

SENATOR THOMAS P. GORE

By Monroe Billington*

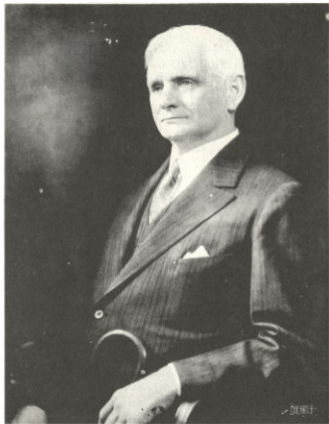
When Oklahoma became a state in 1907, totally blind Thomas P. Gore and part Cherokee Indian Robert L. Owen went to the United States Senate to represent the former Indian lands. Drawing the short term, Gore was re-elected in 1908 and again in 1914. He was defeated for a fourth term in the Democratic primary six years later. The voters of Oklahoma returned him to the Senate for a final term after he had been out of office for a decade. This is a study of an ardent, youthful, Populist politician who became an ultra-conservative, anti-New Deal, old man.

A native of Mississippi, Gore had been active in politics before he was a legal voter. He made his first public speech at a Farmers Alliance gathering before he was eighteen years old¹ and three years later was nominated for the Mississippi State Legislature by the state Alliance. Gore was forced to withdraw when it was realized the election was to take place a month before his twenty-first birthday. With the national Populist movement engulfing the various splinter parties which had sprung up among the politically dissatisfied southern farmers Gore readily joined the movement and was nominated as a presidential elector by the State Populist convention in 1892. He traveled to Corsicana, Texas, two years later to aid the election of Populist candidates by his oratory. He moved there in 1896 to practice law (he had been graduated previously from the Cumberland University law school) and to engage in the political battles being waged between the Democrats and the Populists.

The Populist Party declined sharply after William Jennings Bryan's defeat in the presidential campaign of 1896,

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¹ Thomas P. Gore to Dawes Gore, May 29, 1947, in Thomas P. Gore Papers (Manuscripts Division, University of Oklahoma Library.)



Senator Thomas P. Gore of Oklahoma

and Gore, opportunist enough to appreciate the decay of the Populist movement, joined the Democratic party three years later. As a rampant Populist orator, Gore had been openly hostile to the Democrats. After changing his allegiance, he knew that his political fortunes had a brighter future elsewhere than in Navarro County, Texas. With his wife, Gore joined those pioneers who were creating a state out of the Indian lands north of the Red River. Settling at Lawton in Comanche County, Oklahoma Territory, in 1901, Gore established a law office and immediately joined the action on the political stage.

Representing the Lawton area, he traveled to Enid in the spring of 1902, to attend the Democratic Territorial Convention. He spoke to the Oklahoma Democracy for the first time when he responded in behalf of the delegates to the speech of welcome. This speech tickled the ears of the delegates: "I would rather be a humble private in the ranks of those who struggle for justice and equality than to be a minion of plutocracy, though adorned with purple and gold." Many said it was the finest piece of oratory they had ever heard.² Gore became the Democratic nominee for the Territorial Council from the district composed of Caddo and Comanche counties. He was confident of his own election, and spent most of his time traveling over the Territory campaigning for William Cross the party's nominee for delegate to Congress. The speeches and connections Gore made that summer were of significant import in his campaign for the United States Senate five years later.

Gore's contributions to territorial legislation during his term of office were meager; the importance of the session for him was that he kept himself in the public eye. He publicly admitted that he desired a United States Senate post when Oklahoma became a State, causing the *Oklahoma City Daily Oklahoman* to effuse, "When Gore becomes a senator for Oklahoma the land of the fair god may well rejoice in having one man the equal of the representatives from any state in the union."³ Active in the statehood movement and giv-

² Unidentified newspaper clipping, in Fred S. Barde Papers (Library, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City).

³ May 8, 1903.

ing "sound advice"⁴ to the constitution-framers, Gore continued to keep himself before the public. Along with Owen, he was nominated in the Democratic primary of 1907, and the first Oklahoma State Legislature made the election of the two Democrats official.

Quickly stamped as a Progressive Democrat, Gore spent much time during his early years in the Senate opposing Republican - sponsored legislation. The administration's answer to the panic of 1907, the Aldrich-Vreeland Emergency Currency act, the new Senator considered wrong in principle, and he believed it would prove unwise in policy. A makeshift measure, the bill was coaxed through Congress only after the failure of the famous La Follette-led filibuster. During the filibuster, Progressive Republican Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin held the floor continuously for over eighteen hours. William J. Stone of Missouri at last came to the aid of La Follette, and Stone was relieved by Gore as the blind man took up the cudgels for the obstructionists.

Before joining the marathon, Gore had laid careful plans with his cohort. He was to be relieved by Stone, after which La Follette was to resume. Stone had left the Senate Chamber for a rest during the Oklahoman's speech, and when he returned Gore was informed by friends that Stone was present and ready to speak. Gore concluded his speech within a few minutes, turned his sightless eyes toward Stone's seat, and sat down, expecting to hear the Missourian claim recognition. But Stone had stepped out of the Senate chamber after Gore's having been informed of his return. Unaware of Stone's departure, the blind obstructionist surrendered the floor when no collaborator was present to claim it.

