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Interview with  
Representative Sarah Weddington  
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Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello  
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Oral History Collection

Representative Sarah Weddington

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Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Representative Sarah Weddington for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 11, 1977, in Austin, Texas. I'm interviewing Representative Weddington in order to get her reminiscences and experiences and impressions from the recently completed 65th Texas Legislature, which, incidently, is now in special session.

Representative Weddington, let me ask you just a few general questions first of all. I want you to comment on a few things that I am going to throw out to you here. According to an article in Texas Monthly, that particular magazine said that money was the dominant force in the 65th legislative session. How would you assess that statement?

Rep. Weddington: I would say that was a basically accurate statement.

We in Texas were very fortunate this session in that we

did have a surplus of money above what we had spent the last two years. So the main question for the session was how the extra funds would be spent and whether it would be spent.

I was one of those who voted against a vastly increased expenditure for highway funds when that matter was originally presented. Only after a compromise that did reduce the immediate expenditures considerably did I vote for the bill. It seemed to me that it was a very sad thing that that bill came up early, and it seemed as if the State Legislature of Texas was this year saying that our first priority, among all priorities, was putting more money into highways. I personally would have far preferred to see that considered with the overall appropriations bill and the overall appropriations process instead of being spent early in the session and put aside ahead of everything else.

Marcello: Did this highway appropriations bill come up suddenly, or were most of you expecting this?

Weddington: No, most of us were expecting it. The Good Roads Association had been lobbying on the measure for some time. The governor, before the session began, had indicated that that was something he felt was a major concern this session. It's my understanding that when the governor was, himself, a member of the House that he had worked particularly hard for the rural

roads bills and funding, and so he had a background interest in it. So it was certainly a bill that all of us expected to be introduced.

I personally did not expect it to have quite the momentum and the personal attention of the governor and the speaker, particularly, that it in fact did have. I personally was a little surprised when it passed with such a big expenditure of money early in the session.

Marcello: Evidently, there was quite a bit of clout behind that bill. The highway lobby groups were evidently quite active during that session.

Weddington: That's correct. I think that's very accurate. I think the other thing is that a lot of other groups that were particularly interested in how the state spends its money, like parents of retarded children or education concerns or even public employees, did not understand, at the time that the highway bill was being considered, that for every cent taken out of the till at that point, it meant fewer cents to divide up later. So even those groups which had a vested interest in how the state's money was spent didn't really oppose the highway bill. It was really only after the bill had passed the House and was in the Senate that legislators I am personally familiar with started getting any citizen input saying, "This is not the right time to pass that bill."

Marcello: Now when a governor labels a piece of legislation as "emergency" legislation, what precisely does that mean?

Weddington: Well, the normal rules that the House operates under are that you cannot consider any bill that spends money until after the general appropriations bill has been passed. The problem is that if you don't pass the general bill funding all the state's projects and instead if you pass a bunch of other stuff first, there may not be enough left for the routine spending of government. The governor, though, does have the authority to submit emergency measures. This time that included the highway bill, pay for retired teachers, some extra utilities money for state schools, and several other things. When a matter is designated as an emergency, it can be taken up and funded prior to consideration of the general appropriation bill.

Marcello: Now in the highway bill that ultimately emerged from the Legislature, money will actually be taken out of the general revenue fund to finance it, is that correct?

Weddington: That's correct. It would continue part of the dedication of monies that we've had traditionally from the gasoline tax and other things, but in addition it would set aside monies from future general revenues up to the amount that's guaranteed in the bill.

Marcello: Now is this breaking new ground?

Weddington: It is in the sense that we've never looked to general revenues for highway funding specifically. Several of us had questions about whether it wouldn't be better to let each Legislature deal with how much general revenue money should be spent on highways because of other needs that come up that you just don't foresee.

The highway lobby was very active in saying that they felt it necessary to plan ahead and know how much money they were going to have in order to know how many projects to plan and all. I can understand their concern about that, but it seems that same concern is shared by everything we fund; they would all rather know as far ahead as they could what monies would be available. So I personally didn't think it was a good policy decision.

