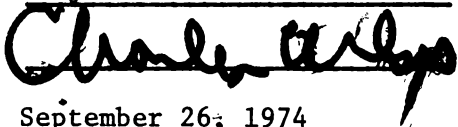


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Interview with  
Senator Charles Wilson  
January 1, 1972

Place of Interview: Lufkin, Texas  
Interviewer: James Riddlesperger  
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Oral History Collection

Charles Wilson

Interviewer: Mr. J. W. Riddlesperger

Place of Interview: Lufkin, Texas

Date: January 4, 1972

Mr.

Riddlesperger: I am J. W. Riddlesperger interviewing Senator Charles Wilson for the Oral History Collection at North Texas State University. The date is January 4, 1972. The general topic will be legislative politics for Texas teachers. Senator, will you give a short biographical view?

Wilson: Well, I was born and raised in Trinity, Texas, which is a small town in mid-east Texas. I went to school at the Naval Academy at Annapolis. I served for four and a half years in the Navy and was elected to the Texas House while still in the Navy in 1960. I served in the House of Representatives for six years. I am finishing my fifth year in the Senate, and I announced for the United States Congress this month. I make my living as the manager of a large discount lumber yard in Diboll, Texas, which is owned by Temple Industries.

Riddlesperger: You didn't give the date of your birth there.

Wilson: Oh, 1 June 1933. I am thirty-eight years old.

Riddlesperger: Senator, our interest, of course, is trying to give a realistic picture of the state Legislature to Texas teachers. What legislation have you been mostly interested in as a member of the Texas Legislature?

Wilson: Basically, I have been interested in some losing causes. I have been more or less the leader in efforts to establish a state utilities regulatory commission, Texas being the only state in the country that doesn't have one. I have been interested in trying to curtail the continued and increasing Texas dependence on consumer taxation--the sales taxes rather than a more progressive taxation. I have sponsored all the constitutional amendments to raise the ceiling on welfare because I feel that Texas is lacking a great deal in what it pays the old and the helpless in the state in order to sustain a life with some caliber of dignity. I have authored the various constitutional revision amendments, which are going to be on the ballot next November, to revise the constitution as well as the amendments to provide for four-year terms, higher salaries, and annual sessions of the Legislature.

Riddlesperger: Well, that sounds like a rather extensive thing. In setting forth this program, how do you think, by the way,

you can get elected in the same district that elected a man like Congressman Dowdy?

**Wilson:** Well, that is a good question. This is the district that George Wallace carried, a district that is generally regarded as extremely conservative and racist, but I have been able to appeal to the pocketbooks of the working people of the district. Most of the people are working people. They generally favor my views on automobile insurance, they favor my views on utility regulation, and they favor my views on taxation. So although they may suspect that regarding generally progressive social legislation I am not entirely in step with them. I think they generally will vote for me because they feel that I am not afraid to tackle the people who abuse them economically.

**Riddlesperger:** That's a very interesting statement. Let's get down to the legislative thing. You sponsored a bill in the Legislature . . . does the utilities lobby raise money to oppose you in the elections?

**Wilson:** Certainly. They sure do. And that's where I think my opposition in the congressional race will be primarily financed from. I have not had as much problem with the electric lobby as I have had with the telephone lobby

because although I have introduced bills to regulate investor-owned power companies, I have not attacked them with the vehemence I attacked the telephone companies because I don't think they are quite as abusive. Their profit picture is not as high, and they don't have totally unregulated situations such as intrastate long distance, and they are more responsive to the needs of the people and do a much better PR job. But I will be opposed by them, naturally, and vehemently opposed by the telephone company, but I am prepared for that. I might say, just as a matter of speaking, George Wallace carried this district, and he has always attacked the utilities, too!

Riddlesperger: Maybe you will get some votes for it. Of course, basically, I think Wallace's basic appeal is what we call the old Populist appeal, and probably yours is, too.

Wilson: Except for the racial . . .

Riddlesperger: Racial, yes.

Wilson: Wallace also employs a basic anti-intellectualism that I try to avoid!

Riddlesperger: Yes. Now these bills, when they are introduced, what does the lobby do to oppose the passage of these bills once they are in the Legislature?