Many suspected that Stone had been called out of the Senate in order to trick the blind man, but this was never proved. A popular rumor had it that Gore had been forced to sit down by an opponent behind him pulling at his coat-tails, but Gore later discounted this version of the incident.⁵

⁴ William H. Murray, *Memoirs of Governor Murray and True History of Oklahoma* (Boston, 1945), Vol. I, p. 75.

⁵ Gore to Franklin L. Burdette, August 18, 1939, in *Gore Papers*; Franklin L. Burdette, *Filibustering in the Senate* (Princeton, 1940), p. 90.

The proponents of the bill capitalized on the situation, demanded a roll call, and the bill was passed. It was a costly mistake on the part of the blind obstructionist.

During the debates on the currency measure, Gore praised La Follette with these words: "I trust that he will regard it as not otherwise than a compliment when I say that, in my opinion, he is the best Democrat and the poorest Republican in the Senate and in the United States."⁶ This was the first time Gore had praised La Follette publicly, but it was not the last time they were to stand side by side on important issues. The "Fighting Progressive" had the blind progressive Democrat's support many times during the next decade.

The fight in the Senate over the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act was primarily a struggle between the middle western Republican progressives and the eastern protectionist Republican regulars, the controversy seeing the Democratic minority for the most part cheering from the sidelines. But some of the Democrats could not refrain from entering into the heated debates on the subject, and Gore fell into this group. Never one to leave the scene of a word-battle he joined the progressives with vigor.

Representing farmers who complained about transportation abuses, Gore assisted the Progressive Republicans in their drive for railroad regulation. During the debates on the Mann-Elkins Act, he consistently voted with the Middle Western states' representatives in their opposition to the abuses which the railroads imposed on the farmers of the prairie plains. In the Progressive tradition, Gore was an early advocate of direct election of Senators.

Although William F. McCombs, William G. McAdoo, and Walter Hines Page led the drive in the summer and early fall of 1911 to make Woodrow Wilson President, Senator Gore publicly expressed his accord with the movement a year before the Democratic nominating convention. He observed of Wilson: "In respect to legislative policies, he is abreast of the times. He is in harmony with the spirit of

⁶ *Congressional Record*, 60 Congress, 1 Sess., pp. 3966-67.

enlightened and rational progress, and yet he is wise enough to know that 'too swift arrives as tardy as too slow'.⁷ Later admitting that he joined the Wilson ranks because he thought it was a shrewd political calculation,⁸ Gore was the first important political figure holding a national office to advocate Wilson's nomination.

As a close friend of McCombs, the general manager of the Wilson campaign, Gore gave valuable preconvention advice. When the Democratic National Committee selected a city for the nominating convention, McCombs, following Gore's suggestion, named Baltimore as the site. Gore and McCombs favored Baltimore over New York City because they did not want Wilson's candidacy to have the appearance of being Tammany-dominated.⁹ When Bryon R. Newton, publicity agent for preconvention activities, clashed with McCombs, he was discharged, and McCombs accepted Gore's suggestion for a replacement.¹⁰ As the preconvention struggle intensified, the sickly McCombs leaned more heavily on Gore. "It was to him, more than any other person," McCombs recalled, "that I turned in the most difficult moments."¹¹

Gore publicly defended Wilson against the verbal attacks of political opponents. During the Harvey-Wilson episode, Gore piously intimated that Wilson was refusing George Harvey's support in order not to be obligated to him, remarking that the Governor's critics should be willing to tell the public frankly whether their candidates would accept a financial obligation similar to the one the governor declined. "I would rather see Governor Wilson defeated and his heart an open book, 'that all who run may read'," he declared, "than to see him triumphant with a skeleton in his political closet which had been concealed from the eyes of a con-

⁷ Gore to Henry S. Breckencidge, May 25, 1911, quoted in *The Weekly Chieftain*, (Vinita) June 2, 1911.

⁸ Gore in conversation with A. S. Link, August 15, 1942. Link, "The South and Democratic Campaign of 1912" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1945), p. 71.

⁹ Maurice F. Lyons, *William F. McCombs: The President Maker* (Cincinnati, 1922), p. 41.

¹⁰ William F. McCombs, *Making Woodrow Wilson President* (New York, 1921), p. 106.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

riding people."¹²

Gore also aided Wilson's cause by persuading Francis G. Newlands of Nevada, himself a possible presidential candidate, to declare his support of Wilson. Determined to carry the Midwest in the primaries, McCombs sent Gore, in March, on a speaking tour of Wisconsin. But Gore did more than speak. He helped organize an active publicity agency, and from Milwaukee he directed the organization of a campaign which reached to the smallest precinct in the state. Nor should Gore's work for Wilson in Oklahoma be overlooked. With several able lieutenants, including William H. "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, Gore was able to get half of the Oklahoma delegation to the national convention pledged to the New Jersey governor.

