BOOZE, BOOMTOWNS, AND BURNING CROSSES: THE TURBULENT
GOVERNORSHIP OF PAT M. NEFF OF TEXAS, 1921-1925

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Pat M. Neff served as governor of Texas from 1921 to 1925, a period marked by political conflict between rural conservatives and urban progressives. Neff, a progressive, found himself in the middle of this conflict. Neff supported prohibition, declared martial law in the oil boomtown of Mexia, and faced the rise of the Ku Klux Klan as a political force in Texas. Though often associated with the Klan, Neff did not approve of the organization and worked against it whenever possible. During the Railroad Shopmen's Strike of 1922, Neff stalled the federal government in its demand he send troops to Denison just long enough to win re-nomination. William Jennings Bryan mentioned Neff as a possible candidate for the presidency in 1924, but he pursued a back-door strategy that alienated his political base among Texas Democrats.
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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION  

Pat M. Neff was Governor of Texas from 1921 to 1925 during the most turbulent periods in the state’s history. The governor often found himself caught between conservative and liberal interests and spent considerable time and political capital trying to negotiate a path between the two. Texas’s single party system complicated his efforts because both groups existed within Neff’s own party. Generally, Neff dealt with this conflict by staying above politics and dealing with events in a fair, even-handed manner. The governor had more than his fair share of issues and crises to deal with. “Lawlessness,” in the form of lynchings, kidnappings, and floggings, occurred almost daily. The East Texas oil boomtown of Mexia required the use of state force to tame it. The Railroad Shopmen’s Strike of 1922 was so serious that Neff came under federal pressure to send the National Guard to the town of Denison. Finally, with presidential stars in his eyes, Neff was unable to stay above politics and allowed himself to be drawn into that ultimate expression of 1920s conservative-liberal conflict—the 1924 Democratic National Convention. Neff is generally considered by historians to have been a “business progressive.” In reality, Neff was neither strongly pro-business nor notably progressive. Governor Neff was a shrewd, practical politician whose moderate approach suited a turbulent, divisive period in Texas history.

Pat Neff had a long career of public service in public office and education before and after his two terms as governor. A native of Waco, Neff received his law degree from the University of Texas in 1897 and began practicing in his hometown the
following year. He entered politics in 1899 and served in the Texas House of Representatives until 1905, the last two years as speaker. Neff then returned to his law practice in Waco and also served as McLennan County Attorney from 1906 to 1912. Neff reentered state politics in 1920 to run for governor. After leaving the governor's office, President Calvin Coolidge appointed Neff to the United States Board of Mediation in 1927 and served two years in that capacity. Governor Dan Moody then named Neff to the Texas Railroad Commission where he served until 1932. Finally, Neff served as President of Baylor University in Waco from 1932 to 1947. Neff continued on as president emeritus until his death in 1953.¹

In spite of his long and varied career, Neff has been largely ignored by historians. The bulk of what has been written about him consists of three master's theses. All of these are centered mostly on Neff's tenure as governor and were written between 1938 and 1953. None of the theses placed Neff within the context of 1920s and Texas historiography, which was admittedly very thin at the time they were written. The 1938 thesis is entitled “The Administration of Pat M. Neff: Governor of Texas, 1921-1925” by Emma M. Shirley. According to Shirley, “Governor Neff’s administration was characterized mainly by a progressive spirit...Neff’s administration will not go down in history for the work that was completed...but for its forward-looking legislation and accomplishments.” The second thesis on Neff is entitled “Pat Neff and his Achievements, A Thesis” by Louise M. Moore. This 1941 work discusses Neff’s service on the U.S. Board of Mediation, the Texas Railroad Commission, and his presidency of

¹ “Neff, Pat Morris,” *Handbook of Texas*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997, 970. Note: Neff’s appointment to the Board of Mediation by Republican Coolidge was probably the result of Neff’s support for the Harding Administration during the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike in 1922.
Baylor University in addition to his tenure as governor. Moore’s treatment of Neff’s administration makes little note of his problems with liberal-conservative conflict or his progressive nature. The final thesis on Neff is entitled “The Life of Pat Neff” by Macklyn Ward Hubbell. According to Hubbell, Neff presented himself as a “progressive democrat” who was ahead of his time. Hubbell noted, “His recommendations were basically needed but the people of Texas were not ready...and the legislators were not receptive. ²

For historians, Neff’s tenure as governor offers the opportunity to use the experiences of one person to bring new focus to the 1920s. Though Neff’s governorship has received glancing treatments by a few historians, again there is no comprehensive treatment that puts Neff’s experiences within the context of the current historiography of Texas and the 1920s. The most extensive treatment of Neff’s governorship is by Norman D. Brown in Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928, a study considered to be the foremost work on Texas politics in the 1920s. According to Brown, state politics were driven by three main factors: The Ku Klux Klan symbolized by the Hood, “Fergusonism” symbolized by Mrs. Ferguson’s Bonnet, and prohibition symbolized by the Little Brown Jug. These three factors represent the main forces of conservative politics in the state at the time. The missing element is of course the forces of liberal politics, mainly die-hard progressives without

whom there would have been no political conflict. The struggle for supremacy between these liberal and conservative forces kept Neff busy as governor.³

Brown includes two chapters directly related to Neff’s governorship. The first entitled “Pat M. Neff, Apostle of Law Enforcement” deals mostly with Neff’s first election campaign and term of office. The second entitled “Pat Neff and the Battles of Peace” deals mostly with Neff’s second term and his efforts to enact reforms such as the establishment of a state park system, soil and water conservation, writing a new constitution, tax reform, and greater support of public education. As Brown notes, these reforms indicate a fairly progressive agenda, but when weighed with Neff’s preference for fiscal responsibility, prohibition, and law enforcement, they more accurately reflect a practical political approach. Brown’s treatments of the events of Neff’s administration are somewhat uneven. Three key events during Neff’s tenure as governor are given rather brief treatments by the author. Brown spends approximately two pages on the declaration of martial law in Mexia, and four pages on the railroad strike at Denison. Brown includes one chapter on Neff’s flirtation with the presidency in 1924 entitled “Seeing it Through with McAdoo” but concentrates on the governor’s pursuit of an uninstructed delegation rather than his actions at the convention. These are the three most interesting episodes during Neff’s tenure as governor and truly need more extensive treatment.⁴

At this point, it is important to ask a few pertinent questions—What is progressivism? What was business progressivism? What groups constituted the

⁴ Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 130-1.
progressive forces in Texas and was Neff one of them? Historian Paul W. Glad has sought to answer some of these questions. Glad noted that in the 1920s, the term “progressive” had no rigid definition. Glad cited the example of journalist William Hard who asked his readers the simple question “What is progressivism?” Hard’s aim was to provide a clear definition of the term and to offer a means of comparison with “conservatism.” Hard found that people had difficulty answering his question. According to Glad, “Most of those who answered...believed that progressivism rested upon certain fundamentals, whether derived from political theory, philosophy, ethics, or religion....” Furthermore, Glad noted that a majority of respondents believed that there was such a thing as progressivism and that it differed fundamentally from the business-oriented culture of the time. So, while there was clear agreement that progressivism existed, no one could quite define it. Glad also noted that the progressive movement was “pluralistic.” Glad wrote:

The problems which aroused the progressive conscience were broad social, political, and economic problems. Whatever may have been their difference in status and interest, progressives wanted to provide the underprivileged with the means of achieving human dignity... to make the institutions of government more responsive to the need of all citizens...and that the nation's economy should serve the public interest. Programs and methods varied, but insofar as anyone shared in these broad aspirations he was to that extent a progressive.5

Many groups in Texas fit under Glad's description of progressivism, and Neff had frequent contact with many of them including the Texas League of Women Voters, Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Chautauqua Institute among others.

