs. Aikin were real good friends. They were fellow club members in the Senate Women's Club, just very congenial--they both liked flowers and pictures and things like that. And Senator Aikin was a great friend of Governor Stevenson and still is, and my personal friend. So, the governor advocated his interest in this bill, and Senator Aikin picked it up and passed it in the Senate. And it provided for an interim study of public school education in Texas. It provided for the speaker of the house to appoint three members, the Lieutenant Governor to appoint three . . . three of whom should be members of the house; the Lieutenant Governor to appoint six, three of whom should be members of the Senate; and then the Governor appointed six.

Anyway, Rae Files from Waxahachie who was a classroom teacher, Otis Locke, who later became a senator, any myself, were members from the house. James Taylor, Senator Taylor, Senator Aikin, and Senator Gus Straus from Fayetteville, were the Senate members. We employed this superintendent I'm telling you about from Kerrville

as a consultant. We organized, and that's another little, one of these things. We all met and took the oath, you know, and went off into one of the Senate rooms to organize. Dean Pittinger from the university was on this committee, and they were top-flight educators. A Mr. Stillwell who was the President of the State Teachers Association from Texarkana, Superintendent of Schools in Texarkana, was on that committee . . . and a real fine fellow. And they were . . . they were top-flight people from laymen, and schoolteachers, business people. There was a man named Pate from El Paso, who was a . . . oh . . . some kind of an industrialist out there.

But anyway, the day we met, why, they . . . they said, "Well, who shall be chairman?" I think it was Senator Aikin that nominated Senator Taylor to be chairman of the committee. And some of these schoolteachers didn't like it. They said, "Well, he's against us." Well anyway, they appointed . . . he was elected chairman of the committee. And about that time, they said, "Well, we . . . the committee ought to have a name. What shall we call the committee?" And everybody looked at everybody, and just about that time Governor Jester walked in the door. He was back in one of the Senate committee rooms. Governor Jester walked in the door, and Dean Pittinger whirled around and said, "Governor Jester, we want you to help us." He said, "Well, I'll be happy to. What do you want me to do?" to the Dean. He said, "Suggest a name for this committee." Said, "We were just . . . just decided or started to talk about a name for the committee." "Oh," he said, "that's easy." He said, "Call it the 'Gilmer-Aiken Committee.'" Said, "They sponsored this resolution."



Well, I don't think anybody particularly wanted to do it, but they had asked him and he had told them. And so everybody looked at everybody a little bit, and directly somebody said, "Well, I so move." It became the Gilmer-Aikin Committee.

The . . . they didn't go very far before they got to looking around the country for someone who had had experience in the re-organization of a public school system. They came up with a fellow named Hasque who had helped them re-organize the public school system in the State of Florida, and he's now, I believe, Dean of Education at the State University. But he came in, and so they evolved the system of appointing or having selected county and school district committees. And they farmed out the questions and had these people have open hearings of . . . to discuss . . . well, improvements or questions that related to public school education. And those things came up through channels, and these experts of ours mulled them over. And that . . . then we had some hearings in Austin, several of them. There was any number of meetings by this committee, and every type of question that related to the public school system was thrashed out.

We had . . . the public school teachers had first been on . . . sort of on guard about this committee. They felt like Senator Taylor and I, since we'd opposed them, were not really sympathetic with them, and that we were in there to just try to help block them some more as we had been trying to do in the past. But we had enough people that we knew personally in there that had served in the House, that started a nucleus. So anyway, to make a long story short, why, this . . . this committee came back with . . . with specific

recommendations of this committee. And by the time that the session was ready, why, they had been written into bills. We people that had been through this thing before, and it included members of the legislature, and schoolteachers, why, we . . . we wrote the actual bill.

And among the . . . one of the basic and far-reaching parts of the . . . of the recommended program was to abolish the state superintendent, who was an elective office, who was a pretty powerful fellow in his own right. And he was the central educational figure in the state, and we just proposed to abolish him in one fell swoop. And man, he came out swinging, and he . . . this rural aid bunch that had been administered through his office, they came rushing to his aid, and we had the legislative fight of the century. But anyway . . . and oddly enough, I was not even a member by that time. That was . . . these bills were considered and passed in 1949. And of course, the recommendations of the committee were tabbed with this name, and then it became the Gilmer-Aikin program. And of course, I did put a tremendous amount of time in on it, as did all these people. It just happened to be tabbed with that name. Actually, now days, no one, perhaps, realizes . . . I say, "no one." The average person doesn't realize how it all came about. And they think Gilmer-Aikin is one man, that Senator Aikin . . . when they do know, that it's he and I, they think he and I sat down and worked the whole thing out all by ourselves. As I say, as far as I'm concerned, why, I started out fighting the schoolteachers, (chuckle) which . . . I mean fighting a schoolteacher bill, and that all led to this whole

thing. Mrs. Still . . . Miss . . . Rae Files, in the meantime had married and was Mrs. Still, and she wrote . . . I don't have it here now--I have it at the ranch . . . but she wrote . . . then she later took her Doctors Degree and she wrote the . . . the story, I think she says, the "Story of the Gilmer-Aikin Bill," or something like that, in which she just relates the . . . and it's . . . it's a true story, so to speak. It's the Gilmer-Aikin Story, so to speak, and she relates it from the beginning to the end, more or less.