Marcello: Ultimately, how did the early passage of that highway appropriations bill affect other legislation? Maybe you ought to apply this to some of your own legislation that you sponsored?

Weddington: I would say both directly and indirectly. In a direct sense, I think many of the members, even those who voted for the bill, because it was the governor's project and the speaker was very active in suggesting it would be nice for members

to vote for it . . . I think even members who did vote for it because of those reasons--many of them--did not like the bill, especially those who are more fiscally conservative in the Legislature. They felt that it was a real mistake, but yet they were under pressure to go ahead and pass it, and they did. I think it set up an attitude whereby members felt that the state's money was not being well-managed. In the appropriations bill, lots of things were added to the appropriation bill that we really didn't have the money for. In the education bill toward the end of the session, there were lots of things added that really we didn't have the money for.

I think the passage of the highway bill early, as did happen, sort of set up an attitude of saying, "Well, what's another hundred million?" You know, "Look at how much we've already spent!" I think, in retrospect, even those who were in favor of it might agree that it would have been better not to have done it that way. In terms of time, it didn't take up particularly a lot of time, so legislation was not held back because of that. But I think it was more just the problem of attitude and the approach, then, that members took.

Marcello: We talked awhile ago about pressure coming from the governor's office and then also pressure being exerted by the highway lobby. Can you speak from any personal experiences about this?



Weddington: From the governor's office, no. I think that often you have situations where a particular member or lobby group will know that there are a certain number of members who are going to favor their cause, and they really only worry with getting the rest of the ones necessary, not necessarily everybody in the House. So I was not personally approached by anyone from the governor's office in favor of it.

I did receive a great mass of literature from the Good Roads Association and had some friends in some of those industries drop by to emphasize the importance of the bill. But I was not the subject of any heavy lobbying, and I think that's partially from my prior record and from my district. They would more or less assume that I would not be voting for the bill unless it was toned down a lot, and I had said that publicly.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about another subject--public school finance--because that took up a great deal of time during the session and was ultimately responsible for the calling of this special session. What sort of a public school finance bill would you like to have seen passed?

Weddington: Well, I think a good public education bill has to have several facets in it. I personally do believe that we need to give some tax relief to rural farmlands. That is not in the interest of a major urban school district, such as the one

I represent, in a direct sense. Now we have some farmland in our area that would be helped, but by and large that would cut down on the revenues from those lands. But I think, as a state, that we have to recognize that having rural land and agriculture production is a crucial asset and something we ought to value, and we ought not to allow a situation where farmers are having to sell their land just to pay school taxes or taxes in general.

I think if we are going to decrease, really, the taxes on rural land, we must put more state money into public education funding, because I don't think we can completely fund education from property taxes, and that's what we're currently doing. It is obvious that there are some areas of the state where the property within a district is not worth nearly as much as property in other districts. So for that reason, I do believe in the equalization theory--that we take some state monies and we give it to those districts that just don't have the tax base within their own community.

I do believe we need a teacher pay raise, a lot of the things in terms of special spending, helping with maintenance of buildings, helping with more materials being available--that sort of thing. I think almost anyone in the Legislature you talk to will agree on the basic elements of a bill. Where we really get hung up in the Legislature is how much weight to

give different factors.

I have to think about Austin as an urban district, and for that reason I would say that there has to be enough money to make up for the fact that we have a whole lot of single-family dwellings that have homestead exemption or a lot of property that is exempt from taxation because of county and state government and so on and that the formula has to be one that both balances the need to give farmers special considerations and at the same time puts enough state money into the urban districts to help them operate. So I don't think you'll get a real variety of opinion on the factors to be considered, just on the balance.

Marcello: Now what you're saying, in effect, then, from your previous statement is that you are more or less in favor of using the productive value of rural land rather than the market value of rural land.

Weddington: Yes, that's right.