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In the years following Hard’s attempt to solve the riddle of progressivism, historians struggled to answer it as well. The notion of “business progressivism,” a more moderate business-oriented strain of the philosophy, often confused these attempts. Historian George B. Tindall grappled with both of these issues. According to Tindall:

Any serious attempt to understand Southern politics in the twenties must begin with recognition that the progressive urge of previous decades did not disappear but was transformed through an emphasis upon certain of its tendencies to the neglect of others, that in its new form progressivism pervaded Southern politics of the twenties.⁶

Tindall made a very good point. By the 1920s, progressivism was embedded in the liberal tradition, especially in the South. In the decade of normalcy, however, liberal politicians merely accentuated the business-oriented aspects of progressivism while deemphasizing the social aspects of the philosophy. Often politicians are judged by their achievements, or lack thereof, rather than their actual philosophies. In this case it bears asking, how many southern politicians were business progressives out of political necessity or reality rather than out of a true personal philosophy. Practical politicians like Neff spend political capital on issues that they think they can win and avoid doing so on those they cannot.⁷

Tindall also offered what he called a “working definition” of progressivism. According to him the progressive spirit was based on five central tenets. First, was the desire to bring government closer to the people. Second, was the desire for cheap, efficient government. Third, was the regulation of corporations. Fourth, was a sense

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⁷ Ibid.
of social justice including labor laws and prohibition. Finally, there was the desire for a responsive government that provided essential services such as the building of roads, support of education, and public health and welfare. Tindall noted that in the 1920s government efficiency and public services were accentuated, while democracy, corporate regulation, and social justice were deemphasized. In many ways, Neff fits this description of progressivism. Neff was often prone to taking his case to the people of Texas—he traveled extensively during his 1920 election campaign and his fight for an uninstructed delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1924. Governor Neff was also very concerned about fiscal responsibility and the need to increase revenues in order to provide expanded services. While Neff seems to have held these ideals, as governor he was able to compromise them when necessary.8

To understand Neff’s administration and the problems he dealt with, it is necessary to understand the economic and social conditions prevalent at the time. For the purposes of this topic, a useful book is George B. Soule’s *Prosperity Decade*, which comprises one volume of *The Economic History of the United States*. Soule explained the economic boom caused by World War One, the subsequent recession of 1919-20, and the uneven prosperity of the 1920s. One of Soule’s main themes was the difference between urban and rural prosperity. In Texas, this was important because the state had several urban areas but was still heavily rural and economically dependent on agriculture. This was the basis for much of Texas’s liberal-conservative conflict. Soule’s work is especially useful in understanding the Railroad Shopmen’s

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8 Ibid.
Strike of 1922 that Neff had to confront. By tracing the development of wartime regulation of the railroads through efforts at postwar efforts to reduce wages, Soule provides a context for the cause of the strike. Burl Noggle’s *Into the Twenties* discusses the transition period between the end of the war and the advent of the Harding administration. Another book providing background for this topic is William E. Leuchtenburg’s *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*. Leuchtenburg’s chapter entitled “The Politics of Normalcy” helps explain the general attitudes of people during Neff’s time as well as the flawed economic system in which some prospered while others, particularly farmers, suffered. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., offers similar background in *Crisis of the Old Order*. Schlesinger reveals how the political and business establishment of the 1920s was unprepared and unable to avert the coming Depression. Together, Leuchtenberg and Schlesinger provide a strong basis of knowledge for scholars of the 1920s.⁹

To understand Neff’s personal and political philosophies, two books are particularly useful. The first of these is Lewis L. Gould’s *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* in which the author describes the unlikely coalition that brought about prohibition in Texas. Mostly urban progressives, and often, rural prohibitionists, joined forces to bring about what they considered to be a reform. Neff embodied Gould’s thesis in that he was an urbanite and a progressive, but was also a staunch Baptist who disapproved of alcoholic beverages. Prior to his

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gubernatorial run, Neff was active in both the women’s suffrage and the prohibition movements. As a result, Neff maintained close relations with both the Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Texas and the Texas League of Women Voters throughout his term of office. Another book that is useful the governor’s personal and political philosophies is Andrew C. Reiser’s *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* in which the author places the movement, centered in Chautauqua, New York, within the larger Social Gospel movement. According to Reiser, the movement combined elements of evangelical Christianity with progressivism to form a national movement that provided much of the basis of modern liberal thought. Neff’s speech at the Chautauqua Institute in 1923 demonstrates his alignment with the movement.\(^{10}\)

The Ku Klux Klan was one of the strongest political forces during Neff’s tenure. Charles C. Alexander’s *Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* is the foremost work on the topic of the Klan in Texas. Alexander’s work centered on the establishment and growth of the Klan organization in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, and details the establishment of the organization in Texas in late 1920—about the same time as Neff’s first election. One of the most valuable aspects of Alexander’s work is his emphasis of the Klan’s foray into organized politics. Alexander used eight pages to detail the 1924 U.S. Senate race of Earle B. Mayfield, who was Klan-backed. This race was one of the most important political issues in Texas that year and received national attention.