At the Baltimore convention Gore worked diligently for Wilson. McAdoo recalled in his autobiography that Gore was "skillful and active" as one of the Wilson floor leaders and praised the Senator for his "great work."¹³ McCombs' secretary, Maurice F. Lyons, called Gore "a power on the floor."¹⁴ After the balloting was underway and it was apparent that the hundred-odd delegates pledged to Oscar W. Underwood held the balance of power between Wilson and Champ Clark of Missouri (the two leading contenders for the nomination), McCombs, Gore, and others held long conferences with the Underwood leaders promising that if Wilson should be put out of the race at any stage, they would use their influence to deliver the Wilson delegates to the Alabamian. With the Underwood men agreeing in return to remain loyal to their candidate, a solid anti-Clark block was formed, and Wilson ultimately probably won the nomination because of the deft and persuasive arguments of his backers.¹⁵ *The New York Times* said, "Senator Gore was referred to by Governor Wilson just before the deciding ballot was cast at Baltimore as a field general so capable that

¹² Lyons, *McCombs*, p. 53.

¹³ William C. McAdoo, *Crowded Years* (Boston, 1931), p. 152.

¹⁴ Typed statement signed by Lyons, in Maurice F. Lyons Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

¹⁵ Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The Road to the White House* (Princeton, 1947), p. 450.

it would be mere impertinence on his own part to intervene in the situation instead of trusting all to the Senator."¹⁶

After the convention the most perplexing business facing the Democrats was the reorganization of the Democratic National Committee. Josephus Daniels, A. Mitchell Palmer, A. S. Burleson, and Gore conferred several times, finally agreeing that McCombs and McAdoo should be recommended as chairman and vice-chairman respectively of the national committee. A strong executive committee, including Gore, was chosen to support McCombs and McAdoo.¹⁷ Gore, impressing his fellow workers with his organizing genius during the preconvention campaign, was named chairman of the National Bureau of Organization. When the Senator took charge he found the party machinery in a state of "utter dilapidation," and it was October before the organization was under full sail.¹⁸ Directing the campaign with extraordinary ability, he perfected the organization to such an extent that it was possible to reach the personnel of the smallest precincts. Distributing pamphlets giving detailed instructions to local workers on how to form Wilson and Marshall clubs, Gore urged the establishment of these groups throughout the country, supplying them liberally with campaign literature and buttons.¹⁹ The organization bureau distributed 760,000 packages of campaign material to an estimated 380,000 different individuals. Some 3,300,000 pieces of printed matter were sent directly from Gore's office and about 2,500,000 were sent from the general supply room by order of his bureau.²⁰

When the general election gave Wilson an electoral

¹⁶ August 12, 1912.

¹⁷ Of the committee of fourteen, Burleson evidently considered McCombs, McAdoo, Gore, Daniels, Joseph B. Davies, W. R. King, and William Saulsbury the most important members of the campaign committee. See memorandum in A. S. Burleson Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

¹⁸ Gore to John J. Raskob, December 15, 1912, in Gore papers.

¹⁹ Gore to "My Dear Democratic Friend" (manuscripted), October 3, 1912, in Joseph Daniels Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

²⁰ W. D. Jamieson to T. P. Gregory, November 7, 1912, copy in Edward M. House Papers (Yale University Library), quoted in Link, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

college landslide, the Democratic leaders held conferences from November to March, their discussions centering around cabinet choices and the program for the next session of Congress. Gore conferred with Colonel Edward M. House in November, at which time the Oklahoma leader expressed his favorable opinion of Bryan as a possible cabinet member.²¹ The following January the Senator talked with the President-elect on two occasions, at one of which he and Hoke Smith conferred with Wilson for three hours discussing cabinet posts and the program for the coming session of Congress.²² There were rumors that Gore would be given a cabinet position, and it was generally believed in Oklahoma that the Senator could have one if he desired it.²³ But Gore did not care to leave his Senate post. He had attained the height of his ambition when he reached the Senate, and he had no desire to leave it at a time when his influence was obviously gaining momentum.

Gore lent his support to the New Freedom measures. The Underwood tariff bill and the act establishing the Federal Reserve System received his votes, the Clayton Antitrust Act and the bill providing for a Federal Trade Commission gained his support, and the various social-justice measures enacted during the Wilson regime, including woman suffrage, met with his approval. When an amendment to the Constitution proposing suffrage for women was voted down in 1914 the National Suffrage Association published its first blacklist, naming nine United States Senators and nine Representatives in Congress "whose opposition to woman suffrage is so powerful as to constitute the greatest obstacle to federal legislation that the women have to face."²⁴ Gore was included in this list; he had voted against woman suffrage.²⁵ But Gore learned his lesson, and thereafter he voted and spoke for the extension of the suffrage until it was accepted

²¹ House to Wilson, November 28, 1912, quoted in Charles Seymour (ed.), *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (Boston, 1926), Vol. I, pp. 94-95.

²² *The New York Times*, January 9, 1913.

²³ *The Post-Herald*, (Hollis) November 7, 1912; *The Weekly Star*, (Mangum) November 28, 1912. *The Arizona Gazette*, (Phoenix) December 9, 1912, suggested Gore for Secretary of Interior.

²⁴ *The New York Times*, August 30, 1914.