Marcello: Then balancing this out with those exemptions for the single-family dwellings?

Weddington: Yes, or giving some urban districts some extra money, realizing that they're not going to have much revenue because of land that does not pay taxes in the districts. I think what has happened in so many instances are that people who once had farmland a good bit away from town . . . as the town spread

out, the land is right on the edge of the development. You can certainly sell the land for apartment houses or shopping centers or whatever else for a whole lot more than you can make off the land. We ought not to be taxing farmers at the value their land represents because of its development potential when a city has expanded out close to the land. We ought to tax them more on what they can make on the land.

Marcello: Your stand seems to be an interesting one, assuming that you are a liberal legislator. Most liberal legislators were in favor of using the market value of land. Am I correct on that?

Weddington: I think there were many of them who felt that not using the market value meant so many extra state dollars going to those rural districts, that it was going to take money away from the urban districts. I do feel, though, that rural land is a state asset and that, even though not so much of it is in my particular district, it is something that we do have to consider as a responsible Legislature.

Marcello: What percentage of funding should the state put into the Permanent School Fund, the minimum school fund, as far as you're concerned? You know, right now it's about 75 per cent; the governor wanted to take it up to 90 per cent, I believe; ultimately, I think the speaker's bill would take it to 100 per cent somewhere down the line.

Weddington: Yes. I think you can't just say a percentage. This year with the monies left, you know, we are essentially going to put just about everything that's left into public education. From what they were saying in committee the other day, it appears that under that system we'll be paying over 80 per cent state funding.

The argument that's been used as to why we should not completely fund education is that you ought to have some leeway for local people to still be involved in education. The main way to keep control is always the purse strings, so that it's good for people to raise some money. I do not have any objection to having some local support required. I don't like the hundred per cent funding, but I think how much that the state can fund is really dependent, as it is in this session, on just how much money's available. That's, to me, the shame of passing the highway bill so early, because it really did cut down on the money that was available.

Marcello: Well, the speaker's ultimate aim in wanting 100 per cent financing was to bring about some sort of property tax relief, isn't this correct?

Weddington: Yes, that's correct. But any additional amount that we fund from the state does allow some tax relief. I believe the governor in his message to the special session this morning indicated that he wanted about \$300,000,000 extra added--state

money--now which would allow local districts to either reduce their taxes or at least not increase them as costs go up.

Marcello: Most news commentators seem to feel that there was some politics involved in wanting 100 per cent state financing and then ultimately property tax relief. How do you feel about this?

Weddington: Well, I think everyone in the state would rather not pay property taxes. So to say to people, "I don't think you ought to have to pay property tax; I think the state ought to do it all," is an appealing argument. I know personally, though, the members that were making that argument, and I don't think that that was their sole motivation. I really do believe that their basic motivation was that it would be a more equitable system, because right now all of our school taxes fall on land. Those people who have wealth in bonds or stocks or savings accounts or anything else don't pay for the schools in the same way the people with land do. So I think there really is an inequity that is present.

I'm not sure it's one we can ever correct. It would be very difficult to locate intangible assets. So I would

certainly say that there is some chance for demogoguery or something in 100 per cent funding, but the people that were advocating it, I think, did not do it for that reason.

Marcello: Now one of the things that liberals, in particular, have continually been criticizing in the public school finance bill--not only in the 65th session but also in the 64th session--was this whole business of equalization. Evidently, most of the liberal legislators still do not feel that the state has gone far enough in the direction of equalization. How do you feel about that?

Weddington: I think that's true, because we have some districts that who are able to spend far more per pupil than other districts. Now you have a particular problem in the fast changing districts where, along the border, for example, you have a lot of people who are actually Mexican citizens who are going to school here. That is a major problem for the school districts down there, which basically have little land to tax. Or, for example, you have a very fast growing area in some places with not a high tax base; they get very little state money and get an awful lot of kids to try to educate. So I agree with that criticism, and I think we should put more money into equalization. I do not think, though, that that offsets the need for some relief to that person who has farm or agricultural land.

