

N O R T H T E X A S S T A T E U N I V E R S I T Y

O R A L H I S T O R Y C O L L E C T I O N

N U M B E R

2 8 7

I n t e r v i e w w i t h

W a l t P a r k e r

S e p t e m b e r 1 9 , 1 9 7 5

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Terms of Use: Two years after leaving
State Service

Approved: Walt Parker
(Signature)

Date: 3-25-76

COPYRIGHT © 1975 THE BOARD OF REGENTS OF NORTH TEXAS STATE
UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF DENTON

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Coordinator of the Oral History Collection or the University Archivist, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203.

Oral History Collection

Walt Parker

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: September 19, 1975

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Representative Walt Parker for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on September 19, 1975, in Denton, Texas. I am interviewing Representative Parker in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was a member of the Sixty-fourth Texas Legislature.

Walt, to begin this interview, let me ask you a type of compare-and-contrast question. You served in the Legislature under three speakers: Gus Mutscher, Price Daniel, Jr., and Billy Clayton. How would you compare and/or contrast the methods and the personalities of the three speakers under whom you have served?

Mr. Parker: Well, I must say that I felt like this time it was the fairest way that the Legislature had been run since I've been in it.

Dr. Marcello: Why do you say that?

Mr. Parker: The reason being that I think Speaker Clayton bent over backwards to make sure that every side had an

equal chance. Yet the difference between the two . . . and I think Price Daniel--Speaker Daniel--did basically the same thing, but I feel like that Speaker Clayton, when the time came to exercise leadership, was more forceful than was Speaker Daniel.

Now as far as Speaker Mutscher, there was never any question that he ran it with a real strong arm, and you didn't have much choice. It was just run that way.

But I just feel like that it was just fairer. In the first place Clayton had his committees appointed on a more even basis. A woman was the head of a committee for the first time, and Craig Washington, who is what you'd have to say an ultra-liberal, headed the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. And Lane Denton, who is an ultra-liberal, was heading a committee. Yet, to counteract those he had some ultra-conservatives in various committees.

Marcello: Let's back up a little bit and talk about the House speakership race, which, I think, this time really got started during the Constitutional Convention. Describe what you know about that movement as it took place during the Constitutional Convention.

Parker: During the Constitutional Convention there were actually three candidates, but two were very active.

Carl Parker was one, and Fred Head was the other. Personally, I supported Carl Parker, but I did not come out in his support until after the convention was over. Basically, Ron, the reason was that I just didn't feel like I wanted to let that have any effect on me while I was working on the constitution. But I did come out immediately on the conclusion of the constitution in support of Carl Parker, my thoughts being that I trusted him a whole lot more than I trusted Fred Head.

Marcello: Evidently, Fred Head was putting around some rather . . . or some of Fred Head's supporters were putting around some nasty rumors and so on about Parker. That became a very personal sort of campaign, I think.

Parker: It really did, and this turned me off, frankly. It turned me off of Fred, and the statements Fred was making to the various news media about the number of people he had and everything was just an out-and-out falsehood, and I knew it and so did everyone else that was in the Constitutional Convention. But that was his policy to do this. So I was very apprehensive toward joining him, although basically I lean more to the conservative side than I do to the liberal side. But I felt like that Carl Parker was a liberal, but he was as honest as anybody I've ever been with. I felt like I'd get a fair shake with him, whereas I did not

feel that I'd get a fair shake with Fred. So I supported him. I didn't think that Billy Clayton at that time had any chance.

Marcello: Well, he was remaining rather low key, too, during that Constitutional Convention, was he not?

Parker: That's right because he was following the philosophy that I felt like that the convention . . . we were there to write a constitution, and we didn't need to be involved in this at all. That's the way he operated. I respected him for it, but, yet, I didn't think he could win. I just honestly didn't think he could win.

Marcello: I think the fact that both Parker and Head were campaigning so hard during that Constitutional Convention turned off a lot of the representatives.

Parker: Well, I think that's true. I think that it turned off a lot of them and . . . in fact, I was one of them that signed a statement, you know, that we weren't going to commit ourselves to any candidate until after the Constitutional Convention was over, and that's what I did.

Marcello: Well, of course, eventually what did happen? Would it be safe to say that Head and Parker more or less cancelled each other out?

Parker: Well, let me say this. The way it turned out in my situation, I received some calls one night about one

o'clock telling me that they wanted me on Speaker Clayton's bandwagon and that they wanted me on it and that Bill Clayton wanted me on his team. But I told them at that time, Ron, that I could not do that until after I had talked to Carl Parker, that I'd given my word and just couldn't change. I knew from what the people that called me told me that they were telling me the truth because they were . . . these people I have utmost respect for, and as it turned out everything that they told me was the truth.

Marcello: Were these people that called you representatives themselves?

Parker: They were representatives and they'd been formerly on Head's team.

Marcello: And these people had switched over to Clayton.

Parker: Clayton.

Marcello: Who were they?

Parker: Well, one of them was Bill Sullivant, who I have an utmost regard for, a young man from, you know, Gainesville. But he is probably one of the hardest-working, more outstanding people down there, and I trust him implicitly. He just told me the facts. As it turned out, they were absolutely true.