²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 53 Congress, 2 Sess., p. 5108.

by the legislature.²⁶

When the Democrats organized the Senate in the spring of 1913, Gore was appointed to the position he desired above all others: chairmanship of the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry. In this position his major responsibility centered around the annual agricultural appropriation bills allocating money for the Department of Agriculture. Working behind the scenes on many other pieces of legislation, Gore was the Senate floor leader when agricultural appropriations were being considered.

The most significant legislation with which Gore dealt in his capacity related to rural credits. With agitation for rural credit reform increasing, Gore secured an amendment to the 1914 agricultural appropriation bill, making possible the creation of the United States Rural Credit Commission with power "to investigate and study in European countries cooperative land-mortgage banks, cooperative rural credit unions, and similar organizations and institutions devoting their attention to the promotion of agriculture and the betterment of rural conditions."²⁷ President Wilson appointed Gore as a member of his commission, but other duties hindered him from making the European tour.²⁸ From the data gathered in Europe,²⁹ Duncan U. Fletcher of Florida, chairman of the commission, framed and introduced a bill to establish a system of privately controlled land banks to operate under federal charter. A clause in the bill providing for government support was opposed by both Wilson and Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston, and the agrarians were forced to halt temporarily their agitation for rural credits.

While guiding the 1916 agricultural appropriation bill through the Senate, Gore submitted Fletcher's original rural credit measure as an amendment, but it was never reported from committee. A second attempt was made to attach the bill as an amendment, and Gore had a conference with the President on the subject, but when House conferees insisted

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65 Congress, 2 Sess., p. 10987; 65 Congress, 3 Sess., p. 3062; 66 Congress, 1 Sess., pp. 229, 232.

²⁷ 37 U. S. Statutes, p. 855.

²⁸ *Harlow's Weekly*, Vol. III (May 3, 1913), p. 12.

²⁹ See *Senate Documents*, 63 Congress, 1 Sess., No. 214, IV (Serial No. 6519), 2 parts.

on drastically revising the amendment, Gore voiced objection, and the subject was laid aside for further study.

At Gore's insistence a substitute for the amendment was included in the bill, creating a twelve-member congressional joint committee charged with the responsibility of preparing and reporting to Congress in January, 1916, a bill providing for the establishment of a system of rural credits adapted to American needs and conditions. After working for nearly a year, this committee introduced a bill in the Senate. Aware of the need for a system of long-term loans at low rates of interest with the amortization method of payments, Gore lent his support to this bill.³⁰ When the measure was signed into law by the President a number of interested guests were present, including the members of the United Rural Credits Commission.³¹

Gore's 1907 campaign platform contained a plank against militarism,³² and the Senator manifested his pacificism during the critical period in the United States-Mexican relations prior to this country's entry into World War I. Introducing a resolution in the Senate to authorize the President to negotiate with Mexico for a neutral zone along the northern border of Mexico, Gore expressed his increasing pacifistic tendencies. This pacificism had been exemplified in a more concrete way with the outbreak of the World War in Europe. In the progressive tradition, Gore assumed that the war was mainly economic in causation, and he attacked the bankers, munition makers, and industrialists who profited financially from the war. He refused to support the President's defense program as he aligned himself with the antipreparedness group.

The problem of neutrality facing the United States received Gore's attention when the intensified German submarine campaign brought violations of the rights of American citizens traveling on belligerents' armed ships. After se-

³⁰ Gore in address before the New York Credit Men's Association of New York City, January 25, 1916, *Senate Documents*, 64 Congress, 1 Sess., No. 366, XLII (Serial No. 6952), p. 7.

³¹ Woodrow Wilson to Duncan U. Fletcher, May 23, 1916, Woodrow Wilson Papers (Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress).

³² *Sturtevant's Oklahoma Magazine*, Vol. IV (March-April 1907), p. 16-p.

veral incidents, a multitude of diplomatic notes, and general confusion owing to the administration's reversals and counter-reversals relating to the subject of travel on the high seas, a crisis was reached in the early spring of 1916. With the Congress (whose members generally favored restrictions on American travelers) and the President (who wanted to hold the Germans to "strict accountability" for loss of American lives by U-boat attack) in disagreement on the issue, it appeared to many that Wilson was deliberately trying to maneuver this country into war by going to almost any extreme to support the principle of American rights to travel on the high seas. The climax came when Wilson decided to fight his critics in Congress who, he felt, were trying to take from him the control of foreign affairs.³³ The Gore-McLemore resolutions, around which the controversy had raged, were decisively defeated in March, 1916, (although Gore amended his resolution beyond recognition) and the crisis was past.

Gore had been in the thick of the fight since early January, 1916, when he introduced bills to prevent Americans from traveling on belligerent ships. These bills were not acted upon, and the situation seemed to indicate that the President was leading the country into war. Gore then introduced his resolution, which if accepted, would have expressed Congress's disapproval of United States citizens exercising the right to travel on armed ships.

Although not a pacifist in the sense that he opposed war under any circumstances,³⁴ Gore was consistent with most of the progressives in leaning toward isolationism. But Gore opposed involvement in the European war for another reason. By 1914, he had pledged himself to reducing government expenses to save the taxpayers' money, and he knew that a declaration of war would bring havoc to the United States treasury. Pacifist progressive tendencies, opposition to militarism, obsession with saving money, and a fear that the President desired war in the spring of 1916 forced the blind

³³ Wilson to Edward A. Pou, February 29, 1916, Wilson Papers.