Marcello: What seems to be the hangup here in getting enough money into the equalization aspect of the public school finance bill?

Weddington: I think, again, it's just a combination of all the demands. By the time you pay the teacher salaries, and then if you reduce the amount of money you're going to require local districts to raise and you put more money into school buses, as we are suggesting that we do, and more into maintenance and more into special education programs, there's just not that much left for extra money directly to local districts. So as I say, it's all this balancing process. Right now there are, I think, an equal number of members of the Education Committee committed to the Clayton bill and an equal number committed to the Ron Coleman bill and one person in the middle. In many instances those bills are very much alike, but it's just this balancing of how much money you give to equalization and how much you give to tax relief--that's the crucial question.

Marcello: Again, it goes back to each legislator's priorities, as you mentioned awhile ago.

Weddington: That's right. Each legislator will probably have a little different emphasis based on what his or her own district is like. We always come back to realize that we are basically a rural Legislature. Regardless of the fact that we have more and



more major cities and more cities, we still are basically a rural Legislature, and I think that's often reflected in the votes.

Marcello: This brings up an interesting issue, and we'll get back and talk about school finance in a minute, because there's some other questions I want to ask on this. But in that same article in the July issue of Texas Monthly, it was mentioning that Texas had reached a "watershed" so far as politics was concerned. The Texas Monthly article said that the old liberal-conservative split had changed into it was not a urban-rural split. How do you feel about that? Did you see this sort of thing developing or not?

Weddington: Yes, I think particularly on the school bill that was true. The urban districts were saying, "We have so many kids to educate, and we don't have a tax base to do it. You've got to give us some help." The rural areas were saying, "We just can't tax our land any more than we already are. You've got to give us some help." There was definitely that split.

I don't know whether that would necessarily be reflected on other issues. I do think if you looked at some other issues like monies put into mass housing projects that those people who voted for it tended to be the urban legislators, and those against it tended to be the rural. So I think there is some of that split, particularly on the education

bill.

Marcello: Okay, getting back to that education bill again, the teacher pay raise also gained a great deal of prominence here. Some people said it should be a part of that public school finance bill; some people said it should be a separate bill altogether; Governor Briscoe, I believe, felt that the local districts ought to take care of the teacher pay raise. How'd you feel about either one of those particular stands?

Weddington: Well, it looks like the bill we will pass here in the special session will be a combined bill, and I will vote for it. I didn't agree during the regular session with those persons who were so critical of the leadership for wanting to have one bill as an education bill and a separate one as a teacher bill and who said, "They just don't want a teacher pay raise!" I think what we saw in the 63rd Legislature or the 1973 Legislature was that there was so much focus put on teacher pay raises that the basic financing of education got no attention whatsoever, and I thought that was really a bad situation. So this year, I think what those people who were trying to have bills were, one, saying, "Let's think about how we are going to fund public education," and then as a separate issue, "Sure, we need to raise teacher salaries, and let's think about how much." But so many of the education organizations

in the prior session had just focused on the pay raise and had not focused on the education bill. I think it was a mechanism for making us think about both. Now that we've done that in the session, I think it's fine to go ahead and put them back. I think it was a tool to thoughtful discussion, not necessarily of whether it's divided or not, but that they both need to be considered.

Marcello: Okay, let's talk about another subject--one that failed. It didn't fail in the House, but ultimately it did in the Senate--property tax reform--and I'm referring now to the work done by the Peveto Committee. How did you feel about the report of the Peveto Committee?

Weddington: I was very much in favor of the Peveto bill. Wayne is, in my opinion, one of the best members of the House; he really worked hard on it. I think that the reason it failed was not nearly what was in the bill but was much more a result of people not having read the bill, not understanding the bill . . . much more a result of people who were afraid of change.

Marcello: Now, of course, it got through the House fairly easily, did it not, and bogged down in the Senate?