So I personally called Carl the next day and went down and visited with him. Carl, being the type

of person that I always have felt like he was, he relieved me when I first went in his office. I didn't have to ask him to be relieved. He just told me, "Walt, it looks that we've lost the race for the speakership, and you've been a good friend of mine and helped me immensely, and I want you to know that I'm releasing you, and you can repledge yourself to anyone you'd like."

So, of course, in my idea . . . then I didn't know whether I wanted to or not. He had been so nice and such a man about it that it really told me that probably he was . . . my original choice was a good one. But anyway, I did then go to Speaker Clayton, and he accepted my pledge for him. As it turned out, I have been loyal to him and will continue to be until he actually releases me from that loyalty-type pledge.

Marcello: How did your early support of Carl Parker affect the committee appointments that you received under Billy Clayton?

Parker: Well, this is a part . . . when I said fair, you have to realize that when I joined Billy, probably I was somewhere in the seventy-six to eighty-five-member situation, and it takes only seventy-six to be elected. So I could not say that fundamentally I was one that

got him elected. I was on the bandwagon after he had the seventy-six.

He did not promise me one thing. But, yet, when the committee appointments came out, he appointed me vice-chairman of Appropriations, which is one of the . . . there's about four or five of what you call key appointments. I personally would have been disappointed if I hadn't received the appointment, but I would not have been surprised.

Marcello: In other words, there were never any promises made even during that phone call that you'd received from Sullivant.

Parker: No. Bill Sullivant did not promise me anything. He just felt like that they needed me on their side. He said, "Walt, I know that if Bill is elected that he is going to be fair with whom he puts on committees." That's why I said that everything Bill Sullivant told me turned out to be the truth. He made no promises to me at all, and I asked none. I asked for no special favors.

Frankly, as it's turned out, he's . . . well, he's given me every top appointment that he could possibly give me within, you know, a certain range. I know that right at the present time I would have liked to have been on the Legislative Budget Board.

He felt like that there had never been a black on this board, and he just felt like they ought to be represented. Here again is that fairness that I think he did. He turned and appointed Mickey Leland, who is a . . . you'd have to say he is an ultra-liberal, but a fellow that I really respect and really think the world of is Mickey Leland. But he appointed him on the Budget Board. Well, I can't get mad at Bill Clayton over something like that because he was honestly being fair with the people of Texas on this situation. Throughout Bill's regime so far down there I've been disappointed a few times, but I've not been disappointed because he hasn't been fair. It's just because maybe I didn't get something personally that I wanted.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were put on Appropriations, which is a committee which you've served on, I guess, ever since you've been in the House, haven't you?

Parker: Yes, I've been there under every one . . . I've been under every speaker. I've been able to stay on it, and . . . goodness, he had lots of people that he could have appointed vice-chairman of Appropriations. Frankly, I was given strong consideration for the chairmanship.

Marcello: Refresh my memory here for a minute. Who did he appoint as chairman of Appropriations?

Parker: Bill Presnal, who was his number one supporter in the House. But, frankly, the chairmanship was, I think, considered between Fred Head and Bill Presnal and myself. Actually, you would have expected Fred Head to receive the appointment because it was his people . . . when he switched after he got mad at Carl, when he talked his people into coming to Clayton, that's the ones that put Clayton over in the speakership. He brought all of the liberal people over to the real strong conservative candidate. That's what got Bill Clayton elected, was Fred Head switching those over. I felt that he would make Fred Head chairman of Appropriations.

But Bill, in my opinion, exercised excellent judgement in the selection of his chairman. Bill Presnal and I have officed together, and there's not a finer man that I know of than he is. So he made a good choice, and I was just happy that I was selected to serve under him.

Marcello: From the names that you've mentioned, I gather that Neil Caldwell was not given too much consideration to return as chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Parker: Well, let me say this. Speaker Clayton had a problem in that he had to have seventy-six people that were real "gung-ho" for him. If he were to have appointed

Neil to the chairmanship or something, since Neil had been the campaign manager for Carl Parker, then that would have irritated Fred Head and his followers, and Speaker Clayton just used good judgement in not doing that. However, I have the utmost regard for Neil Caldwell. He probably worked harder on the committee than any other members did. He has such unusual talent that we did not utilize him as much as what we should have. To defend Speaker Clayton, he didn't have really much choice because he would be irritating some of the people that were deeply resentful against Neil because he and Carl had run a pretty tough campaign against Fred Head. These same people were the ones that were in some of the leadership positions under Speaker Clayton.

Marcello: Also, Caldwell's been around the Legislature long enough that he probably expected it. I don't think he was disappointed.

Parker: Neil was . . . he had a personal disappointment. In other words, you know, he felt like that he would love to have had it, but a political disappointment it was not. If you can kind of distinguish between those two, personally, sure, he wanted it. But here again, he was on the Appropriations Committee. Of course, he was on the Appropriations Committee as a result of his

seniority. But still I think he would have loved to have been on the conference committee. That, again, was one of those positions to where it wasn't to the . . . it would have caused some resentment among some of the members that had supported Bill Clayton real strongly. That was the reason and not his ability because his ability would have placed him up there. Probably, in my opinion he would have been the number one man appointed because I feel that way about him.