³⁴ Thomas P. Gore, "The True Basis for America's World Influence," *Annals of American Academy (of Political and Social Science)*, Vol. LXVI (July, 1916), p. 133.

Senator to advocate suspension of what he considered a trivial right in order to lessen America's chances of becoming a part of the European conflict.

In the spring of 1917 the situation in Europe was increasingly foreboding, and Wilson's antagonists filibustered to death a bill designed to give the Chief Executive the power to arm American ships. Gore was seriously ill during the filibuster,³⁶ but he surely would have joined it had he been present.³⁶ This sickness also prevented him from being present when the vote was taken on the war declaration, but he later announced that he opposed the declaration and would have voted against it had he been there.

Gore's voting record during the war was generally anti-administration. He voted for the war-risk insurance act for American military personnel, the civil rights act for soldiers, the preferential shipping bill, the so-called trading-with-the enemy act, and several similar bills, but these measures were negligible when placed beside the ones he opposed. Favoring a volunteer army, the Senator feared that the draft would make this country too militaristic. For similar reasons he voted against the bill providing for censorship of the press during wartime. Although supporting the espionage bill, Gore soon expressed regret for having done so, "because it has already been used or abused to throttle freedom of speech and freedom of the press."³⁷ As a result of Gore's stand on these measures, especially the draft, the Oklahoma press and electorate became aroused. Much popular disapproval was expressed against Gore's voting record. According to one survey of 225 Oklahoma newspapers, not a single editorial column openly supported the Senator.³⁸

A member of the Senate Finance Committee, Gore helped

³⁶ *Congressional Record*, 64 Congress, 2 Sess., pp 863ff; 2749; Personal interview with J. Roy Thompson, Jr., November 16, 1954.

³⁶ In later years Gore strenuously objected to being classified as one of the "little group of willful men," and it is technically inaccurate to refer to him as one of them, but events in 1916 and 1917 warrant the conclusion drawn here.

³⁷ Gore to Alger Melton, August 23, 1917, in Wilburn G. Cartwright Papers (Manuscripts Division, University of Oklahoma Library).

³⁸ *The Daily Oklahoman*, (Oklahoma City) September 2, 1917.

prepare the war-revenue acts, and he voted for almost all of the major appropriation bills, but he negated the effect of his co-operation by opposing the government's policy for war-financing. He favored the pay-as-you-go plan, continually stressing that he did not want to lay a great debt on future generations. He believed that the government should tax rather than borrow money to finance the war. Wishing to tax companies reaping huge war profits, he declared, "I would like to demonetize war. I might almost say . . . every dollar of war profits is dripping with blood and tears."²³ If the Senator had had his way, a high flat rate--he failed to mention a specific figure--would have been established rather than the graduated scale of taxation on war profits which the Senate ultimately accepted. Claiming to have originated the slogan "draft money as well as men," the Senator favored the various liberty and victory loan drives, although he was accused of opposing them. Before the Southern Commercial Congress in New York in October, 1917, Gore said, "It is as much a public duty to buy bonds as to pay taxes. The man with the pocketbook must stand back of the boy with the bayonet. It would be almost as great a disaster to lose this liberty loan drive as to lose a battle in France."²⁴

Except for the food survey requested by the President, Gore generally did not agree with the President's recommendations concerning food legislation in wartime. He openly opposed the Lever food control bill because he concluded that it delegated unconstitutional powers to the executive. As a result of the opposition, Gore, as Agriculture Committee chairman, appointed a member of his committee and a friend of the measure to take control of the bill,²⁵ and then he led the opposition to it.

Gore did not like the broad powers over food production, distribution, and regulation delegated to the Chief Executive. The section of the bill requiring businesses to secure licenses to operate repelled Gore. "To require a free country to take out a license to transact business when he

²³ *Congressional Record*, 65 Congress, 1 Sess., p. 6849.

²⁴ A typed manuscript of this speech is in the Gore Papers.

²⁵ *Congressional Record*, 65 Congress, 1 Sess., p. 3772.

should be encouraged to transact business runs counter to my view of first principles as well as of sound public policy," he declared.⁴² His opposition to the President on this issue caused many Oklahoma newspapers to suspect that Gore was in league with the food speculators. His opposition was so strong and his criticism so biting that he was charged with obstructing the war legislation by a fellow Senator. President Wilson agreed that Gore had used obstructionist tactics in his fight against the bill, and thanked George Chamberlain for making his remarks against Gore on the Senate floor.⁴³

With the enactment of the Lever Food Control Act, President Wilson placed a minimum price on wheat and set the stage for another clash between the administration and the independent "Sooner" Senator. When it became apparent that the fixed price for wheat was not only the minimum but also the maximum figure, Gore went into action. Although he opposed price fixing in principle, Gore advocated a higher absolute figure since he had been assured by Food Administrator Herbert Hoover and Secretary of Agriculture Houston that the price was not the minimum but the absolute price.⁴⁴ In February, 1918, the Senator introduced a resolution providing that the minimum price for the 1918 wheat crop be raised from \$2.00 to \$2.50 per bushel. When this measure made no progress, he introduced an amendment to the agricultural appropriation bill proposing this increase.