Wilson: Well, in the first place there are so many of them. In one session of the Legislature we counted 126 telephone lobbyists that were in Austin at various times--just telephone companies, not counting the power companies and the gas companies. So they just overwhelmed the Legislature by sheer numbers and entertainment and campaign contributions and those kind of things. In addition to that, their most effective ploy is going to the little towns, or the big cities, really, and convincing the big cities--the city councilmen in Dallas in particular but Houston certainly no less--they convince the city council that the state is going to be taking away one of their powers of regulation, and, of course, the city council doesn't want this because in cities that are a closed shop kind of thing like Dallas especially, and Houston to a large extent . . . that's where a tremendous amount of campaign money comes from--the utilities. Dallas is really the best example. The vast majority of the city council . . . in fact, all the city council with the exception of Jesse Price this time has been elected with the endorsement of the Citizens Charter Association. Now the head moguls in the Citizens Charter Association in Dallas are the utilities executives. The president of

Texas Power and Light, president of Texas Utilities, the president of Southwestern Bell, and all those people furnish a great deal of the money and a great deal of prestige. So it is only natural that Mayor Eric Jonson and his city council were very sympathetic to their viewpoint, and they send people down to Austin to oppose the utility regulation, and consequently we get no votes from Dallas on utility regulation. That's the basic thing. When you have a bill and you are opposed by several hundred lobbyists and there is no one on your side with any money and in addition to that you look up and you see dozens of city councilmen and mayors who have been put in office by these utility companies coming down also opposing it, it's just a pretty tough deal.

Riddlesperger: I would think so.

Wilson: Last time we got eighteen votes in the Senate which wasn't enough. It requires two-thirds to pass a bill in the Senate, and last session we got eighteen when there were only thirty on the floor voting, so if we had two more votes last session, we would have passed the bill. I think it is an ideal whose time will probably come, and sooner or later some young, vigorous senator is going to be able to pass the bill.



Riddlesperger: Speaking of that, you say it takes two-thirds to call up a bill like this.

Wilson: That's right. The Senate operates under rules which are very detrimental to the passage of new and progressive legislation, and to bring up a bill it requires two-thirds of those present voting, which really denies the majority rule. That's a rule which should be changed and I hope will be changed in the future. The Senate also requires two-thirds . . . for instance, on the utilities bill something like that is a close thing. We had eighteen votes for it, and the other side had twelve. Well, that bill should have certainly passed. Yet, when you get into a piece of legislation that the lieutenant governor is for, for instance, he has various methods of bringing up bills on the calendar where it doesn't take that and where they can pass a food tax by fifteen to fourteen.

Riddlesperger: The lieutenant governor also appoints the committees, of course. Do you find the committee structure in the Senate also opposed to your type of legislation?

Wilson: Well, generally. Lieutenant Governor Barnes has, in all fairness, recognized the fact that in last session the Senate was very evenly divided. For that reason he evenly divided the major policy committees, such as the

State Affairs Committee. On the State Affairs Committee eleven, for lack of a better word, conservatives and ten liberals. So all you had to do was to get one of them on your side . . . and I did. I got the utilities bill out of that committee with three or four conservative votes. I got it out by a big vote.

Riddlesperger: What regulations do you think should be placed on the lobby that is not on them now?

Wilson: Oh, I noticed where one state . . . I believe it was an eastern state--New Hampshire or Rhode Island or somebody. I believe it was Rhode Island that passed a law that made them all wear badges in the capitol so everybody would know who they were. I think that their activities should be curtailed greatly. I think that they should be readily identifiable. I think that the most stringent public knowledge should be made available on the amount of money that they spend on their entertainment. I don't know whether there is anything that we can do about it or not, but I question the propriety of the lobbyists actually drafting legislation as they do now. But, really, I believe that the answer more than controlling the lobby, which, of course, needs to be done, is the people of Texas electing more enlightened and more independent members.

Riddlesperger: Getting back to the lobby and the ethics bill, which is of the lobby problem, what kind of measures should be adopted? I know Senator Hall has been pushing an ethics bill. What sort of ethics bill do we need?

Wilson: We need a bill which would provide full financial disclosure, which the present bill does not. Although Senator Hall and I are not very close politically, I really believe that Senator Hall honestly wanted a strong ethics bill last session, and it was corrupted on the floor of the Senate. The original bill that he introduced was a very strong bill that would have done a lot of what needed to be done. Although I very seldom take the side of Senator Hall on an issue, I would say that he is right in his contention that he tried hard to get a good strong, effective piece of ethics legislation. Now it was not just corrupted on the floor of the Senate. It was done greater violence by the conference committee because Mutscher's appointees obviously wanted as weak a bill as possible.