Neff’s action, or inaction, in the election was telling of both Neff’s personal philosophy as well as his political acumen. ¹¹

One of the most important and interesting periods during Neff’s governorship came during the nationwide Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen’s Strike of 1922. President Warren G. Harding who feared its potential economic impact took this strike very seriously. Neff came under pressure by the administration to break the strike in the middle a reelection campaign. Thus, Neff was placed in a difficult political position between labor, who were presumably his supporters, and a Republican administration. Colin J. Davis’s *Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen’s Strike* is currently the only book pertaining to the strike. Though the book views the strike in a national context, it does briefly mention the strike at Denison but does not offer an extensive treatment.¹²

One of the most neglected episodes of Neff’s political career was his stillborn campaign for a favorite son presidential nomination during the 1924 election season. Thanks to the governor’s performance in handling the Shopmen’s Strike, there was considerable talk of his possible nomination for president or vice-president. William Jennings Bryan first mentioned Neff as a possible candidate in late 1923. Ultimately, the prospect of the nomination caused Neff to depart from his typically shrewd political persona and resulted in his alienation of Texas Democrats. Historians generally regard the 1924 Democratic National Convention as a prime example of rural-conservative

versus urban-liberal conflict. David Burner’s *Politics of Provincialism* offers the best treatment of this conflict during the 1920s. The most extensive work on the convention itself is Robert K. Murray’s *The 103rd Ballot*, which details the struggle between Al Smith and William Gibbs McAdoo for the nomination. In the end, the nomination went to a dark horse candidate, John W. Davis of West Virginia. Murray makes little mention of Neff. Yet, his actions during the first half of 1924 invite closer examination.13

In many ways, Neff and his policies were a product of the times in which he lived. Neff had the distinction of being Governor of Texas during a time in which the country was economically flawed and socially troubled. Much of the economic situation was out of the governor’s control, but the social problems were not and seemed to be magnified in Texas. Racism, labor problems, violence, fiscal shortfalls, and vigilante justice among other things, made Neff’s job extremely difficult. Though Neff was a progressive at heart, he often found himself limited by conservative forces. Neff is often described as being a “business progressive,” but in reality a more accurate description might be a “practical progressive,” in that he was not always pro-business and that he was sometimes able to pursue reform whenever it was politically practical. On several occasions, events alone seemed to monopolize Neff’s time and attention at the expense of social issues. Many politicians, if faced with a similar situation, would have been physically and politically ruined by the experience. It was only through patience and practicality that Neff was able to overcome the political and social storm that was Texas in the early 1920s.

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CHAPTER 2
NEFF’S ELECTION

Pat Neff’s election as governor in 1920 was itself a manifestation of the liberal-conservative conflict that dominated Texas at the time. In this election, the liberal progressive wing of the Texas Democratic Party aligned itself against the party’s conservative forces in a contentious fight for the gubernatorial nomination. In some ways, the fight foreshadowed the famous and bitter contest between Earle B. Mayfield and George Peddy for the U.S. Senate that followed in 1924. Neff’s victories in 1920 constituted a success for progressives; Mayfield’s victory in 1924 constituted a victory for conservatives. Together the two races reveal the strength of both wings of the party as well as the fluidity of Texas politics at the time. Generally, conservatives lined up behind former U.S. Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey, and liberal progressives eventually supported Neff. By 1920, Bailey had been out of politics for several years and was, for the most part, out of touch with Texas. Neff, on the other hand, had been an avid supporter of both prohibition and women’s suffrage. Neff’s contacts with and support from progressive activists kept him on the cutting edge of Texas politics and ultimately made him governor.

At first glance, it seems strange that prohibitionists would also be progressives. One assumes that those favoring the prohibition of the sale and use of alcoholic beverages would be Christian rural conservatives. In fact, many progressives saw alcohol as an impediment to the improvement of society and thus favored prohibition. This was the case in Texas where typical progressive groups such as the Texas League
of Women Voters and the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs worked with, and shared membership with, the Anti-Saloon League of Texas. According to historian Lewis L. Gould, “Few states offer a better opportunity for an examination of the progressive-prohibitionist wing of the Democrats than Texas. In the ten years after 1911, the state enjoyed a deserved reputation as a bastion of reform.” Gould also notes that Texas progressives identified liquor as a “major area in need of change” and decided to use the Democratic Party as a means to effect the change. Conservatives within the party opposed its use for this purpose as well as the use of government to enforce “moral reform,” or much of anything else. Neff worked closely with both prohibitionists and progressives and received strong support from them in the 1920 gubernatorial election.1

In many ways the 1920 elections were seen as a referendum on both progressivism and the administration of President Woodrow Wilson. This was especially true in the Texas. According to Gould, Texas Democrats, “contributed heavily” to Wilson’s nomination in 1912. By 1920, the influence of progressives was such that one plank of the Texas Democratic Party included a blanket endorsement of the Wilson administration and its policies. During the governor’s race itself, Wilson and his administration were very much at issue. Generally, Bailey denounced the administration and its policies, while Neff and the progressives praised it. Bailey had also been opposed to women’s suffrage while Neff supported it. In the end, this division within the party and the accompanying disorder made it possible for

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“charismatic personalities” like Bailey, and later Mayfield, to gain popular attention. Neff fulfilled the same role for progressives. Neff’s political skill allowed him to reach the head of the progressive political pack; the support of what turned out to be the better part of the party brought about his victory.²

When Neff began his campaign for governor more than a year in advance of the first primary, he ran an independent campaign that was somewhat separated from organized party politics. According to Neff:

No one solicited me to run for governor. I did not ask permission of anyone to get into the race ...without a conference with or advice from anyone, I announced my candidacy. No publicly recognized political leader had any interests in or strings on me. No business interests had any concern in my candidacy. Without a campaign manager, without political headquarters, without an advisory board, I proceeded to take my candidacy in person to the hearts and homes of the people.³

This passage reveals much about Neff’s priorities in seeking office. First, it reveals a strong independent streak as well as a rejection of “machine” politics often typical of the day. Second, it reveals a strong willingness to take his case directly to the people of Texas. These patterns continued throughout Neff’s term in office. His independence allowed him to maintain a practical approach and also made him appear to be above politics. Neff’s willingness to go to the people by way of statewide speaking tours reappeared during his re-election campaign in 1922 and during his fight for an uninstructed delegation to the 1924 Democratic National Convention.

In the course of the 1920 campaign, Neff traveled far and wide across the state, from “Texline to Brownsville and from Texarkana to El Paso.” Neff targeted sparsely

² Ibid.
populated areas and reported that he had campaigned in thirty-seven counties that no gubernatorial candidate had ever visited. In addition, Neff used nearly every conceivable means of transportation, including airplanes, trains, automobiles, and even a mule. In a time when roads were rough and few and cars were at least temperamental if not unreliable, Neff drove his car some 6,000 miles in pursuit of the governor’s mansion. It was a long arduous campaign for Neff that also revealed something of his populist character by way of his propensity for talking to people in barbershops and country stores. According to Neff, “From the first day of January 1920, to the last Saturday in August, I spoke approximately 850 times. When I campaigned in a small town without a speaking date, I made it a practice to shake hands with everybody I could find.” In all likelihood, Neff’s hard work was much of what separated him from his opponents.4

During his election campaign, and during his tenure as governor, Neff maintained close contacts with Texas progressives. For example, one of the most interesting exchanges was between Neff and Dallas attorney and former state senator, Martin M. Crane. Crane was a devoted progressive and long-time opponent of Bailey. In 1906, Crane had a much publicized debate with Bailey over the issue of politicians’ acceptance of money from business interests, an offense of which the senator was accused. Ultimately, Bailey left the Senate in 1912 because of the growing strength of progressives like Crane within the party. Bailey’s return to run for governor in 1920 exacerbated the rift between conservatives and progressives. Crane maintained contact