Gantt: Can you think of anything that you could add to her work that ought to be included in . . . for posterity?

Gilmer: (Laughter) Oh, no. I don't think so. It's past history now. I mean, the people that are familiar with the Gilmer-Aikin thing now sort of date themselves. These new ones don't know anything about it. But anyway, I might add that I'm a sort of a hero with these schoolteachers now. They stop me on the streets, you know, and pat me on the back. When Mrs. Gilmer and I were involved in an automobile accident here a number . . . oh . . . fifteen years ago, it became a problem in the hospital where we were what to do with the flowers. They came from all over Texas. But that was a far cry from the situation when my daughter went to San Antonio to go to the teachers' meeting. (Chuckle)

Gantt: Right. Mr. Gilmer, during your last term you were serving with still another governor in the chief executive's office, Governor Beauford Jester. What was your relationship to Governor Jester?

Gilmer: Well, it more or less originated through his acquaintance and his dependence on Senator Taylor. Senator Taylor and I were old friends.

He was a member of the House before he went to the Senate. And since I had the position of Chairman of the Appropriation Committee in the House, and Senator Taylor had a like position in the Senate, matters that concerned appropriations, of course, involved both of us, and I became acquainted with Governor Jester. In fact, I had supported him when he ran, but I knew him just very casually. Our relationship was cordial, but I had no special entree with him or any reason beyond this matter that we've spoken about. One of our legislative problems was this school matter, and, of course, we associated on that matter; but above and beyond that I had no contacts with him really or background.

Gantt: Do you think that overall he was an effective governor during that term?

Gilmer: Yes, I think he was. I remember one thing that was . . . that was . . . one specific thing. Early in the session he called Senator Taylor and I in his office and showed us the plan of improvement of the capitol area--the first time I had ever really seen it laid out. And probably the city of Austin had been working it up for some time, but he had in mind appropriations to begin acquiring that land, and the first . . . the first outline of the present improvement of that capitol area that I ever had any introduction to was in Governor Jester's office, which will show you that he had some vision and some ambition about it. I remember another thing that happened that session. One of your problems in Austin was to find space, or in those days was to find space for our state government. And the Tribune Building had been built where the Railroad Commission

is now, but the paper didn't work out, and the state was renting some of it, and we . . . Senator Taylor and I found out that the state could acquire that building at actually less than cost. We talked to Governor Jester about it, and we decided it would be business to do that, and we did. At that time we bought that state building just in order to have available space, and, of course, all of those business interests there in Austin that own those buildings that rent to the state. You go up there and start financing some state buildings, and you run head-on into a pretty effective local situation there in Austin. You're hitting somebody's pocket book when you start getting some buildings that the state would own. And Governor Jester supported us, I recall, in that.

Gantt: Do you think perhaps then that you would say that while you were chairman of the Appropriations Committee that the teacher pay bill was probably one of the most important things to occupy your attention?

Gilmer: Yes, sir, no question about it. You talking about this last term?

Gantt: Right.

Gilmer: Oh, there's no question about it. Of course, heading the Appropriation Committee is no small job. It takes a tremendous amount of time, but that's routine more or less. Any one of fifty people could probably have done as well, but the way this school thing developed was I guess that's just the way the Lord works. I don't know, it . . .

Gantt: Compared to being Speaker, how did you enjoy being chairman of the Appropriations Committee? Was it kind of an anti-climax?

Gilmer: Well, being Speaker is a real honor and a privilege. Being chairman of the Appropriation Committee is a back-breaking, thankless job.

There's no comparison.

Gantt: You did thoroughly enjoy your role as Speaker, I assume.

Gilmer: Oh, certainly.

Gantt: What were some of the considerations that prompted . . .

Gilmer: I don't mean to belittle it. Pardon me. I don't mean to belittle the appropriations. It's a very important job, but anybody that knew as much about it as I did ought to have had sense enough to have left it alone. But it started this whole thing. I mean, just a sequence of events.

Gantt: Right. Of the Gilmer-Aikin Committee.

Gilmer: That's right. That's what I'm talking about. If I hadn't been in position where I had to jump on the dragon, it wouldn't have happened. Then the book I'm telling you about--this Rae Files Still--she autographed it for me, and a little . . . I think she says, "To my friend Claud Gilmer whose inquiring mind started the whole thing."  
(Chuckle)

Gantt: What were some of the considerations that caused you to decide not to seek another term after having been Speaker and chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and in such a position of leadership in the legislature?

Gilmer: Well, we had no ambitions, and I mean my wife and I. We had no ambitions for other office, and we'd been there ten years, and we just wanted to come home. Her mother was old, and my father was. We'd raised our family so we just came back to the hills.

Gantt: You never gave any serious consideration to seeking a state-wide elective office?

Gilmer: I don't think so.