Riddlesperger: Yes. Senator Christie, I believe, is running for lieutenant governor.

Wilson: That's right.

Riddlesperger: He has come out for full disclosure. Have you noticed anything about what his bill . . . what his ideas are?

Wilson: Well, the Hall ethics bill, or the ethics bill that was passed, did not provide for full disclosure. Senator Christie has called upon all of the other candidates for lieutenant governor to provide full disclosure, and he just filed a personal financial statement showing all his assets and his income, which I think that they should all do but there is nothing to make them do it.

Riddlesperger: Going back just a minute on this lobby thing, the lobbyists are now supposed to sign up and say who they are working for. My understanding is that Gulf Oil can hire a law firm in Dallas . . . it can hire lobbyists without really showing where the money is coming from on the report.

Wilson: No, I don't think that is right. I think that the law now is violated a lot. People don't pay much attention to it in some cases. For instance, Waggoner Carr never registered as a lobbyist for the Sharpstown bill, although he admitted in the grand jury and, as I understand it, in the newspapers and at the general investigating committee hearings that he did come over and did lobby for those bills on the Senate. But I believe that the law requires that a man show who he is representing on a certain piece of legislation.

Riddlesperger: Now what about the lobbyist reports between sessions?

Wilson: There are none.

Riddlesperger: And that is a hole in the circle, certainly.

Wilson: But really, the crux of it is that you are never going to control the lobby situation. It is just too complex and there are just too many, and it is too . . . the crux of the situation is in the cost of campaigning and in electing independent people. It is very difficult to elect independent people to the State Senate when the State Senate race costs \$40,000 to \$50,000 and the job pays \$5,000 a year. It takes men that are exceptional to . . . if they are independent and are progressive, it takes very exceptional men, and when you have exceptional men, they, of course, could be doing much better for themselves and their families somewhere else. You not only have to have exceptional men, but you have to have exceptional men willing to make financial sacrifices. That's the problem as well as where are you going to get the money. Now we have a very fine state representative here in Lufkin that had practically announced for the State Senate and had been working hard, but he told me yesterday that he was going to have to withdraw after three months of effort because he simply could not raise the money. He couldn't raise the minimum amount of money.

Riddlesperger: I noticed right along with this money the filing fees. There is a constitutional question now. Do you have any feelings on how the support of the primaries could be changed in Texas or should be changed?

Wilson: Well, of course, theoretically the state should bear the financial burden of the primaries, and it shouldn't cost people a lot of money to file. On the other hand, it is not necessarily in the public interest to have everybody in a district that wants to get a little personal publicity or that's just a crank . . . it is not necessarily in the public interest to have thirty or forty people on the ballot for one of these offices. So that is one of the few questions that I don't have a ready answer for. I haven't formulated the Wilson solution for that problem yet.

Riddlesperger: You know in Britain they require a deposit of several hundred dollars or the equivalent, and if they don't get a certain percentage of the vote, they forfeit.

Wilson: That's a good idea. I hadn't thought of it. That sounds like a pretty good solution. Make them put up a couple of thousand dollars probably, and if they don't get a certain percentage of the vote, they don't get it back.

Riddlesperger: That's right. Now in your pushing of the bill to regulate the telephone companies, can you give some of the things that the telephone companies are doing which got you to do this?

Wilson: Yes, many things. I first got interested in about 1964 when Texas Telephone and Telegraph . . . now the rural . . . you have to understand a few things here to start with. Texas is the only state in the country that does not have a utilities commission. The cities have token regulatory power, but that's all it is because the small cities like Lufkin and Nacogdoches simply don't have the money to have the rate studies made and to have the service performance studies made to effectively regulate them. But besides that, in the small rural areas that are unincorporated--and all the people that live out in the country have absolutely no protection whatsoever--the telephone company does exactly what they want. They charge what they want, they provide the service they want, and if the people don't like it, they can have their phone taken out. In addition to that, there is no regulatory authority whatsoever that can regulate the cost of intrastate long-distance telephone calls. Consequently, the telephone companies charge what they