Marcello: One of the newer procedures that was instituted this time, I believe, was the idea of having the chairmen of the other House committees come before the Appropriations Committee when it came time for the allocations of funds and this sort of thing. How did this procedure work out?

Parker: Well, let me say this to you. The thought behind it is very good. Speaker Clayton came up with the idea of having an appropriative vice-chairman of the Appropriations Committee. This appropriative vice-chairman would be a man from each of the standing committees, such as Higher Education, Criminal Jurisprudence. In theory these people were to first look at the budget that applied to their committee.

We'll just take the Education Committee for one. Representative Hostenbach of Odessa was the appropriative vice-chairman of Education. He held . . . he had these

people testify before him that were wanting funds in higher education. Then he made his recommendations to the main committee. This was real good except we got in a real personality conflict because Fred Head was chairman of that committee. We did not . . . I say we. The speaker did not really feel that when he appointed these . . . he was going to have the vice-chairman kind of run that situation without the chairman of that particular committee really being involved. But it didn't work out that way in the Education Committee.

In all of the other committees we had no problems whatsoever. The only problem we had was in the Higher Education Committee. This got to be a pretty nasty situation and one in which certain demands were made by Fred of the committee members. They went along with it in their committee. We had quite a time in the Appropriations Committee.

Marcello: Fred Head must have been a real bugger during this legislative session. He caused a lot of problems.

Parker: I don't know what his reasons were, but he did cause a lot of problems. Especially on appropriations it caused all kinds of problems. We had to do many, many hours of extra work in order to get the Appropriations Committee's work out.

Marcello: Now when you went down to Austin this time, one of the first things that you had to face was the fact that there was a surplus or there was a projected surplus that was going to be available. How did this affect the activities of the Appropriations Committee?

Parker: Well, we had a projected amount which the news media had talked about as being around a billion dollars, which in essence was probably about four hundred million dollars too much. It was closer to the six hundred million dollar surplus than it was to the one billion mark. But then we had certain things that they considered emergency things that we had to do that was involved. That was the state employees' salaries due to the inflation factor. We had to correct that. Also, we had the retired teachers' problem. This involved teachers that, really, basically they never really made a real good salary, and they retired and their retirement was less than two hundred dollars a month or two to two hundred and fifty at the very highest. These people were really in a problem, and we had to try to solve that. By the time we got through with all of the emergencies that really needed to be taken care of, there wasn't much of a surplus left.

That did create kind of a false impression. This made every agency when they came down there . . . when they came down there, they didn't just use their hands, but they brought buckets along with them to try to get all of this surplus funds. Let me say this. The biggest vultures were the higher education people.

Marcello: In what sense? In the sense that they wanted more money for buildings and this sort of thing?

Parker: No, they just wanted more money for everything. They just didn't . . . and this is honestly the way it happened. Everybody wanted more, but higher education asked for more than any of the agencies. Maybe they needed it. I don't know, but we were faced with a serious problem.

Marcello: How close does the Appropriations Committee work with the comptroller--in this case Bob Bullock?

Parker: Well, let me say this. All during the time that I have served on the Appropriations Committee in the past, usually the comptroller, Mr. Calvert, on some occasions never took the trouble to even come over and appear before the committee. He'd just say, "Whatever you send me is fine." He was satisfied with it. He had never made any effort, although there were several of us on the committee that felt like that something needed to be done. He never wanted to do anything. Frankly, I was real disappointed that Mr. Calvert

didn't want any additional funds to help collect the things that, as it has turned out, could be collected. But he didn't want to rock the boat in any way.

Marcello: You're, of course, referring to the delinquent sales tax payments.

Parker: That's exactly right. And we knew that this was going on. It had been brought up time and time again, but evidently Mr. Calvert didn't feel like it was necessary and didn't ask for the funds. So the present comptroller, Bob Bullock, came to us in the committee, and he also visited with several people on a . . . or had his representatives visit with some of us on a personal basis and assure us that if we were to give him the necessary increases in funds that he had asked for that he could return us many, many millions of dollars. In fact, the figure thrown around was that if we were to give him an additional thirty million dollars to operate his department, he could return us a hundred and thirty million, which would be a net to the state of a hundred million. Only history will tell, but from the reports we're getting at the present time, he's easily going to collect that amount of money.

Marcello: The delinquent individuals seem to be getting the message, I think.

Parker: That's right. I think he's doing what the man on the street . . . frankly, I've asked several of them by

visiting around in this district, "What do you think about Bob Bullock's tactics?" They say, "Well, he's doing exactly what all of you guys should be doing. If that's what you're supposed to be doing, you're doing your job." So I can only see that he's helped himself, although his public relations maybe is conducted in a little different manner from the way I might personally do it. It's having results, and I don't see how you can fight results if they're good like he's been getting.

Marcello: You mentioned that the manner in which he is conducting his operations are perhaps a little bit different than the way that you would conduct them. There, of course, is always the possibility--and it has been rumored--that Mr. Bullock has his eyes on a higher office. But this, of course, doesn't take away from the fact that he is doing the job that he was elected to do.