Weddington: That's correct. That's right.

Marcello: And I guess it was ultimately killed in Creighton's . . . well, wasn't really killed in the Economic Development Committee, but evidently he bottled it up there for quite awhile before

it was finally voted upon.

Weddington: That's correct. One of the other bills that passed the House and the same sort of thing happened to it was the presidential primary bill. That was a bill that . . . well, as you'll remember in 1975, we passed the presidential primary bill, which provided for a "winner take all" system. I think we've all seen that that did not work well. So this session we had a bill which would have provided, first, for getting a lot of different people on the ballot; second, for proportional representation according to how many votes each candidate got. I think it would have been a far better system. It did get out of the House; it got out of the Senate committee; and it bogged down on the floor of the Senate. I am hoping that the governor may open the call of the special session to consider the presidential primary bill issue.

Marcello: Again, in reference to that Texas Monthly article, they seem to have gone out of their way to praise Lieutenant Governor Hobby. But at the same time, in looking back upon the legislative session, it seems that the House acted in a much more responsible manner during that session than did the Senate. It seems as though the House passed all of the major bills very quickly in the session, and then they all bogged down in the Senate. Many of them died in the Senate.

Weddington: That's true of the major ones. It's interesting that, I

think, if we probably looked at the little bills, more passed the Senate and then bogged down in the House. Now I think the Senate is really a very different body from the House. The Senate, with only thirty-one members and the lieutenant governor, is a place where each individual has far more influence, and I think it's much harder to lead a body like the Senate. You've got some real personalities that have been there a long time and are sometimes hard to reason with. I think Hobby does often work hard in thinking through a strategy in trying to get things to move. It's certainly correct that in this session things didn't move as they should have, either in the House or the Senate.

**Marcello:** Let's talk about some of your personal legislation, Representative Weddington. According to your newsletter, it seems as though you had a rather active session this time around.

**Weddington:** This session was one where a lot of things that I would not consider of state-wide significance passed (chuckle). For example, the federal Congress had passed a bill allowing the federal monies to be used for buses--not school buses--that have facilities for handling the handicapped, which need to be a little wider than normal buses. One of my bills was to allow that wider bus on public streets.

For example, I had gotten a letter from someone who said that they enjoyed working with children who were in the Austin

State School, an institution for mentally retarded children, and that the only problem was when they tried to take them fishing that they couldn't afford to pay fishing licenses for everybody. So we passed a bill saying that a person who is in a state school or a V.A. hospital--Veterans Hospital--would not have to have a fishing license if it was part of the therapeutic treatment.

There were a number of other bills along that line that did pass. Some of the ones I was very sorry that did not pass and really just got bogged down were, for example, one that would have mandated that students at public universities be given some say-so about how their student fund monies are spent on health care, on publications, on student government activities. I think that the bill could have passed; it just didn't ever come out of the Calendar Committee.

Marcello: Let's talk a little bit more about House Bill 88, which, I think, is one that you sponsored, and I think you made reference to it awhile ago. This refers to the presidential primary.

Weddington: That's right.

Marcello: Why did you sponsor that bill?

Weddington: Well, I really believe that the presidential primary is a good thing for Texas. I think Texans enjoy the experience of helping select, in that sort of direct way, who they want to be

President. It seems to me that our goals ought to be to allow people to vote in the most direct way possible on who are going to be presidential and vice-presidential candidates. I don't think the bill we had the prior year did that.

I was able, in 1975, to get an amendment on the bill which made it a two-year bill, so that as of this moment, we have no bill in Texas providing for a presidential primary. We must pass one before the next presidential election in order to have a presidential primary at all.

Marcello: Now this particular bill, I assume, would be superseding the old Schieffer bill, is that correct?

Weddington: No, the Schieffer bill, see, automatically expired at the end of two years, so that bill is no longer around.

Marcello: Which, I think, most people agreed was a bad bill.