want, and our rates in Texas are higher than they are anywhere else in the country. Now the thing that got me started was that Texas Telephone and Telegraph Company arbitrarily raised the rates by 50 per cent in the rural areas that I represented when I was a state representative, where the people had no choice whatsoever. Like there are two little towns in South Angelina County--Huntington and Zavala. They sit right next to each other. Huntington was incorporated but Zavala wasn't. The company raised the rates 50 per cent in Zavala but didn't raise them in Huntington because they would have to have gone through the city council. That infuriated me, especially when I started looking into the matter and found that there was no place to go, no arbitrator, no referee. Then after doing some studies on it, I began to discover the other abuses that took place in this state, such as down at Clear Lake. There were three telephone companies operating there under the auspices of Southwestern Bell. There was a motel, the Ramada Inn, where there was a barbershop in one end of the Ramada Inn, and if the guy in the barbershop wanted to call the desk and tell them that the air conditioning wasn't working, it was long distance. Now that sort of thing



exists all over Texas. In a little town called Snook-- that's near Bryan--General Telephone and Telegraph has two exchanges, and it is long distance for people to call across the street. Those things are just all over this state and nowhere else in the country. It is just basically wrong for a monopoly not to be regulated. I manage a lumber yard. If we charge too much for our two-by-fours, people buy them somewhere else. So we are regulated by the law of the marketplace. People that believe in free enterprise believe in regulation by the law of the marketplace and believe in that discipline. But the telephone company and other utilities are monopolies and have no discipline. They should be regulated. That's an accepted principle everywhere in the world but in Texas.

Riddlesperger: Of course, that's a real big issue. I teach government regulation at North Texas, and I know something of what you are talking about. I think it is a very interesting thing. Let's get back. You were in the House awhile. What changes in House rules, particularly in regard to the speaker, do you think should be made to modernize their procedures?

Wilson: Well, first of all, there should be some system of committee assignments other than simply by the speaker

himself. That puts too much power in his hands. Now I am not familiar with what the reformist members of the Congress want to do. They have got a seniority system that limits the power of the speaker. Now all the reform members of Congress are very unhappy with the pure seniority system. If you get down to what is purely the most democratic thing, it is for the Senate or the House itself to elect its committee chairmen. I think that is probably true in Congress, too, for a democratic caucus to elect their committee chairmen. But we are talking about in the realm of the possible rather than the ideal. I would think that a limited seniority system in the House, where every member of the House is allowed to select two of the committees he presently serves on and be automatically put on those committees next time, and with the chairman of the committee being the man that has been there the longest is a start. That's not a good system, but it is at least better than putting all this power in the hands of the speaker. Secondly, conference committees should be limited to the differences between the two houses rather than new approaches. Thirdly, the speaker should have an absolute reporting of his campaign contributions

and any money that he receives to implement his living expenses. Lastly, I am undecided about whether or not the speaker should be limited to one term. I think if you do these other things, you have diluted his power to the extent that the abuses that have taken place wouldn't take place in the future.

Riddlesperger: What about the number of committees?

Wilson: Oh, another thing which is rather technical is that the Rules Committee should be abolished. If a bill gets out of the committee which studies that subject, that should be the end of it. There should not be a Rules Committee that the speaker can use as a stranglehold on any legislation that he doesn't want.

Riddlesperger: Do they do that a great deal now?

Wilson: Oh, absolutely. And that was a Barnes innovation. But if a bill comes out of the State Affairs Committee, then it is in the Rules Committee, and the speaker just has an absolute life or death say as to whether the bill comes out of the Rules Committee or not.

Riddlesperger: The Senate doesn't have anything of this nature. They use the two-thirds thing will do it.

Wilson: That's right.

Riddlesperger: What about the number of the committees in the House and Senate?

Wilson: Oh, there are too many, but that doesn't harm anything in my opinion. From an academic standpoint you could say that it should be streamlined, but it doesn't really harm anything or cost any money. It just provides other members with a little more recognition. You know, some guy gets to be chairman of Highways and Roads, and it doesn't mean a thing in the world except it gives him a little pride, and since the public hasn't seen fit to pay the Legislature anything, well, maybe it doesn't hurt for a guy to have a little ego building by being chairman of Highways and Roads and meet once a session.

Riddlesperger: Assuming one of the reforms would call for annual pay, what is your feeling on annual sessions?