Parker: No question in my mind but what Bob Bullock is either running for governor or senator. He's been in politics long enough to know how you have to run and what you have to do. He's using his past experience to his advantage. By the same token, I'm not faulting him now. I'm just saying that he's doing what the average man on the street wants done. He wants his money. If they've paid their money for the sales tax, they don't

want that man keeping it in his business to help his business. They want it in the state treasury.

Well, he's just a different type of individual from what I am. But I'll say this. I've got to respect him for what he's doing. You never have to worry about which side of the street Bob Bullock's on. He's going to tell you. But I found this out when I was working through him on some appointments for . . . while Governor Smith was governor, why, Bullock, of course, was the man who handled all of his appointments. Frankly, he was responsible for appointing my opponent the first time to the judgeship here in Denton County--Judge Scofield. This kind of upset me, and I got real upset at Bob. But still as it turned out, he made a hell of an appointment. Judge Scofield's been a tremendous judge, and he and I are real close friends now. We were at that time. I've had my taste of Bob. I know what he'll do. But he didn't hesitate when he told me. He'd just look you right in the eye and tell you what he's going to do, and if you don't like it, well, that's just your problem.

Marcello: I thought it was also interesting that you mentioned awhile ago that members of the Appropriations Committee, and I assume other legislators, knew that there were a

great many individuals who were delinquent in returning their sales taxes, but that nothing was ever done about it.

Parker: Well, let me say that when we say we knew, we had been told that this was there, the debt was there. I personally never did go to the comptroller and say, "Well, you show me the accounts." But at that time, if you remember, we didn't have the open records law. It was pretty difficult to get things out of Comptroller Calvert's office at that time. So we had to go more on rumors. I had talked to some of the people in the comptroller's office, and they had told me that these things were there, and there were people that were not paying. But we just couldn't get him to ask for any additional people to look into this matter. So, yes, I'd say many people in the Legislature knew that this debt existed.

Marcello: Let's continue to talk a little bit more about the activities of the Appropriations Committee, since obviously it is one of the most important, if not the most important, committee in the House. Once again, Governor Briscoe made it quite clear that there were going to be no new state taxes. Now obviously this would have had to have affected the manner in which you looked upon all of the requests for funding that came before the Appropriations Committee.

Parker: There's no question about this. This is one of the times that the governor made a real positive statement. But he made a positive statement to the press, and he also had the men that were working out of his office to brief you on this and to let you know that he meant every word that he said. It very definitely had an effect on us on Appropriations. Some of the programs that were presented were never considered because of the fact that it would cost new taxes.

Of course, the number one was in the school bill. We could not consider Representative Kubiak's bill because we were talking about having to raise possibly a billion dollars in new taxes. Not only had Governor Briscoe said there wasn't going to be any new taxes, but the average man on the street had told me he didn't want any new taxes. I was committed right along with him not to vote for any.

Marcello: You mentioned the public school financing bill, which, I would say, was probably the most important piece of legislation that came before the State Legislature during this Sixty-fourth session. So let's talk about public school financing. I think just about everybody made it their number one priority. It all stems from the Rodriguez case in a way, does it not?

Parker: Yes, sir. It stems from the fact that the court ruled against the Rodriguez situation. But in their opinion

it was stated that the state had the opportunity to correct any injustices that might have been done, and the basic . . .

Marcello: The courts just threw it back to the states, in other words.

Parker: That's right. In essence, in my opinion, they just told us that we had to do something, or else possibly if another court suit were to come up to them and we had not taken the opportunity, then the courts would step in. Frankly, I appreciated this approach to it because it at least gave us an opportunity to try to do something about it. I certainly would rather we have the opportunity than the courts to do it for us.

Marcello: What sort of a public school financing bill did you personally want to see come out of the Legislature? Did you have any thoughts on what you wanted to see?

Parker: Well, let me say that at the time when the public school financing bill was being worked on the appropriations bill was being worked on at the same time. I had not a great input into the public school financing; however, I had fundamentally two or three things that I wanted. We came out basically with what I had hoped for. One, of course, was teachers salaries. I was, frankly, opposed to a starting salary of ten thousand dollars--not from the fact

that teachers are not representative of that salary, but the fact that I knew that for each one hundred dollars that we give to public school teachers that that costs the state about forty million dollars. So I knew that we were talking in an eight hundred million dollar figure. If we took the additional two thousand dollar starting salary per teacher, it was going to cost about \$800,000,000. I knew that this was out of line with what we had, so I supported about a . . . somewhere . . . frankly, I supported the \$8,400 salary. But we compromised . . . most . . . got around to an \$8,000 starting salary.

Then the second thing is, I knew that the transportation was in trouble in the schools. We also needed to make some adjustment for some of the larger cities, which was done, in their enrollment and class size, and to give them some help because they've got a serious problem within the larger school systems that we do not have in the community schools or smaller schools.

Marcello: You were talking about transportation difficulties awhile ago, and I assume that you were referring to the whole area of maintenance and operation which has been his very hard by inflation.