Weddington: I think that's right. It was passed because there were many people who were trying to be helpful to a Texas U.S. senator running for President. It didn't turn out to work that way, anyway.

Marcello: And, of course, you're referring to Senator Bentson.

Weddington: That's correct.

Marcello: Another bill here that I see that you were co-sponsoring was one that proposed to give power to the voters of each county to decide which specific ordinance powers, if any, to give to local commissioners. Talk a little bit about that.

Weddington: There's an old saying that one of my friends taught me that

goes "My right to swing my fist ends where your nose begins."  
I think in government we have seen so much an explosion of population and people living closer together that the effects of what one person does is now far more likely to affect someone else than has been true in the past. For that reason, I think government needs more power to regulate.

At this current time, counties do not have general powers. They only have the specific powers granted them by the constitutional statutes. I felt it was very important to try to move in the direction of county government being able to respond to more of those problems. For example, even so small-- or major, you might say (chuckle)--a matter as stray dogs running loose in county areas. The county has no real authority to pass an ordinance about picking them up. Things like developers who go into a county area and develop subdivisions with substandard streets or sewage that flows down the street or water supplies that aren't as they should be. The county in many instances has no power to require ahead of time how things will be done.

It seemed to me that especially the urban counties, where people are living closer and closer together, need the power to be able to pass ordinances regulating how people live, especially where it affects someone else. I think it's also true that if someone goes out in the country and builds a five-



acre tract and builds a lovely house on it that they should not be subjected to having a junk yard move in next door, and that's exactly what may happen today.

So for firework ordinances, emergency vehicle ordinances, just everything you can think of, it seems to me that county government--and that kind of local government--is the best place to handle it. Right now we end up considering bills in the Legislature to, for example, regulate fireworks in Harris County or regulate zoning around a certain airport in a different county. Well, those things just ought to be done by the local government. That was a bill that did pass the House but, as you know, got bogged down in the Senate.

Marcello: I'll bet there was a lot of opposition from the real estate lobby on that piece of legislation.

Weddington: There certainly was, and they made no bones about it. Many of them felt that they ought to be able to do anything they wanted to with their land. I don't object to someone using their land as they see fit except, I think, where it does have this effect, either direct or indirect, on other people. Then I think that there have to be rights of all of us in common.

Marcello: Are the real estate interests normally a rather powerful lobby in Austin?

Weddington: It depends on the session. But in a session where they have a bill that they are very much interested in, there are a lot

of real estate people. Many people sell real estate and a lot of people who have made a lot of money in real estate and who believe they could make a whole lot more money in real estate don't want the government telling them what to do.

Marcello: I think every faculty wife at North Texas is selling real estate (chuckle).

Weddington: Right (chuckle).

Marcello: So like you say, there must be a bunch of people that are in that particular aspect.

Weddington: But, really, I think the bigger real estate people tend to make up the lobby and influence its direction.

Marcello: Here's an issue that we hadn't talked about up until now, and this was the proposal to reduce the sales tax on residential utilities. Now I guess here we have to go back to that highway appropriations bill again, do we not?

Weddington: That's correct. Because once we spent that amount of money, then it made it far more a problem to reduce the level of state income. I personally did vote for the reduction on the sales tax. But when the bill got to the Senate, they were very much afraid that reducing the expenditure would create financial problems because of all the money we were spending.

Marcello: Now you actually were not a sponsor of this bill.

Weddington: Co-sponsor, I believe. Or, for example, the bill on inheritance taxes. There was another situation where people,

especially with farms or small businesses, were having to sell precious assets that had been in the family a long time just because they had increased in value so much.

There ought to be a provision such as Congress has recently enacted to allow higher and higher rates of property to be passed on without taxes. That was another matter that got a little bogged down over in the Senate in that whole item of how much money we could afford to give up.

Marcello: Yes, one could rationalize opposing all these bills, I think, because of the amount of money that was spent on that highway appropriations bill.

Weddington: Yes,

Marcello: It seems to me that everything that we talk about keeps coming back to that highway appropriations bill.