Responsible for steering the appropriation bill through the Senate, Gore included his amendment and in March, 1918, the Senate made the wheat amendment a part of the appropriation bill. Senate and House conferees discussed this amendment until June, delaying the passage of all agricultural appropriations when at last Gore agreed to a reduction of ten cents per bushel. But the President was not disposed to accept the wheat amendment. "Nothing more distinctly against the public interest has been put into a bill in many a month," he had written when the Senate first accepted the amend-

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 5272.

⁴³ Wilson to Chamberlain, August 8, 1917, quoted in Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters* (New York, 1939). Vol. VII, p. 209.

⁴⁴ *Congressional Record*, 65 Congress, 2 Sess., p. 8488.

ment, "and I fail to see any need for it, from the point of view even of the farmer."⁴⁶ In a veto message which the House subsequently refused to override, the President dissented from the amendment on principle as well as expediency.⁴⁷ Coming from a state with a large portion of its area in the wheat belt, Gore tried but failed to assist his large farm constituency.

He was more successful in securing benefits for his oil-interested constituency under the guise of war legislation. To the War Revenue Act of 1918 he secured the adoption of an amendment which inaugurated the discovery depletion allowance, the principle for exempting from the income tax all proceeds from oil which represented capital by providing for the return of capital based on the market value. Oil producers thus paid less taxes than when depletion had been based on cost.

When the Treaty of Versailles was before the Senate for ratification, Gore insisted that reservations be made in regard to the United States' entry into the League of Nations. Knowing that the treaty could not pass without reservations, Oklahoma's junior Senator had voted for many of them and during the voting in November, 1918, he cast his ballot for the treaty with reservations. He was one of four Democrats who refused to listen to the President's plea for the supporters of the League to vote against the treaty with the Lodge reservations.

Gore has generally been considered one of the "Irreconcilables" opposed to the treaty in any form, but it is more accurate to label him a Reservationist. The treaty advocates generally voted against the reservations while the Irreconcilables voted for them, with both groups joining to vote against the treaty in its final form. The Reservationists, although a large group not lending itself to accurate generalizations, were ordinarily in favor of the reservations and then voted for the treaty in its completed form. Gore fell within the bounds of this group and should definitely be classed with

⁴⁶ Wilson to Atlee Pomerene, March 25, 1918, in Wilson Papers.

⁴⁷ *House Documents*, 65 Congress., 2 Sess., No. 1229, CXIV (Serial No. 7444), p. 3.

one of the several groups of Reservationists.

Gore insisted that he favored a league of nations; but he did not like the League that Wilson advocated. He wanted a world organization "to regulate international law, set up a code of justice and establish a court of conciliation," but he did not want an arrangement requiring an army to enforce its decrees.⁴⁷ He claimed he did not want to see the treaty defeated, but he was realist enough to understand party politics, and he foresaw that if the treaty were accepted it would be with Reservations. Favoring the reservations which Henry Cabot Lodge advanced, Gore manifested his growing isolationism by expressing fears of entangling alliances and frequent wars.

Gore's defeat in 1920 resulted from his outspoken opposition to the administration's war policies, his stand on the League, and the fact that his political opponents laid careful plans for his defeat, taking advantage of the Oklahoma voters' aroused attitudes because of his clash with their popular President. During the decade of the twenties while he was out of the Senate, Gore crystallized his isolationist thinking, and he became economically more conservative. Practicing law in Washington, he fought and won the case of Burnet, Commissioner of Internal Revenue, v. Coronado Oil and Gas Company, dealing with petroleum recovery on tax-exempt state-owned school lands.⁴⁸ He argued this case twice before the United States Supreme Court, finally winning it in 1932. Gore's interest in the oil industry's welfare undoubtedly helped his growing conservatism, and the money he made as a result of this and other litigations did not hinder the trend.

Gore's re-election to the Senate in 1930 is attributable to several factors. The pacifism which he had manifested during the First World War and his isolationism apparent during the debates on the Treaty and the League were not so repugnant to Oklahoma voters after a decade dominated by similar sentiment. Not to be discounted was the fact that Gore tied his campaign securely to the Democratic gubernatorial

⁴⁷ *Nation's Weekly*, Vol. XVII (December 3, 1919), pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ 285 U. S. 393 (1932).

torial candidate, "Alfalfa Bill" Murray. Appealing to the marginal farmers of Oklahoma by campaigning as the candidate with a hole in his pocket, Gore ousted the Republican incumbent.

During the first two years of his last senatorial term, Gore criticized the Hoover administration's efforts to solve the problems created by the depression. The only positive suggestion offered by Gore for solving the depression dilemma while the Republicans were in office was his advocacy of the reviving of international trade. With protectionism triumphing during the Republican supremacy of the twenties, Gore was sure that the tariff barriers aided depression. He was convinced that these walls would have to be lowered for trade and prosperity to return. Thinking that all of the efforts of the administration were in vain, Gore was a stalwart advocate of *laissez-faire* in the midst of one of the world's worst economic crises.