Wilson: Oh, absolutely that is the only hope. The way the lobbyists work is they try to delay. If I had annual sessions, I would have already passed the utilities bill because I could have marshalled public opinion, and I could have kept hitting them relentlessly every time, and I could have worn down the opposition. But just having biennial sessions, all they have to do is fight me off for four months every two years, and, of course, they can do that. This state operates on a seven billion dollar budget. It is completely absurd to try to budget seven billion dollars two years in advance. It is the

most natural thing in the world for the department heads in the state to try to pad their requests because no man can know what is coming in two years and nobody wants to be caught short. I run a little business that has sales of three million dollars a year, and, my Lord, we have to have major policy meetings once a month! You know, in a small business we can't project what we are going to sell in 1974.

Riddlesperger: Right. Of course, that brings in another thing--the committee staff for legislative research.

Wilson: The people of Texas would be very well rewarded for their investment in providing the money for higher pay and therefore higher quality in the Legislature and providing the money for good staff work for professional research work so the legislator can be independent of lobby information, which has to be slanted toward the lobbyists' line.

Riddlesperger: I was interested in your reference awhile ago to the consumer taxes. How effective is the lobby down there in the matter of taxes?

Wilson: Oh, they are extremely effective. We lost the corporate income tax last session by one vote. In my opinion two votes were bought by the lobby, and in my opinion, if they had needed to buy four, they could have bought four.

Riddlesperger: Just that simple.

Wilson: Yes. We are the last major industrial state in the United States that doesn't have a corporate income tax and one of the last ten in the whole United States that doesn't have a corporate income tax. Even Mississippi and Alabama have got a corporate income tax.

Riddlesperger: I keep thinking about the new bill on local school taxes and the reforms that are going to be necessary to make. The Legislature perhaps is going to have to do that, and I noticed that the Texas Research League, I believe they call themselves, was making a study, which is a lobby organization when you come right down to it.

Wilson: Yes. But I am pretty much a defender of the League because they have . . . and they . . . the people . . . now that is not exactly a lobby organization but is supported by corporate contributions. But they have hired a caliber of staff that run that that are such that their professional competency and integrity is pretty well accepted by members of the Legislature that are not necessarily friendly to the corporate interests, such as myself.

Riddlesperger: I have noticed that, too. Now getting to the appropriations bill, I think it is a very interesting bill. When the

appropriations bill comes out of conference, how much does the individual senator know about the bill?

Wilson: The only thing I ever know about the bill is the things that directly are affecting my district. Those are the things I know about. Those are the things that I look and see--what Stephen F. Austin has got, what the Lufkin State School has got, what the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation has got, what the Corsicana State Home has got, what my River Authority has got. And then for the rest of it I have to depend on people who have more expertise on appropriations than I do because I don't have a staff to study it myself. For instance, if Senator Aikin tells me that public school teachers are well provided for, well, I generally feel that he knows. If Lieutenant Governor Barnes tells me that higher education is well provided for, I have to trust him. Those are the people in those areas who have paid the most attention to it. People ask me if they have provided as well as we can within the constitutional limits for people on old age assistance because that is a deal that I have a certain amount of expertise in.

Riddlesperger: You know, I was interested in a report on some bills on Texas colleges that Governor Smith didn't . . .

of course, he didn't know certain things were in the bill, and other members of the Legislature . . . I think this is very interesting because many times various organizations say, "Well, you are supposed to know what is in that bill!" I know, for instance, the Vending Commission was supposed to have some regulations, and I know Chairman Raymond Williams, I believe, had some loopholes in there which kept them from being taxed and didn't do what the bill was set up to do.

Wilson: That's right but how in the world . . . there were 3,000 bills introduced last session. Two thousand got out of committee, and 1,000 went to the governor. Now with my efforts in taking on 145 or 150 telephone lobbyists, as well as the lobbyists from all the other utilities, and in worrying about old age assistance, and worrying about my own district's appropriations, and in worrying about the tax bill, how in the world am I going to be intelligently advised of what is in those 2,000 bills that come out of committee along with my own committee assignments.

Riddlesperger: It keeps going back to annual sessions and unlimited sessions.

Wilson: That and . . .



Riddlesperger: And staffs.

Wilson: . . . and staffs, right. Just to be frank about it . . . there are not many people who would agree because none of them likes to see his power diluted, but I also think that we should have more senators than thirty-one.

Riddlesperger: Yes. That's one of the questions . . .