Parker: Basically, that's what it was. Where a school bus costs about \$7,500 about four years ago, it's now up

to about \$13,000 for the same school bus. Their gasoline . . . where they were paying around nineteen cents, now they're paying around fifty cents. So, I mean, there's a tremendous factor, and we have not increased it. So this was having to be picked up by the local school districts. They just could not . . . well, the people's tax on their homes has just gotten to about the maximum amount they can pay.

Marcello: You were talking awhile ago about teacher salaries. I think this was one of the things that disappointed a great many people about some of the deliberations on the public school finance bill, that is, that teacher salaries really weren't what the Rodriguez case was all about.

Parker: No, sir. You're exactly right. The Rodriguez case had nothing to do with teachers. But, yet, the bulk of our money was put into this program to take care of teacher salaries. I'm a little hazy on this, but I think we provided about fifty to seventy million dollars for what we would call raising the quality of education in Texas, which is just a drop in the bucket of what really has to be done. But at least we made a start. But the big problem, as I see it, is that we really don't know . . . we don't have equal taxation in Texas.

Marcello: Okay, I was going to talk about the taxing structure because it's one thing to appropriate the money, but the money has to be raised in some way, too.

Parker: That's right. But we don't really know what the wealth of any district really is. We've never had a study made. We tried to get money for this study. It'll cost around twelve or fifteen million dollars to make a study in the manner of which we thought to find out what the wealth of each district is. I don't think we can solve the problem until we find out what the actual wealth of the district is and how much equal taxes would bring in and so forth. So that was one reason that we passed this Bill 1126, and it's only a two-year bill. During that time maybe we can come up with the answers to what would be equal taxation and what the value of the state is in every district.

The governor has appointed a committee. Incidentally, he has picked a real conservative member from his former . . . that represented his area, John Poerner, to head this committee. John is going to try . . . has promised . . . in fact, I have a letter here that he has promised us all of the facts no later than November 1, 1976. So the people going into the next session of the Legislature will have a pretty good idea of what the various districts . . . how much

wealth they have in them and what taxable values they possibly could have. Maybe then we'd have some factors that we could really try to solve the problem we had. We went a very short distance in trying to solve the problem this time.

Marcello: We're getting into the whole area of fair market value and this sort of thing.

Parker: That's correct. And, also, where maybe a fair market value approach is probably going to be the solution to the problem. If a piece of property is basically worth \$10,000 in Denton, if the same piece of property is located on the same type of land and so forth in El Paso, it probably should be valued at \$10,000 there, also. We were trying not to take away--and I don't think that the sentiment at this time is to take away--a local control of what taxes will be and so forth. But probably down the line or in years to come, that probably will be done from a central location. Of course, that is contrary to what most people . . . and basically what I have always stood for. I want to try to have local control, but it may not . . . this may not be the answer to it.

Marcello: How powerful a lobby was TSTA during this session?

Parker: Well, they were very powerful. They came and made their demands. Let me say that the local TSTA was more active this time than they have ever been, and

not just in my district but throughout the state. They are becoming very strong, and they're very adamant about their demands. This kind of bothered me on occasions. I've been one of the supporters of public school education. Probably I have almost a 100 per cent voting record. But when I voted for an \$8,000 salary as opposed to a \$10,000 one, I received so many complaints but . . . so, you know, your friends are only with you as long as you're with them 100 per cent. This kind of irked me a little bit. But I'm going to say this. TSTA was very strong, and now that they've unionized the teachers of Texas under the present affiliation with the National Education Association, I expect them to become more demanding than they have been in the past.

Marcello: What did you think about Governor Briscoe's weighted pupil approach?

Parker: Well, there is a lot of merit in the weighted pupil approach. However, it just never was explained to me well enough that I bought the weighted pupil approach.

Marcello: Now I think what happened was that the Legislature did take some timid steps in the direction of experimenting with that weighted pupil approach just as they did take some timid steps to implement that Rodriguez case in the ultimate bill.

Parker: That's correct but maybe . . . you know, we're dealing with every person in the state in the way that they run their home because we control the tax that's going to be levied on them. I supported the idea that maybe we ought to try out, experiment, for just a short period of time on this weighted pupil approach. That's what they're trying to do during this interim time. During this two-year period, that may prove to be the thing that we should do, but then again it may prove just the opposite, and I would hate to get it started because my experience is that once you get something started, it's a terrific challenge to get it changed in any way, to get it stopped. You may add on to a program, but you don't kill a program. So I was real hesitant about starting something that none of us knew anything about. We had no experience factor on it at all.

Marcello: You mentioned that a lot of legislators really didn't understand what Governor Briscoe's weighted pupil approach was all about. What sort of information were you receiving from his legislative aides or the people from his office with regard to that weighted pupil approach?

Parker: Well, we got various opinions. You'd get a different opinion from almost every person that talked to you about it. At no time did I get the same reply to

questions from individuals that were in favor of the weighted pupil approach from the governor's office. If I talked to them it didn't seem like they had their facts coordinated. And, again, I may have to say that since I look at figures so much, it's pretty easy to recognize figures than it is to recognize just small talk. But I never could get the same answer twice.