4 Neff, Battles of Peace, 7-9. Note: Neff’s primary means of travel during his campaign was by car or passenger train; however, bad weather or tight scheduling sometimes necessitated the use of other means of transport.
with all of Bailey's opponents including Neff. In one letter, Crane alluded to his exchanges with Neff and his concern over the coming election. Crane wrote:

Your several communications have reached me. I am much troubled at present about our number of candidates; we [progressives] have three for governor, the opposition has but one [Bailey]. Is there not some way that would be satisfactory to you, Mr. Looney, and Mr. Thomason, [other progressive candidates] that will enable us to get together. I do not expect you to say anything publicly about it …the success of our cause is far more important than the success of any particular individual.5

It is evident from the passage that Neff and Crane were, at least, cooperating in some way. In a follow-up letter, Crane expressed support for Wilson’s administration, an assumption of public support for Wilson, as well as Neff’s own support of the President.6

A few days later, Neff answered Crane’s earlier letters, after first apologizing for the delay caused by a busy campaign schedule. Neff mentioned that he had been campaigning for two weeks and had discussed the very issues in which Crane was interested. Neff wrote, “Answering your inquiry as to my stand with reference to the Wilson administration, desire it to say that…I have made seventeen speeches in behalf of the League of Nations and the Wilson administration. I really thought my attitude…to be well-known.” So, after reassuring Crane of his credentials, Neff closed the letter by noting that he would be in Dallas in the next week or so and expressed

5 Martin M. Crane to Pat Neff, December 20, 1919, January 9, 1920, Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Hereafter cited as PNP).
interest in meeting with Crane. These letters marked the beginning of what would be a
cordial correspondence between the two men that lasted into Neff’s first term.\(^7\)

During his campaign, and later as governor, Neff openly courted the women of
Texas for their votes. Neff had aided the women’s suffrage movement in the state and
kept in close contact with various women’s organizations in the state and generally tried
to mollify them. Neff sent many letters to various club ladies around the state in late
1919. In one letter Neff wrote:

> I am exceedingly anxious to be honored by receiving, not only your vote, but
> your active support ...I am planning to ...declare myself in sympathy with the
> program and the purposes of the Texas Federation of Women’s clubs. This
> organization has done, and is doing, many things for the general uplift of the
> state ...I have always been a prohibitionist ...I have at all times been in favor of
> women’s suffrage ...If elected governor, I shall do whatever is possible, ...to
> enforce the prohibition laws and to give to woman her long denied standing at
> the ballot box.\(^8\)

This letter sought to cement Neff’s good standing among women voters and is clearly
designed to appeal to what was perceived to be their wishes. Over the next few years,
Neff continued to cultivate the friendship and support of women’s groups. He rarely
declined their speaking requests, and when he did, was often very apologetic. As it
turned-out, the support of women was crucial to Neff’s election—and he knew it.

Another group whose support was crucial was the prohibitionists. Neff had
frequent correspondence was Claudia Hightower of the Texas Women’s Christian
Temperance Union (WCTU). By the time of his run for governor, he had known
Hightower for several years as both of them had been active in the prohibition

\(^7\) Neff to Crane, January 24, 1920, PNP.

\(^8\) Neff to Mrs. M. F. Bewley, November 14, 1919, PNP, Note: This was a form letter and there
are several examples bearing the same date sent to various Texas club women.
movement. In a letter to her a little more than a month prior to the primary, Neff expressed his appreciation for her “interest” in his campaign as well as her “splendid work.” Neff also directly addressed the importance of Hightower, and women in general, when he wrote, “Of course, I realize the importance of the organization of the women and assure you that anything you may do along this line will be sincerely appreciated. Hoping to hear from you frequently as to political conditions....” Neff also kept in close contact with his old friend J. Frank Norris, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Fort Worth. By 1920, Norris was well known for being both sensational and controversial in his fight against alcohol and gambling. Nevertheless, Neff courted Norris’ support when he wrote:

Knowing your interest in all things that affect the people morally, socially, politically, educationally and religiously. I feel no hesitancy in writing you in behalf of my candidacy for Governor. You know me and therefore, no comment from me is necessary. I am exceedingly anxious to have your open support.9

Neff received the wholehearted support of both Hightower and Norris and maintained contact with both throughout his tenure as governor.10

Neff’s relationship with labor was always a little tenuous, and this was no different during the 1920 campaign. At best, Neff’s views toward labor were ambivalent. He avoided close association with labor to avoid conservative criticism but, as a progressive, he needed to maintain friendly relations with it. During this time, it often seemed as though labor courted Neff more than he courted it. Nevertheless, Neff did seek the support of labor organizations. For example, Eaton Williams of The Toiler,

9 Neff to J. Frank Norris, October 2, 1919, PNP.
10 Neff to Claudia Hightower, June 7, 1920, PNP; “John Franklin Norris,” Handbook of Texas, Volume Four, 1036-7
“a weekly devoted to the interests of all organized labor,” acknowledged receipt of an earlier letter from Neff and promised to distribute campaign material. Williams wrote, “I have already talked to a number on regard to your candidacy for Governor and those that I have talked with, seems to be for you and I honestly believe that you will receive 75 percent of the labor vote in Dallas County.” In this case, Neff was obviously trying to reach as many labor voters as possible through this Dallas publication. In another letter, Neff courted the International Association of Oil Field, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers of America. The editor of that organization’s trade paper, George Fisher wrote, “I am in receipt of your letter of the 12th soliciting my support of your candidacy for governor of Texas. I am for the man that can defeat Joe Bailey and shall support whichever candidate appears to be the strongest.” Fisher’s letter illustrates an important point. Neff did not have to court labor particularly hard because of its great opposition to Bailey.11

When Neff began the campaign in earnest in early 1920, he was well placed to appeal to the voters of Texas. Neff was already considered a friend by Texas’s club ladies and women in general who would be voting in their first election in the fall. He was also favored by the state’s prohibitionists, with whom he had a long relationship. In addition, Neff had made valuable inroads into labor, and the state’s progressives considered him to be one of their own because of his support of Wilson and the League of Nations. Generally, Neff had his bases well-covered and was truly the political opposite of Bailey. By February of 1920, Neff had already been in the campaign for six

11 Eaton Williams to Neff, March 15, 1920, PNP; George Fisher to Neff, March 17, 1920, PNP.
months. As yet, the party's conservatives had no candidate. The initial rumblings of a possible gubernatorial campaign by Bailey occurred during the first week of the month when it was revealed that the former senator was returning to the state after a long absence in Washington, D.C., where he also had a home. Over the course of the next few weeks there were increasing indications of Bailey's impending candidacy. Finally, on February 18, Bailey announced his intention to run and set forth his “essential principles.”