Wilson: I think that in Texas the senators represent more people than anywhere else in the country. We are extremely powerful in our own little bailiwicks, etc., and all that, but especially with not having annual sessions I think the workload is just too great. There are too many local bills and things you have to deal with and too many of your constituents that you have to service. You have to help them with their old age assistance. River authorities, you know, people want to be appointed and all that. I have got five major river authorities, and you could spend full time just servicing your constituents as a state senator. Since it is a part-time job, you just can't represent 360,000 people as they should be represented.

Riddlesperger: If the salaries of the state legislators were raised to, oh, \$25,000 or \$30,000 a year along with adequate staffing of the offices in Austin, do you think that this would actually increase the efficiency enough to pay the state to do it?

- Wilson: Oh, yes! As far as saving in taxes and that sort of thing, the people would be returned tenfold.
- Riddlesperger: Do you have any feelings on single member districts?
- Wilson: Absolutely! Anyone that is honest will admit that multi-member districts are simply a ploy used by those people who have money and want to preserve the status quo. It is used to deprive the minorities and liberals and Republicans from being elected in the cities. It is indefensible from a moral standpoint, and any honest adherent of multi-member districts, after a drink or two, will admit it is indefensible.
- Riddlesperger: Of course, we people up at Denton have had a good taste of that with the fifteen members under the domination of a Dallas group which includes the University of Texas at Dallas with our lone representative there.
- Wilson: Incidentally, I cast the vote that killed the extra two years for that last year.
- Riddlesperger: We appreciate every little thing. Do you have any other ideas? I know there is criticism of the staffing of the speaker's office. They must have about forty or fifty people on the staff. What does the speaker do with that kind of staff between sessions?
- Wilson: Well, for instance, Gus hired a lot of his friends that were defeated--some of them. Joe Shannon, for instance,

from Fort Worth that Senator Kennard defeated went to work for Gus much like President Nixon makes them ambassador to the UN when they get defeated. But . . . are you . . . did you ask me why that happened?

Riddlesperger: Yes. What in the world . . .

Wilson: And also, if a man has twenty professional people working for him, that increases his power and the things he can do and his chances of being re-elected. Now the lieutenant governor uses a big staff, but he uses them for more reasons than to attend to his politics and to build a base. He uses them to better service his constituents, but by the same token service him. Speaker Mutscher used his to reward friends and to keep control of the House. The lieutenant governor has great capacities of leadership, in my opinion, and was able to pretty well run the Senate without any staff help.

Riddlesperger: You talk about the lobby and you think about the lobby and you think about the sharp escapades down at Houston and so forth. Do you think that you as a senator could make a great deal of money if a certain lobbyist found out that you would accept various kinds of help, or would they suspect you too much?

Wilson: Well, of course, you could make money, but it is more subtle than that. It would be more difficult for me,

not being an attorney. But now the people who are attorneys that cater to the lobbyists do well, I think, through retainer fees. I have had three different members of the Senate tell me they would like to vote the utilities regulation, but they can't because that is one of their best retainer fees. I honor their honesty. But a man needs to build himself a power base as a legislative ally of the corporate interests, and it takes awhile for them to really thoroughly trust him and for them to provide him with the favors that will enable him to make a lot of money. This is done through investment opportunities, it is done through retainer fees, and it is done through allowing him a great deal of credit that he ordinarily wouldn't have been entitled to. However, I think that most of the legislation is not influenced in that manner, but it is influenced in the lobby electing people who . . . especially in the Senate. In my opinion, the Senate doesn't have near the ratio of crooks that the House does. The people that keep progressive legislation from passing in the Senate are people who are philosophically opposed to it, and the lobby is successful in electing those people rather than in making them wealthy after they get there.

Riddlesperger: They're supporting the right type of people.

Wilson: That's right. Now that's not true for every member of the Senate. We have got a couple of crooks in the Senate, too. But generally speaking, of the twelve that voted against my utilities bill, I would say eight or nine of them voted against it because they simply didn't believe in government regulation, even of a monopoly.

Riddlesperger: Well, what about the insurance lobby? I noticed that Senator McKool had quite a hassle with them.

Wilson: I think the oil and gas lobby is the strongest lobby in Austin. I think the second strongest lobby in Austin is the insurance lobby, and I think the third strongest is probably the utility lobby.

Riddlesperger: Now these lobbies work together on occasion.

Wilson: Oh, since 1960 they have been . . . since they had the election of a moderate speaker rather than a conservative speaker in 1961, they just banded together and just maintained a common front on almost everything. The oil and gas lobbyists, although they tell me they don't fight my telephone bill, I know that socially and all they bad-mouth it and say it's "anti-business." So they are opposed to anything, and then, of course, the telephone

people go around and say that oil and gas taxes are "anti-business." Of course, they are all together fighting corporate income taxes.