The thing that bothered me was that the weighted pupil approach as we discussed it--you and I--just a few minutes ago . . . the weighted pupil approach was going to cause the people in my area to have to pay a tremendous amount of additional ad valorem taxes. Whereas, the governor then would have been scot-free because there would have been no new state taxes. But it was going to be all new local taxes. It was going to be one heck of a tax bill under this weighted pupil approach, but it was going to be on my back in my district and not on the state-wide level. I just couldn't buy the situation until I had a little more experience in it.

Marcello: That's an interesting point because I don't remember ever seeing it in any of the media reports on public school finance.

Parker: Well, this is just one of the things that most of us down there felt like was going to take place. I

think this is the main reason this weighted pupil approach failed, was because of the possible taxes that it was going to cause the local school districts to have to pay.

Marcello: Okay, let's get off of public school finance and talk about another area that occupied a great deal of the Legislature's time. I'm referring now to the establishment of a public utilities commission. First of all, let me ask you a general question. In your opinion how much of a need was there in Texas, or is there in Texas, for the establishment of such a regulatory body?

Parker: To me there is a tremendous need for a utilities commission or some type of commission where the average person has a right to go to to explain his problems. Now in the City of Denton or cities of comparable size, that is really not a problem because you can go to the elected local official and complain. But where the problem came about was in the rural areas.

Marcello: Which you have a great deal of in your area.

Parker: That's correct. I represent a tremendous amount of them. They had no one to go to. Also, you have no control on the telephone situation. The attorney general had ruled that the local people can make a

contract with the telephone people, but they have no control over the rates once they get out of their area. Once you get out of the city limits of Denton, General Telephone can do just about as they please. So I'm not faulting General Telephone. I'm just saying that the average citizen has no way to complain. He has no recourse whatsoever.

I just felt like that there should be someone that makes the final decision on anything. We have it in our Supreme Court, but the average citizen would have to hire an attorney to go all the way through the courts. This is expensive and it's . . . you have to hire an attorney to do it. Under the utilities commission, you would not have to hire an attorney. You could go to the utilities commission as an average citizen without having to hire an attorney. I felt like that this should be available, and I supported it all the way.

Now we came up with a bill that is not as strong as I would have liked to have seen--not near as strong as I would have liked to have seen. However, under the circumstances, at least we got the utilities commission started. It can be changed by public pressure in years to come, whereas, just getting it started was quite an accomplishment.

Marcello: Where would you have liked to have seen the public utilities commission strengthened? You mentioned that the bill wasn't as strong as what you would have wished.

Parker: Well, the first thing, we took the natural gas and left it with the Railroad Commission. I personally felt like that it should have been under the utilities commission. We took out all of the cities that . . .

Marcello: They had the right to opt out. Is that correct?

Parker: Well, they're out and they have the right to opt in.

Marcello: I see.

Parker: And I would have rather it'd been the other way around. I'd rather them to have been in and they could have gone out. This fundamentally was where I differed. I would have rather that everyone would have come under the control of the utilities commission. Then if the people in that area wanted to vote themselves out, they could have.

But it was in a spirit of compromise. This was one of the things that had to be done because there was no way for us to pass the utilities commission without the vote of the large cities. This is what we had to do in order to get it done.

Marcello: Now did you want to see all of the utilities in Texas come under this commission, or were you interested in just getting the telephone company under it?

Parker: No, sir. I wanted every utility that has a monopoly, you might as well say, on their services to the people. I wanted them to come under a regulatory commission. Of course, I drew a lot of flak from this. Texas Power and Light put a lot of pressure on people within the district here that they serve, especially down around Lake Dallas, to call me and voice their opposition against it. However, I found on many of these people that call me . . . in checking around, I found that a big percentage of them worked for Texas Power and Light. But they were putting the pressure on their employees to get their friends . . . and when you traced it all back, a lot of their friends had been asked to by the employees of Texas Power & Light. So there was a lot of pressure exerted on me to vote against the utility commission. I also had a lot of them who wanted me to vote for it, especially in Little Elm and in the other rural areas.

Marcello: I don't think the case for the utilities received any help, especially in the light of the suicide of that Southwestern Bell official and things of this nature. It surely didn't strengthen their case any.

Parker: No, I think that that had a lot to do with helping us get it passed. I will say that probably the fundamental thing that got the utilities commission established was

,

the amount of public interest that had been exerted for a utilities commission. This is what brought it about. Finally, the public pressure forced the big utility companies to back off and say, "Well, we're going to have to have it. Let's write the bill to the best of our advantage." That's what they did basically. But again, I want to say that you can't get everything that you want in the first time in the Legislature. We came up with a bill that was a compromise agreement, but at least it's a start. We have our foot in the door. Now if the public sentiment will continue, we might have a chance to change it to the way that the public might want it changed.

Marcello: Now the House bill was actually quite a bit stronger than that Senate bill, was it not?

Parker: That's correct. But the Senate was . . . well, it leans more heavily toward the utilities companies than does the House.

Marcello: Especially Bill Moore.

Parker: Yes, that's correct, and since he was the chairman of the committee in which it was directed, it was either no bill or a compromise-type bill. That's what it turned out to be.