These principles set Bailey apart from Neff. Generally, Bailey's principles consisted of fiscal responsibility, state's rights, and resistance to progressivism. Bailey also proposed referendums on women's suffrage and the League of Nations, both of which he opposed. Bailey's conservative nature was plainly apparent in his opening speech in which he said:

Times may change, and men may change with them, but principles never change; they are as immutable as truth and justice, they are the same today as they were yesterday, and they will be the same tomorrow as they are today ...these prophets of a new cult, when they came into power, now almost seven years ago, proceeded to substitute progressive policies for Democratic principles.

One cannot help but notice that this passage reads like both a conservative pledge of allegiance and a declaration of war on progressivism. Thus, Bailey put progressives on notice that he intended to give the electorate a clear choice—if nothing else. Bailey went on to criticize excessive government spending and debt accrued during the war. This too, Bailey laid at the feet of progressives. Bailey added:

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Taxation in this country is rapidly approaching the point of confiscation. Unless we can rescue the government from the mismanagement of these improvident politicians, the youngest man in this audience will not live long enough to see our war debt paid or war taxes repealed. Both should be done, but it is certain that neither will be done by these progressive democrats, nor can we expect much better of the republicans.14

In the end, Bailey and his policies became the central issue in the campaign. Bailey's entry into the race marked the beginning of a bitter contest to see which elements were stronger within the Texas Democratic Party, the old-line conservatives, or the progressives.

If Bailey fired the opening salvo of the campaign, Neff answered with a full broadside. In a speech in Hillsboro, Neff first alluded to Bailey's apparent residency in Washington instead of Texas. He said to laughter and applause, “A well-known and distinguished citizen of Washington has announced his candidacy for Governor of Texas.” Neff then referred to Bailey as “an alien citizen of Texas running for state office on a federal platform.” He added, “Bailey is legally disqualified by the Constitution to become governor...The Constitution clearly provides that a candidate for governor shall have resided in the state for at least five years preceding the election.” The crowd responded with cries of “Skin him! We don’t want him!” and general glee. Neff then attacked Bailey's conservative demeanor by noting that “He is a negative, not an affirmative personality, and never during his congressional career produced a single constructive measure but has always been a ‘knocker’ and is opposed to everything.” At this point, Neff picked up the progressive mantle. Noting the “change of the times,” Neff said, “We've got to keep up in legislative and governmental affairs with this rapid

14 Ibid.
civilization we are living in. I am not running for governor on the activities of other generations or on what happened a hundred years ago.” With this, Neff too offered the voters of Texas a clear choice—the future or the past.15

So, with the battle lines drawn, and the options known to all, the progressives rallied. On March 6, a mass-meeting of “Woodrow Wilson Democrats” assembled in Dallas at City Hall Auditorium. The meeting of up to 1200 included many of Texas’s most prominent progressive politicians and activists including Governor William Hobby and Martin Crane. The four progressive candidates for governor, Benjamin F. Looney, Dwight Lewelling, Robert Thomason, and Neff appeared. Others included club woman and suffragist Mrs. Percy V. [Anna] Pennybacker, Texas League of Women Voters President Jessie Daniel Ames, and Galveston suffragist Minnie Fisher Cunningham. Generally, participants at the meeting gave high praise to Wilson and his administration and condemned Bailey. In a speech by Waco attorney, and long-time friend of Neff, Cullen Thomas, the progressives answered the call to arms. Thomas said, “We delight to call ourselves progressive Democrats. We stand arrayed against the Bourbon Democrats, who never forgot the old and never learn the new. We know we live in a new day and we won’t spend our time groping in graveyards.”16

When Neff’s turn to speak came, he began on a more conciliatory note. Saying, “We are gathered here not to weaken but to strengthen, not to destroy but to preserve the Democratic Party. In this fight, let none but true Democrats be placed on guard.” Neff then reiterated his earlier statements about Bailey saying, “Bailey is an objector.

15 “Neff Scores Bailey in Hillsboro Speech,” February 22, 1920, DMN.
16 “Bailey is Denounced by Wilson Democrats,” March 7, 1920, DMN.
He doesn’t stand for anything. He doesn’t today endorse the conduct of any living man except himself...He believes he is the only living statesman.” Finally, to rousing applause, Neff concluded, “Let Bailey go back into his shell. Let him go back to Washington. But let the Democrats of Texas today get ready for the battle and go forward.” Neff’s participation in this event indicates that not only did he regard himself as a progressive, but that he was indeed accepted as such by others.17

One issue that was prominent in the campaign was the wartime service records of Neff and Bailey. Many questioned Bailey’s patriotism and his refusal to support the financing plan for the war. In a speech in Fort Worth in April, Neff criticized Bailey’s failure to speak for the American Red Cross and particularly his refusal to sell “Liberty Bonds.” Neff noted that Bailey had refused to be a “four-minute” man, one who made four-minute speeches to sell bonds during the war. Neff said that Bailey had “declined by stating that he could not afford to recommend to his friends the purchase of these bonds to carry on the war.” About a week later, Bailey responded to the charges by saying, “And I’ll tell you this—and it isn’t an idle threat either. If one of them [who had made the charges] will say to my face that I was not loyal to my country he will think I am a warrior.” At about the same time, Neff’s people discovered a sworn affidavit in which Bailey admitted that he had indeed refused to sell the bonds. Later in the year, there was some question over whether or not Neff should have registered for the draft. The entire issue hinged on Neff’s age to within a year. In this case, Neff produced a family Bible with his birth date given a year later than thought. Generally, people found

17 Ibid.
it hard to believe that Neff did not know his own age. Neff was able to put the issue to rest, thanks to the bible, but Bailey was never able to shake the loyalty question.\footnote{\textit{Pat Neff Attacks Bailey’s War Record}, April 22, 1920, \textit{DMN}; \textit{Bailey Defends Loyalty to Nation}, April 30, 1920, \textit{DMN}; \textit{Neff Reads Affidavit of What Bailey Said}, April 28, 1920, \textit{DMN}; \textit{Old Bible of Neff Family is Shown}, August 22, 1920, \textit{DMN}.}

A look at some of the campaign flyers used during the campaign reveals much about its issues and overall tenor. In 1920, there were no mass communications for candidates to use other than newspapers. Dallas’s radio station WFAA, owned by the \textit{Dallas Morning News}, did not even go on the air until June of 1921. Because of this, candidates for statewide office had to keep grueling speaking schedules in order to reach a broad cross-section of the electorate. In one of Neff’s flyers, his courting of the female vote is apparent. It read, “Hon. Pat M. Neff- Will Speak in Gainesville Thursday-at 8 P.M. - from the steps of the of the east side of the Court House.” In large print on the bottom, it read, “Ladies Especially Welcome.” It should be noted that Gainesville was Bailey’s home. Labor’s support of the progressive candidate is apparent in a series of flyers put out by the Labor Political League of Texas Campaign Committee. One flyer had written across the top “ARE YOU A UNION MAN?” The next line read, “Then vote for Neff, Thomason, or Looney.” In bold letters, nearly as big as the header it read, “Vote Against Bailey.” Across the bottom it read, “Vote Right, Let Labor Rule in Texas.” In another flyer, distributed by the same organization, the appeal was made to rural workers. Its header read, “Mr. Farmer and Farm Laborer” and below it read, “Join
Hands with Labor, Vote for Looney, Thomason, or Neff for Governor.” Again in bolded print it read, “VOTE AGAINST BAILEY.”