Weddington: Well, I think it was just because it was so early in the session and so much money was involved there. It did have a great impact, I think, on the session.

Marcello: Another issue that came up--I'm not exactly sure how much time the Legislature spent on it--was a proposal to put-- what was it--a 5 per cent tax on refineries in Texas?

Weddington: Yes. I think there may have been one hearing on it, but it, in essence, didn't go anywhere.

Marcello: Of course, again, the governor was rather adamant that there would be no new taxes, and obviously this would have been a

violation of that pledge.

Weddington: That's right. Many people felt if it had passed, it would have been vetoed.

Marcello: Overall, after you look back upon this session, how would you rate it? Now you have been in three sessions so far.

Weddington: Three, yes. I think my second was the best--in 1975. The session in 1977 had much more spirit of an attitude of saying, "There are very few things we need to pass. The only thing we really need to do is pass an appropriations bill and keep from having any new taxes, and that's about it." That sort of attitude was then reflected in the way the Legislature worked. Now I certainly would not criticize the Legislature on the lack of hours put in by members on legislative-related work. But we spent far fewer hours on the floor in debate this session than we did the prior one, and I'm sure that had something to do with why bills didn't pass. It was just a better attitude to me in 1975, much more an attitude of, "We can accomplish things; we can get this done; we can seek a solution." This time there just wasn't that momentum.

Marcello: What role would the speaker play in fostering this attitude, either in the 64th or in the 65th session?

Weddington: I think the speaker always has some role, although I don't think it was determinative in either year. I think it was far more a general attitude by the leadership and perhaps

shared by many of the members that there just wasn't a lot the government needed to do. That may to some extent reflect what was visualized as to what the people wanted. To some extent, every politician tries to figure out what it is that "the people" want. With Governor Briscoe seeming to be very popular on all the polls and with sort of being a person who takes the stand that there are very few bills that are worth passing, I think people just sort of got the impression that maybe that was what the public wanted.

Marcello: Several political commentators noted that Speaker Clayton seemed to be rather suspicious of new legislation or new bills. Did you get this particular impression?

Weddington: I didn't get the impression that he was suspicious of them, just that he felt there were really very few that needed to be passed; not that he opposed them, but just that there weren't a lot that were pushed, really.

Marcello: We mentioned awhile ago that the House quickly passed most of the important pieces of legislation early in the session and then sent them on to the Senate where they either bogged down or died. How much credit can one give to Bill Clayton for the House acting in this way?

Weddington: Well, I think he did plan well. I mean, he took some responsibility to say to the Education Committee, "Now you've got to get a bill out early." Now he certainly had a very important

part in the Appropriations Committee getting through early and coming out on the floor. So I think he did say to the committee people involved, "Now this is the kind of timetable. I need your work out so we can do it on the floor," and he did see it was considered on the floor.

Marcello: Speaker Clayton generally has a reputation of being a fair speaker. Did you see this coming through in this session, also?

Weddington: Yes, I did. I think that's accurate. I felt there were very few instances where it was clearly known which side he favored on many issues. I did not see him using a heavy hand. I thought he really was fair on things I requested his consideration on. There were several instances when he didn't agree with me, but I felt that he was never vindictive at all and that he basically ran a fair shop. I think, especially when we contrast it to the way the House was run before I got here, that he's done very well at being fair to members.

Marcello: There are also quite a few law and order bills that were passed during this particular session. Did you have any role in their passage? Were you sponsoring any of these bills or not?

Weddington: No, I did not. I was not a sponsor of those bills and was not a member of the Criminal Jurisprudence Committee this year. The last session I served on that committee and so was very involved in some of the bills. But this year I

was on State Affairs and Elections, so my major emphasis was in those areas and the other bills I was carrying.

Marcello: Was this by your own request that you were taken off of Criminal Jurisprudence?