Marcello: Now I guess the authors of that bill in the House were Representatives Wilson and Boone. I think they had a great deal to do with it.

Parker: Wilson and Boone were the two authors. I would say that probably Representative Wilson was the one that was able to work out more of the details than anyone else. I'd give him more credit than anyone.

Marcello: He's another one of those relatively young legislators who, I gather, is making high marks for himself, too.

Parker: Well, he's doing a real fine job. He gets himself involved in a few areas each time like all of us do. Whatever he becomes interested in, he does a lot of homework, and he becomes very effective in that.

Marcello: This brings up an interesting point because I think this is probably something that every state legislator has to do. You have to sacrifice in certain areas, I would assume, when you're in Austin. You mentioned, for example, that the Appropriations Committee obviously took up a tremendous amount of your time, which, in turn, meant that you perhaps couldn't devote as much study to the education bill or some of these other bills that you perhaps would have liked.

Parker: Well, it's just humanly impossible to do. I have an interest in appropriations, I work with appropriations, and I'd say that the biggest percentage of my time is spent with it. I just do not have the time . . . I can't be the jack-of-all-trades and master of none. I've decided that in my observation that people that are the

most effective in the Legislature are those that kind of specialize in one area and then have to . . . they do a lot of research or have their staff do research for them. But you've got to be effective in one line. That's what I think Wilson has done. He picks out each year some particular phase, and he follows it through just like basically I've always done on appropriations.

Marcello: I think this point was especially brought out to me in my interviews with Senator Clower, who, obviously, was very much interested in public utilities regulation. It occupied just about all of his time during that legislative session.

Parker: Well, it will take all of your time. You know, on appropriations we met, conservatively, about five hundred hours. Well, if you just, you know, divide 500 hours down on a normal, say, ten-hour day, that would be fifty days. Now we're in session only about 140 days. But you've got to take your weekends off for that. When you get down to it, instead of having 140 days, you've got about eighty days of actual time that you're there, and I actually spend about fifty of that eighty on appropriations. I think this would be true of Senator Clower. He probably did the same thing on the utilities deal.

Marcello: And again, you mentioned that you met approximately 500 hours with regard to appropriations. This does

not include, however, the amount of time that you spent on it outside committee.

Parker: That's correct. This is just where you're sitting in there listening and . . . gosh, the many people from my district and from throughout the state that I visited with on it would cover many, many hours. I don't have any idea of what amount of time we spent on it.

Marcello: Getting back to the public utilities bill again, I don't know if this is an indication of Clayton's fairness, but as we mentioned, the House bill was considerably stronger than that Senate bill. This is interesting to me because Clayton was fundamentally opposed to the creation of a public utilities commission.

Parker: He wasn't fundamentally opposed. He was absolutely opposed. If there was one thing he was opposed to, that was it. The very first remarks . . . I said he was fair about the majority of things. He allowed us to have a fair run on the situation.

Marcello: You did mention Representative Uher awhile ago. Of course, the public utilities bill did go to the State Affairs Committee. There was some trouble getting it out of that committee, I think.

Parker: Very definitely. The only way it came out was the fact that the speaker just ordered it out. That's the only way. The speaker could have kept it in that committee

because I can tell you that Uher can stand the pressure, and it wouldn't have bothered him at all to have sat on it. But the speaker gave his word that we would have a chance to vote on it, and he saw to it that it was brought out.

Marcello: Okay, let's move on to another area. We can just discuss this one very briefly, I think: constitutional revision. There was a constitutional convention, but nevertheless a document didn't come out of the convention. You met in the 64th Session of the Legislature, and it didn't take any time at all for the Legislature to approve a constitution. What happened? How come it was able to get through so quickly during the session?

Parker: Well, fundamentally, it was just one thing that kept it from passing before . . . and it passed. If you remember it passed by a wide majority, but it lacked three votes of having a two-thirds majority, which is a pretty . . . it's a pretty tough thing to get a two-thirds vote in anything. But the underlying thing that was responsible for its defeat during the convention was placing in the constitution a section that would have . . . the so-called right-to-work law that we have at the present time. Making that part of the constitution was the thing that turned off enough people to defeat the Constitutional Convention. Well, it was never considered during this

time, and the feeling was that it is a law and it will remain a law such as it is right now. And if the majority of the people change their thinking, then it can be changed just like any other law. Since we took that up, then we didn't have any trouble on getting the constitution out.

Marcello: In other words, what you're saying is that the right-to-work provision ought to remain part of statutory law and not a part of the constitution itself.

Parker: That is correct. In fact, if we could have had a pure constitution, this would have been better than what we have written. But there's no way to write a pure constitution when you've had a hundred years' experience. And some people have talked to me and said, "Why don't you write one like the federal constitution?" Well, when they wrote the federal constitution, they were starting at absolutely zero. If they were to write the federal constitution today, it wouldn't be anything like that since we've had 200 years of experience. We'd have one heck of a time getting a federal constitution done in this time. I think we're real fortunate to have it, and I am supporting it 100 per cent.

Marcello: Did you receive very much flak in your district over the fact that the Constitutional Convention did not come out with a document?