The Senator campaigned for Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, but he soon became an opponent of the New Deal because it was "going too far too fast." Voting for the banking holiday bill, he soon had misgivings about the unlimited plenary power granted under it. He did not vote on the bill establishing the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, and he was unhappy with many of the activities of the "Triple A" program. He voiced opposition to the Government's regulating the choice and quantity of crops to be planted by the farmers. Scoffing at crop reduction as a way to decrease surpluses, he questioned the policy of "murdering" pigs under the program.⁴⁹

The spectacular New Deal experiments to rehabilitate and regiment industry for recovery and reform, especially the National Industrial Recovery Act, received Gore's opposition. The virtually complete regulation of industry proposed under the N.I.R.A. Gore termed "as revolutionary as anything that happened in this country in 1776, or in France in 1789, or in Italy under Mussolini or in Russia under

⁴⁹ Gore to Henry A. Wallace, September 14, 1933, in Gore Papers.

Stalin."⁴⁰ He expressed astonishment at the amount of authority to be invested in the head of the National Recovery Administration, and he vocally protested the section which he thought would destroy private property. He reasoned that the framers of the measure were confusing the police power with the power to regulate commerce. His primary constitutional objections were raised in regard to the issuing of licenses to carry on business, and his strongest opposition to the N.I.R.A. related to these government-issued permits.

On the contention that the N.I.R.A. was unconstitutional, Gore voted against its passage. When the Supreme Court vindicated his position by declaring unanimously that the act was unconstitutional,⁴¹ Gore could hardly restrain himself. He wrote an open letter to the Oklahoma press in which he gave himself verbal pats on the back by reminding his readers that he had predicted this outcome, hinting that his stand by the Constitution in the face of popular disapproval should be remembered at election time. He also wrote a letter (which he never mailed) to Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes the day after the historic decision, praising the Court's action and recalling his defense of the Constitution during the debates on the bill.⁴²

Along with Gore's constitutional and economic opposition to governmental control of industry went his philosophy regarding federal relief, a prominent aspect of the Rooseveltian program. Gore insisted throughout his last term in office that relief should be administered at state and local levels rather than by the federal government. Because of his attitude toward the "give-away" programs and his obsession to protect the taxpayer, Gore was a perennial opponent of the New Deal relief measures. Every relief measure adopted invariably took more money from the taxpayer's pocket, and the Senator pleaded the cause of the taxpayer who financed the measures. When Congress debated the bill appropriating

⁴⁰ Senate Finance Committee, 73 Congress, *Hearings* (May 31, 1933), p. 374.

⁴¹ *Schechter v. United States*, 295 U. S. 495 (1935).

⁴² Gore to Charles Evans Hughes, May 28, 1935, in Gore Papers. The writer has edited this letter which has been published in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol XXXII, No. 4 (Winter, 1954-55), pp. 429-31.

nearly five billion dollars for relief, Gore freely expressed his dissent and voted against the bill in the face of disapproval of large numbers of unemployed voters in Oklahoma.

Gore attacked pensions in his old age, expressing disfavor with the administration's efforts to institute old age benefits and social security both as relief measures and public welfare legislation. On occasion he expressed fears of socialism advancing under the guise of the New Deal.⁵³ He held that assistance for persons over sixty-five should be opposed on the principle that it might make the recipients cease to have initiative.⁵⁴ He often expressed the opinion that the virtues self-help, self-denial, self-reliance, and self-respect were being stifled by the enormous sums set aside for relief. He was not simply using a euphonious catchphrase when he said that "the dole spoils the soul." He honestly believed that the New Deal policies repressed individual initiative, contributing to greater numbers of persons demanding subsidization.

Soil conservation was the one important area in which the Oklahoma Senator and the New Deal were in agreement. Although opposing government competition with private enterprise by voting against the Tennessee Valley Authority, Gore considered the program of conservation indispensable for the future of the country and was one of the prime movers for soil conservation. The damaging dust storms of the early thirties, with the loss of valuable topsoil by wind and soil erosion, forced Gore to favor government intervention for the hard-hit plains states. Generally opposed to federal regulation, he acknowledged erosion control as a function of the central government since it entailed engineering problems which individual farmers or states could not handle. To solve the problems of flood and erosion the Senator advocated a network of dams and reservoirs on the Mississippi River's tributaries, as well as terraces and other conservation measures on individual farms. With this in mind he introduced a bill to protect the Mississippi watershed against soil ero-

⁵³ Senate Finance Committee, 74 Congress, *Hearings* (January 25, 1935), p. 133. See also Francis Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York, 1946), pp. 298-99.