Clearly, there was a progressive alignment against Bailey. In fact, Bailey was so rabidly conservative, that practically everyone but the old-line Democrats were arrayed against him. Many on the conservative side equated their political opponents to communists. Neff apparently was not bothered by this association, and more than likely got a little chuckle out of it. At his speaking engagements, Neff’s campaign often handed out cards with his name and photo on them. In one case, Neff apparently had handed back to him one of these cards with the following scrawled on it: “You are branded a ‘Red’ and correctly so--.” It depicts the strength of political feeling of the right at the time. Neff kept the card and filed it away rather than throwing it away or otherwise disposing of it.

Generally, the campaign did not go well for Bailey, such was the opposition to him. In the county nominating conventions held in the early May, Bailey’s support was found to be “negligible.” County conventions across the state sent delegates to the state convention that supported the Wilson administration and presumably progressive policies—Bailey was on the wrong side. Even Bailey’s home of Cooke County, even the very precinct he lived in, rejected him. The effect was such that Bailey returned to Washington, no doubt, to confer with his friends there and to lick his wounds. At this point, Bailey probably should have surmised the probable outcome of his endeavor, but he refused to give up. The campaign continued, and the Texas Democratic Primary

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19 Neff Campaign Flyer, July 1920, PNP; Labor Political League of Texas Campaign Committee Flyers, May, 1920.
20 Neff Campaign Card, PNP.
was held on July 25th. The race between Neff and Bailey was close; most reports during the next week gave Bailey a slight lead. Final figures released by the Texas Election Bureau on August 6th, gave Bailey a lead of just 1,852 votes over Neff with Bailey receiving 152,173 votes, and Neff 150,321. The results put Bailey and Neff in a run-off election. Despite initially receiving more votes than Neff, Bailey had a problem—Looney and Thomason, the other two progressive candidates received another 100,000 votes between them and they were out of the race. In the run-off, held August 28th, Neff defeated Bailey by 73,325 votes. The standard-bearer of Texas conservatism had lost.21

Some sent congratulatory letters immediately upon Neff’s nomination, on the assumption that unless he died or met some other unfortunate circumstance, he would become governor. Others waited until Neff was formally elected in November to send their congratulations. In either event, they poured into Neff’s office from friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. One such letter came from Claudia Hightower of the WCTU. Hightower wrote, “Never in the history of Texas has there been an election of their chief executive, that has been so closely watched, and that as many fervent prayers have gone up, as the one just closed.” Hightower also passed-on a sentiment expressed by her daughter concerning the last election, “Right must triumph over wrong.” About the same time, Neff received a letter from Eunice Buchanan of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs (TFWC). Buchanan began her letter, “My Dear

Next Governor, yesterday I voted for the first time in my life...for you. This early Sabbath morning, I correctly congratulate Texas.” Buchanan’s sentiment was no doubt felt by many other Texas women, and the fact that she took time on Sunday morning to write the letter reveals the depth of the sentiment. Florence C. Floore, president of the TFWC, also expressed her feelings. She wrote, “Texas is to be congratulated in her choice of a conscientious, progressive citizen for governor. The club women of the state are glad that the man to occupy the chair of chief executive is on with an intelligent sympathy in their work for the welfare of our women and children.” Floore spoke for Texas’s progressive clubwomen, and perhaps many others.22

Neff also received some rather more entertaining congratulations that he likely enjoyed very much. An example, addressed to J. W. Bailey read, “Election returns indicate that you are very strong both in Germany and Mexico. You ought to carry Hell’s Half Acre in Fort Worth and your hometown, Washington D.C. in later returns. Cheer-up, old boy—the ex-Kaiser needs a new hand....” At the bottom of the note, scrawled in Neff’s own hand was the notation, “Copy of one of my Celebrating Messages.” This too, Neff filed away for future reminiscence. With the election over, and good sentiments expressed, Neff spent the remainder of the year preparing for his coming administration.23

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22 Hightower to Neff, August 31, 1920, PNP; Eunice Buchanan to Neff, August 29, 1920, PNP; Florence Floore to Neff, November 6, 1920.
23 Congratulatory note to Neff, unsigned and undated, PNP.
CHAPTER 3

1921: AN OMINOUS BEGINNING

For Texas, and the nation, 1921 marked the end of the Progressive Era under Woodrow Wilson and the beginning of Warren G. Harding’s “Normalcy.” The change did not come particularly quickly or easily for Texans. As the state’s 1920 gubernatorial election showed, Texas progressives were disinclined to go along with a move to a more conservative agenda such as Harding proposed. But, as in the rest of the nation, conservative forces were gathering strength in Texas—the mood of the state was changing. More importantly, the brand of conservatism that was growing in the state was not of the “kinder and gentler” variety but was more often that of the harder, more sinister kind. The most ominous development was the reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the state just one month before Neff’s inauguration. Rural conservatives were becoming increasingly vocal, while urban progressives continued their pursuit of Wilsonian ideals. Labor problems seemed to be an increasing threat as evidenced by the ongoing strike of Galveston’s longshoreman and the continuing wage cuts amongst the nation’s railroad workers. The East Texas oil boom was causing rapid growth of towns such as Mexia. Because of all of these factors, Texas politics and society became increasingly more divisive during this period. Neff had the misfortune of taking office during a time of contentious, and often violent, change.