Parker: Yes, I did. I received mail from a lot of people that felt like that we had gone down there and spent several million dollars and not come up with anything. I think they were deeply concerned. Their deepest concern was that they felt like they should have the right to vote on something. They didn't care what it was. They just felt like they had the right to turn it down instead of us turning it down. And I shared their opinion.

Marcello: Do you think that this was perhaps a motivating factor in getting the constitution approved during the 64th Session?

Parker: Oh, I think very definitely that it is. I want to say this--I don't know whether this is running along the line with that or not--but when we had the Constitutional Convention, there were probably eight or ten people that made up both House members and Senate members who from the day that we opened the convention were 1,000 per cent against the convention. They are still against it right now and are the ones that are leading the parade to get it defeated. But they are also the ones that never attended any meetings. They just felt like they were wasting their time during the convention being down there, so they also are the ones that are leading this thing against the defeat of the constitution.

Marcello: Who are some of these individuals so adamantly opposed to it?

Parker: Well, I see Senator Peyton McKnight, Senator Creighton, Senator Moore from Bryan, Representative Heatly from West Texas. These are just four that I know. They were opposed to it before the convention ever started, and they're still opposed to it right now. But they didn't work during the convention, in my opinion, like the rest of the people did. They were just so opposed to it. That's the reason they didn't work. I want to justify this. They just felt like it was wrong from the word "go," and they just didn't put any effort into it because they knew they were going to vote against it when it got through.

Marcello: Okay, one last question now. You represent a district that has two major colleges located within it. We mentioned awhile ago that higher education in particular was demanding more funding than usual during this session. What sort of an effect did this have upon the two universities in Denton?

Parker: Well, I can't say it had any major effect on these two because I think that according to the funds that were appropriated to them, they came out far better than they ever have in the past. However, I think that the general attitude in the Legislature was that they were being real greedy about it.

Marcello: Now when you say "they," you're referring to all schools.

Parker: I'm talking about 150 representatives and thirty-one senators. They felt that they were being real greedy, and this may have an effect in future years on their appropriations.

Marcello: Is this mainly due to declining enrollments and over-built physical structures?

Parker: Basically, the fact was that for most schools the enrollment has been the same for about the last six years. Yet, their funds have gone up over probably 40 per cent during those six years. You're trying to figure out, where does the money go? It's pretty hard to justify it. I have always gotten along well there, but that is a big burden that I carry down there each time--trying to make sure that we get what I consider the necessary amounts for our two schools. However, we built up during this last time a real strong resentment against higher education, which it had formerly taken us about six years to kind of calm down. Now we've got it started back again, and so I don't know what effect it'll have in the future, but I think it'll have some effect.

Marcello: Okay, in summing up, how would you rate this 64th Legislature in terms of all the previous ones you've served in?

Parker: Well, I would say that it had the most problems to try to confront, and I thought it was the most

productive of all of them. Now some of them have been more . . . well, it's been more newsworthy in the newspaper. But as far as when you get down to the actual nuts and bolts of it, I thought this session was the most productive we've had.

Marcello: Well, we've mentioned school finance, public utilities regulation, and constitutional revision. Those three things were very, very important and very, very fundamental, and something did come out of the Legislature in every case. Perhaps they were not what everybody wanted, but steps were made.

Parker: Well, I've thought that . . . what you've mentioned, those three, any one of them would have been a real accomplishment. But we were able to accomplish all three of them.

Marcello: To what do you attribute the fact that these accomplishments did come forward? Was it leadership? Was it the experience of the state legislators? This was a veteran House, for example.

Parker: I consider it very definitely to the experience of the House members, but I want to give credit, too, to the fact that for the first time since I've been in the Legislature, we had the speaker and the lieutenant governor and the governor that could at least talk to each other. In the past this has not always been. Now

Bill Clayton got along well with Hobby, and a lot of the problems were worked out between those two people. I'd have to say that both of them got along better than average with the governor. It was more of a cooperative effort this time between those three people instead of each one kind of running his separate ways. Now whether it'll be that way in future years, I don't know.

Again, in this session most of our representatives in the House were experienced people. They'd at least been there one term. Whereas, under Speaker Daniel, you can't fault him too much because, as I remember, we had seventy-six new ones. So it takes . . . frankly, it takes at least one term for a person to really know what's going on. You come down there with great aspirations and you're going to change everything, but then when you get down there and you see what it is . . .

Marcello: When you're confronted by the rules.

Parker: Confronted by the rules and the responsibility. Then when you have the rules and the responsibility, you can't always do the changes that you've been telling your constituents you were going to do when you ran for election for the first time.

Marcello: One last question. Did you see any marked changes in the governor between this term and the last term?

Parker: I very definitely did. During his first term, there was little direction at all, as far as I'm personally concerned, given to us prior to the passage of the bill. I would still like for Governor Briscoe to be more forceful and to exercise more leadership prior to the passage of the bill rather than letting the bill pass and then criticizing the bill. I think that he improved this tremendously during this term.

Marcello: Okay, well, Walt, once again I want to thank you for taking the time to contribute your thoughts concerning this particular legislative session. It's been a most candid interview, and we're looking forward to having many more with you.

Parker: Well, thank you very much for allowing me to participate.