Weddington: Yes, it was. State Affairs is a committee that's traditionally been considered the key committee, other than the Appropriations, on the House side. It handles many of the major issues in the state, and I was very anxious to get on a committee with that kind of scope and influence.

Marcello: Is it very unusual for somebody in the third term to be placed on that particular committee?

Weddington: No. The speaker normally would have a mixture of people who were serving in various sessions.

Marcello: The reason I asked awhile ago whether or not you had been taken off of Criminal Jurisprudence by choice or arbitrarily taken off was with reference to Representative Washington, whom, I think, was more or less arbitrarily removed from that committee as chairman. I think it was because of those law and order bills that were presented during this session.

Weddington: Yes, there was a lot of speculation to that effect, and I would not be surprised if that were the case.

Marcello: Representative Weddington, is there anything else relative to the 65th session that you think we need to talk about and get into the record?

Weddington: Ron, I don't. One of the nice things that I see happening is more and more participation by citizens in the legislative process. It does seem to me that we are having more people come and visit the capital and write letters or call their representative, and I think that's a very healthy kind of thing. I hope people will continue that trend.

Marcello: I've two more questions. First, rumor has it that this may possibly be your last term in the State Legislature.

Weddington: I think that may be accurate. It appears that President Carter may in the next several days submit my name to the Senate Agriculture Committee as his recommended person to be General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. If that appointment is confirmed and I am sworn in, then I would resign my House seat and would be moving to Washington for the rest of this presidential term. I do plan, if I go, to keep my house here and my residence here and would hope to return and run in Texas politics again. But it would probably be my last session as a member of the House of Representatives.

Marcello: I have one last question. I always save my sensitive questions to last (chuckle). What was your reaction to the article in that July issue of Texas Monthly relative to your position in this 65th Legislature?

Weddington: Well, as you'll probably remember, the Texas Monthly criti-



cized me for being gone the last two weeks of the session while I was a member of an official delegation to China. Any criticism, you know, that says you're gone the last two weeks is legitimate, and I have no bone with that. I did learn a lot in the trip and am going to be making an official report to the members of this session during the special session. All of my predictions when I left that very little would happen and I would still get to vote on education turned out to be true, so I have no regrets in that sense.

I did feel the Texas Monthly article was very unfair in saying that I had walked votes, when in fact, when I talked to the authors of that article, they said that all they had reference to was a night late in Elections Committee when I left before all the votes were done, which is very customary when you've got a lot of other bills being heard, and that I missed a vote on an amendment doing an errand. Well, it turns out--and they even realized it--that the errand was doing a TV commercial for the Muscular Dystrophy Association here that had been wanting me to do it, and we'd re-scheduled it several times. The amendment was one where I was not the key sponsor but one of forty or fifty people who had signed it. So I felt some of the criticism was unfair. But I hope as a result of my trip to China that I can bring back to people

a sense of the importance of a country that has one-fifth the world's population in it and certainly one that we'll have to deal with on the world-wide level.

**Marcello:** In general, what is your reaction to articles such as the one that appeared in Texas Monthly? Evidently, that publication plans to do it after every session of the Legislature.

**Weddington:** I thought the article this time was not as accurate or as fairly written as the one last time. Now I came off a little better last time, so I don't mean just that. But I thought that the criteria they used for judging people this time were not the ones I would have chosen. They seemed to really count down people who were not so effective on the floor but did not give recognition of other talents. To me, while it is very important to be a member who votes right on the floor, it is equally important that you work hard at the job, that you spend a lot of time answering your mail, that you call people back when they call you, that you give speeches in the district, that you try to make government a very personal thing to the people that you represent. I think several of the members who were down-graded for various reasons are some of the hardest-working people who do try hardest to really communicate with their members. I personally would disagree with some of the choices that were made this time.

**Marcello:** Well, Representative Weddington, I want to thank you once

more for taking time to talk with me. You've said some very interesting and, I think, important things. I'm sure that scholars are going to find this very useful when it's open for research.

Weddington: Thank you very much, Ron.