When Neff took office on January 18, 1921, he could not have known the harrowing path he was about to follow. The novice governor began to work, unaware that his qualities and abilities would be seriously challenged. The 37th Legislature of the
State of Texas convened shortly after the inaugural, and provided Neff’s first personal and political challenge. During the first six months of his term, Neff’s inexperience was evident especially in his dealings with the legislature. Traditionally, Texas governors use their inaugural addresses to provide a legislative agenda at the beginning of the session. Neff, however, did not do this but instead promulgated a series of special messages to the legislature that were frequently confusing. In the first of these messages, issued on January 20, Neff wrote, “We are here, I am ready for my part of the work that brings us here...I realize full well that teamwork is necessary...Our first business at hand is to redeem the pledges made by us to the people.” Neff then offered the Texas Democratic Party platform, which was generally vague but included blanket approval of the Wilson administration as well as support for the League of Nations, as a basis for action. According to the new governor, “All party platforms should be carefully considered and faithfully followed.” Thus, Neff’s first message to the legislature left it to its own devices, and his failure to provide strong direction soon led to problems.¹

The *Dallas Morning News* found the message “notable for its brevity” and further noted that it was probably “the shortest official paper of its kind that ever marked the outlining of a governor’s policy.” Within a few days those familiar with Austin’s inner-workings found themselves puzzled in regards to exactly what Neff’s program was and began to clamor for answers. One seasoned observer noted that, “The governor, from

¹ Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 12; “Democratic State Platform Adopted,” *DMN*, September 9, 1920. (This includes the complete text of the 1920 Platform of the Texas Democratic Party.); “Neff’s Message is with Legislature,” *DMN*, January 21, 1921. Note: The text of Neff’s message was reprinted in the *Dallas Morning News* which is cited here.
the statements of those who have sought him, not to impress him with their views, but to give him an opportunity to express his views to them on legislation,” find him to be remarkably “calm” and “reticent.” The observer likened Neff’s reliance on the party platform as a legislative guide to the “man who could not remember the Lord’s Prayer and hung at the foot of his bed and pointed to it when he retired.” The observer also noted, however, that by not presenting an overall wish list of legislation, the governor did not expose himself to the stigma of failure if the legislature did not approve his policies. Neff’s approach was instead to submit his policies to the legislature item by item. By doing so, Neff was able to “fight the legislature on items, and not general policies.” The observer concluded that if Neff’s actions were deliberate, it was the “shrewdest thing ever done by a governor of this state.”2

Though Neff’s approach may have indeed been deliberate, it was much too subtle for Texas legislators. Within a week, Neff began to offer more concrete proposals for the legislature’s consideration. In a message to the legislature, Neff wrote, “The Government belongs to the people. You and I represent the people. We should conduct their government economically and efficiently or resign.” With that, Neff suggested a series of proposals to streamline and improve Texas government. These included the consolidation of several state agencies, including the Pure Food Department and the Health Department. The governor also suggested placing the state Mining Board and mines inspectors under the Department of Labor, and all state agriculture stations, as well as anything connected with the pursuit of agricultural

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knowledge, under the auspices of the A&M College [Texas A&M -College Station]. Neff also proposed the widening of the state Department of Agriculture to encompass all regulation of those interests in the state. Neff also proposed the outright abolition of the State Parole Board and the Industrial Welfare Board. It was noted that Neff “was seriously wounded where he has not killed outright” and that “he has not sheathed his knife, but has stopped only for a moment to whet it on his boot.”

Neff then turned his attention to law and order in another message to the legislature dated February 1, 1921. Neff’s message began, “the law is the stabilizing influence which holds society together. It is the foundation of every civilization. To uphold it is the first duty of a government.” The governor’s first suggestion was for the repeal of the state’s suspended sentence law that frequently allowed criminals to serve less time than originally sentenced. This was rooted in Neff’s experience as a district attorney, as he felt the legal system was often too lenient. Next, the governor took aim at law enforcement officers engaged in criminal activity. Neff wrote, “I remind you that at times local officers who are sworn to enforce the law, corruptly stand in the way of its enforcement.” He then called for a legal means to remove those officers. Finally, the governor called for an amendment to the Dean Law, which governed state prosecution of prohibition violations, to allow purchasers of alcoholic beverages to testify against sellers. Neff also addressed the issue of lawlessness that was then

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3 “Message to the Senate and House of Representatives,” January 27, 1921, PNP, (Note: The author did not find this particular document in the Texas State Archives, however a duplicate was found in the Neff papers at Baylor. The state archives Records of the Governor are limited exclusively to Neff’s official business. The vast majority of Neff’s records are housed at Baylor including duplicates of many official messages and speeches.); “Neff Believes in Action from Start,” DMN, January 28, 1921.
growing in the state as he noted, “When a government ceases to enforce her laws, it ceases to be a government and becomes a mob.” Neff would spend the next four years dealing with lawlessness and mob violence—and the problem was to grow much worse. These proposals formed the basis of Neff’s legislative program for the session and were the focus of his interest.4

By the end of February, open conflict threatened between the governor and the legislature due to a lack of progress on Neff’s suggested legislation as well as on the appropriation bills. As of the 26th, the state legislature had only passed one of Neff’s bills, that being the consolidation of the Pure Food and Drug Department with the state Health Department. The governor had not signed any major legislation, and the state legislature had not passed any of the appropriation bills. Time was running out for the regular legislative session. Meanwhile, the House of Representatives voted to adjourn on March 12, citing the need of several members to go home. Also on the 26th, Senate leadership informed the governor of the need for a special session, as the Senate Finance Committee did not have enough time to consider the three appropriation bills. By the end of January, state legislators introduced 304 bills in the House and 143 in the Senate. In addition nineteen joint resolutions had been passed. Only five bills were submitted to the governor for approval. So, as the regular session ended, the legislature had still not fulfilled its main purpose of appropriating the state’s funds, and

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4 “[Message] To the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives,” February 1, 1921, PNP.
Governor Neff threatened to bring it back into session immediately upon adjournment to do so.⁵

On February 23, the amendment of the Dean Prohibition enforcement law failed in the house. The governor was not pleased that one of his pet bills went down to defeat in the regular session. This was Neff’s proposal to amend the Dean Prohibition enforcement law. According to Neff:

The defeat of this bill is the greatest victory for the bootlegger and lawless element of Texas. The action of the House by its vote practically wiped off the books and made ineffective the prohibition law. As governor, I thought this broken link in the law should be mended. The members of the House did not think so ...Lawlessness seems to have the right of way these days in Texas.⁶

The governor's comment raised the ire of some representatives and did not help the increasingly confrontational relationship between the executive and legislative branches. Representative Sid Crumpton of Bowie complained that the governor's comments were “unjust” and that he had been “classed with the other sixty members as standing in the way of legislation in Texas.” Representative Grover C. Morris, of Medina, whose name was on the bill, also voted against it. Morris referred to the possibility of the bill allowing the admittance of hearsay evidence. Morris said, “I am unwilling to see a man charged with a felony to be convicted on the unsupported evidence of a co-defendant or a co-felon.” In an editorial, the *Dallas Morning News* probably expressed the thoughts of many by observing, “Governor Neff has shown more petulance than wisdom in his comments on the refusal of the House to pass the bill.” The editors felt

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the governor was exaggerating the importance of the bill and was just upset at its failure, which was likely correct.\(^7\)