Riddlesperger: It is a pretty neat package in a state like Texas.

Wilson: That's right. I might also point out for your consideration that I don't think this kind of situation exists in anything but a southern, one-party state where there is no party responsibility. Now if we had a situation in Texas where the Republicans were opposed to utility regulation and the Democrats were for utility regulation, well, then it would have passed many years ago because neither party would have wanted the onus of being for higher electric bills. But where you have a situation where there is no party responsibility and it is just individual effort, you just can't build the kind of public support for it.

Riddlesperger: I am glad to hear you say that because one of the rules of thumb is that the stronger the two-party system, the weaker the lobbyists.

Wilson: That's right. See, in Texas we have a unique situation in that you have a major industrial state with a large, wealthy corporate community, and you have a one-party state. It is the only state in the country. That's why we are the only state in the country that doesn't have a utilities commission.

Riddlesperger: That's right.

Wilson: The only thing that could make Texas any worse, in my opinion, from the standpoint of lobby control would be to have pari-mutuel betting. Then it might be funny because you would have the Mafia coming down taking the control away from the corporate crooks!

Riddlesperger: (Chuckle) You put them pretty close together.

Wilson: Yes (chuckle)!

Riddlesperger: Well, you know, speaking of that, I know that certain members of the Legislature, leadership included, were elected as barefoot boys and now are quite wealthy. A lot of this is giving people the right opportunities.

Wilson: That's right. It is giving them the right opportunities, making the conservative people in their communities wanting to help them. And then in a couple of instances which I don't want to put on tape but I'll discuss with you afterward, the people who are effective in protecting the lobby interests are people of great intellectual ability that would have been wealthy anyway.

Riddlesperger: It is a very interesting thing because I think the key in Texas legislation probably is the lobby . . . power connected to a constitution that needs revision. Now what steps should be taken now, do you think . . . you

are voting on this constitutional amendment that you said you sponsored, I believe, which would in a sense have turned over to the Legislature the power . . . you think that is the best, or do you think it is only . . . just politicking?

**Wilson:** I think it is both. Now you would say, I presume, that it would be better to elect the constitutional convention . . . just elected by the people. But I would say that is wrong for a very practical reason, and the practical reason is that you wouldn't have anybody vote except the special interest people in such an election. You would absolutely have no interest. You would have a lot better chance, and you will have a lot less . . . bad as the Legislature is, it will be less special interest because of the greater voter participation in the election. It will be a much more representative body of all of the people than an elected constitutional convention. In an elected constitutional convention you are not going to have anybody run except leading establishment types . . . businessmen in the area.

**Riddlesperger:** Yes. Of course, the others . . . I was thinking of the system that would bring up one amendment after another . . . for instance, one amendment to reform the executive



and one to reform the legislative and so on. And some people say that is the only practical method.

Wilson: Oh, no. Out of the Legislature next time, I don't think we are going to get a really progressive constitution, but I do think we are going to get a modestly modern constitution and one that is 2,000 per cent better than the one that we have got. It is not going to satisfy you and I completely, but it is going to be an enormous improvement, and I hope that it will let the Legislature provide for annual sessions, and I hope it will provide for the Legislature setting its own pay, and if the people think they do too much, they vote them out. Just like the Commissioner's Court. I hope it provides for four-year terms.

Riddlesperger: Well, do you have any other comments that you think might be useful in the matter of the reform of the Legislature that I failed to bring up, or reform of procedures or districting, or re-districting politics and so on of this nature?

Wilson: No. I think that the greatest failing of the last Legislature had was re-districting both in the House and in the Senate. It is my present intention to support the lieutenant governor for governor, and . . . but

for practical political reasons I think that he deliberately re-districted Dallas and Houston in order to deny the progressive forces Senate seats. I hope that bill is thrown out, but I have very little hope that it will be. But fair re-districting, better lobby control, better pay, annual sessions, adequate staff, and a realistic limit on campaign spending will make this a much better state for people to live in.

Riddlesperger: Well, thank you, Senator Wilson. We at North Texas State University will preserve this, and we certainly appreciate you giving your time to this interview. I think that in the future you will be interviewed by other people to get some of your ideas in addition to these. We sure appreciate your taking part in this.