⁵⁴ *The New York Times*, January 26, 1935.

sion. A similar House bill was ultimately accepted, but Gore deserves mention for his strong advocacy of this conservation measure. He also introduced a bill to establish a soil conservation service to deal with flood waters affecting the navigability of streams. Again his bill was not the one which finally became law, but the phrase "soil conservation service," originated by Gore, was substituted for "soil erosion control service," the name originally designated for the new division in the Department of Agriculture.⁶⁵

Excluding legislation regarding soil conservation, Gore did not give great effort to the needs of his farm constituency during the 1930's. He was often out of step with the New Deal legislation attempting to meet rural needs, and he played the role of opposer more often than that of advocate. The Senator's interest in farm assistance was no longer as intense as it had been during his earlier period in the Senate. The moving of his legal voting residence from Lawton to Oklahoma City in 1930 just after his re-election was symbolic of his shifted emphasis in regard to his constituents. During his earlier terms in public office he had defended progressive measures, the farmers, and the poor, but during the 1930's—even though he insisted he was still a voice of the farmers—it was apparent that his interests no longer lay primarily with his first love. For example, although Gore harped on the expense added to gasoline for farmers' tractors when he discussed the federal gasoline tax, his opposition actually stemmed from his interest in his large oil constituency. He often figuratively shed public tears for the overtaxed oil industry and preached against the tax structure which he believed placed an unnecessarily heavy burden on that industry. Instrumental near the end of the Wilson era in the passage of a depletion allowance which greatly benefitted oil producers, Gore spent efforts to obtain a larger allowance for oil depletions during his last term in the Senate.

Gore's longtime stand against protective tariffs, dating from early years in the Senate and expressed freely during the Republican ascendancy of the twenties, was reversed when he voted for a tariff on oil during the depression. He

⁶⁵ *Congressional Record*, 74 Congress, 1 Sess., p. 6012.

circumvented his previous anti-protectionist stand by saying that the hard times demanded a tariff on oil, and he soothed his conscience by announcing that he preferred an embargo on a monthly basis rather than a tariff law.⁶⁶ Gore raised both constitutional and economic doubts about the reciprocal trade agreements of the thirties. He did not believe that the executive should be given the power to raise or reduce tariff duties or that reciprocity was the best way to promote international trade.

Gore's isolationism came to the front in the Senate fight over World Court. President Roosevelt felt that the public favored the United States' joining the World Court, and in 1935 he sent a special message to the Senate pressing that body to vote to join the Court. Gore worked against the Court with Hiram Johnson, William E. Borah, and George W. Norris, old-line progressives of the postwar era who had long expressed fears about international "entanglements." It was these men more than any others in the Senate who defeated adherence to the Court.

Although Gore had voted for some of the New Deal measures, he was too conservative to support all of them. The aged Senator was washed ashore when the New Deal reached high tide in 1936, the policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt being the significant issues in Oklahoma's Democratic primary campaign of that year. When the prognosticators analyzed the election results showing the incumbent running a poor fourth, they saw the powerful impact the New Deal had made on the Oklahoma populace. Gore's independence in the face of the national administration was the most important element in his defeat.

Another factor causing his demise was prejudice aroused among the lower classes by the support given him by metropolitan newspapers and business. Although the wealthy and conservative urban vote was cast for the Senator, he was unable to appeal to the rural voters, and he lost much of his former strength in the farming areas.⁶⁷ His affinity

⁶⁶ Speech by Gore before the Governors' Oil Relief Conference, January 16, 1931, pamphlet in Gore Papers.

⁶⁷ *Nation's Weekly*, Vol. XLVIII (July 4-11, 1936), p. 8.

with the oil interests superseded his appeal to the marginal farmers in his conservative old age, and this became an important detriment in his last campaign. For the second time in his career Gore had been defeated for a Senate seat primarily because of his opposition to a popular program. His stand against Wilson and the war measures was only a portent of his final retirement in 1938.⁵⁸

Even though Gore was a staunch conservative in the 1930's, he claimed to be a "true" progressive. Reminded of his opposition to the New Deal as an illustration of his conservatism, Gore used an analogy of a cannon ball fired at night which appeared to be standing still if a flash of lightning came while the ball was in the air. Said he, "I am going as fast as the cannon ball but I am not going as fast as lightning."⁵⁹ Claiming to be in the Jeffersonian tradition, he believed in the philosophy that the government which governs least governs best. Upon his final retirement, Gore stated that throughout his career he had tried to steer his course by the "fixed star of principle" and not by the "shooting stars of expediency."⁶⁰ Yet there is a marked difference between his early progressive career and his later conservative one.

He cannot often be charged with voting on the grounds of expediency, but it is obvious that his outlook on government regulation and federal domestic supports changed with the years. During his later years, he opposed many things which he had favored in his earlier career: direct election of Senators, the income tax, pensions, reciprocal tariff agreements, federal aid to various groups, and federal supervision of industries.

Claiming that his Populist ardor was due to the radical errancy of youth, the Old Senator had become ultraconservative. He was removed from the political scene because he was out of step with the times. But his career, spanning the first third of the twentieth century, is inseparably linked with the early history of the State of Oklahoma.

⁵⁸ Gore spent the remaining thirteen years of his life practicing law in the nation's capital specializing in Indian affairs and tax matters.

⁵⁹ *The Washington Post*, June 18, 1934.

⁶⁰ Gore to the editor of *The Independent*, (Oklahoma City) March 14, 1936, quoted in *Congressional Record*, 74th Congress, 2 Sess., p. 4378.