Despite any resentment over policy, the real point of contention between Neff and the legislature was the lack of progress on the appropriation bills. Neff believed that it was the legislature’s constitutional to complete its work within the allotted time. Neff’s threat to reconvene the legislature immediately after adjournment caused some uproar. Many legislators were simply anxious to return to their homes and businesses after a two-month absence. Others saw Neff’s threat as an insult to the notion of equality of the executive and legislative branches. One of these was Senator R. M. Dudley of El Paso, who was also chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. Dudley said, “I have been impressed with the idea...that there are three branches of government in Texas—the executive, legislative, and judicial. I do not know of any legislator who is attempting to suggest to the executive.” Dudley felt that Neff was rushing the legislature in its duties, especially its consideration of appropriations, and was not paying due respect to the institution. According to Dudley, “The biennial appropriation of the people’s money has become so large, and there are so many interests to be conserved, it is our earnest desire to conserve all of them with equal fairness. This, naturally, is no small feat.”\(^8\)

Dudley’s observation is an important one that many of his contemporaries did not make, possibly including even Neff. By the end of the progressive era in 1920,
demands for public services and infrastructure had grown, and it required considerable attention by the legislature to make appropriations. In addition, appropriations had begun to exceed available revenues. Dudley, as a seasoned legislator, probably realized this. Neff, who had not been in state politics since 1912, may well have not. Budget shortfalls were a continuing problem throughout Neff’s administration. Nevertheless, by the end of the session, relations between the governor and the legislature were strained. Though legislators made a last minute push to pass legislation, many bills died in committee, including the appropriation bills. Furthermore, Neff’s “so-called moral reform bills” were also among the casualties. The failure of the regular session probably was the result of several factors. One of these may have been Neff’s own inexperience. By failing to offer the legislature strong guidance at the beginning of the session, he may have prompted it to consider too many pieces of legislation and fail to concentrate on budgetary concerns. In something of a peace offering, Neff agreed not to call a special session before June 1.9

In early May, Neff announced his intention to call the special session in mid-July, tentatively on the 11th. The date chosen was some three weeks later than most expected. When a reporter asked Neff why he had chosen to convene the session in the middle of the summer, he joked, “I tried to get the hottest day in the hottest month of the year.” Then Neff offered that he had considered many dates but had concluded the 11th to be the most convenient for a majority of legislators. According to the governor, the session would consider law enforcement measures, reform laws,

9 “Solons Speed Up in Closing Hours,” *DMN*, March 11, 1921; “Neff Not to Call Special Session Before June 1, *DMN*, March 26, 1921.
departmental consolidations, general economy, education, and finally, the appropriation bills. To complicate matters, the State Comptroller’s Office announced, just before the session met, that the state had a $4 million revenue shortfall. Neff addressed the issue of the state’s finances in a speech two days before the special session convened. The governor explained:

The present state ad valorem [property] tax rate is twenty-two cents on the one hundred dollars. This will produce in tax money for next year $5.8 million ...the highest tax rate possible under our constitution is thirty-five cents on the one hundred dollars. This will produce $9 million. Taxes from other sources ... will amount to about $6 million. When we take out of the treasury the money appropriated by the regular session ... we will lack five million dollars. “10

So, as the special session began, Neff and the legislature again faced a busy session. “11

Shortly after the session began, the rift between Neff and Senator Dudley reappeared. In a swipe aimed at the governor, Dudley made the point that had the legislature passed the appropriations bills in the regular session, decreasing revenues would have left the state in serious financial trouble that would be averted by passing the bills later in the year. Meanwhile, other legislators had problems with Neff’s policies and methods. Many were upset at Neff’s unsubstantiated blanket charges of “wholesale graft” in state government. Because of all of this, several of Neff’s supporters in the House proposed a resolution expression of confidence in the governor. To his credit, Neff was more interested in results than expressions of goodwill aimed toward himself. In a letter to one of the bill’s sponsors, Representative James Rogers, Neff wrote:

10 “Governor Explains State’s Finances, DMN, July 9, 1921.
11 “Special Session to Meet July 11,” DMN, May 5, 1921; “State in Need of Four Million,” DMN, July 6, 1921.
The Legislature was not convened in special session to discuss me. I am not a legislative problem. I am standing for economy in the administration of the government and for the enforcement of the law and against government graft in sums both large and small. It seems to me that instead of continuing a discussion of things of a personal and political nature, it would be much better to get right down to business and pass the laws for which the legislature assembled. If the withdrawal of the resolution will assist in accomplishing this purpose, it would please me very much to have you withdraw it.12

Rogers and company respected Neff’s request and withdrew the bill. Despite feelings of ill will, the legislature continued its work.13

One of the major sources of controversy during this session was a bill sponsored by Representative Wright Patman of Cass County condemning the Ku Klux Klan. Patman and nine other representatives signed the resolution condemning the work of masked bands of vigilantes. The bill resulted in spirited debate on the floor of the House between supporters and opponents of the Klan. Governor Neff supported the bill, though he never mentioned the organization by name. Neff stated that he supported legislation aimed at “...secret organizations organized for the purpose of masking and disguising themselves and violating the laws of this state by inflicting punishment upon persons against whom no legal complaint has been filed.” The governor added that he was an “advocate of law enforcement” and supported any strengthening of the law that the legislature “may deem necessary.” Despite Neff’s apparent approval, the bill did not pass.14

12 Neff to James Rogers, July 28, 1921, PNP.
13 “Clouds Hovering over Legislature,” DMN, July 20, 1921; “Neff Called Upon to Prove Charges,” DMN, July 20, 1921; “Governor Submits Message on Graft,” DMN, July 21, 1921; Note: Neff’s graft charges were investigated by a House committee and found to be without merit. The governor testified in the proceedings.
On August 6, with just eight working days left in the special session, Neff submitted his final message to the legislature. Neff proposed seventeen additional matters, all of a minor nature, for consideration. These included such trivial matters as the format of poll tax receipts that probably struck many as being outside the realm of the governor’s responsibility. At the same time, Neff refused to call a second special session. However, he also allowed that he did not want consideration of these new proposals, or those he had submitted earlier, to get in the way of the appropriation bills. Over the course of the next few days, legislators did just that and concentrated on appropriations. Despite meeting until midnight, legislators were not able to complete their work. The final sticking point was the educational appropriation bill for the state’s colleges and universities.\footnote{As promised, Neff reconvened the legislature immediately to deal with the final appropriation bill. Many of the legislators assumed that the education appropriation would be passed and arranged to go home. They were disappointed—as was Governor Neff. According to one account, “It was apparent that the chief executive was not pleased with the situation and hesitated to call another session. However upon being pressed he told those present that they had better not go home as they would have to come back soon.” An editorial of the \textit{Austin Statesman} noted that the legislators could not be blamed as circumstance and the many proposals of the governor had given them “enough to exercise a ‘Long Parliament’.” In an interesting aside, nine members of the August 1, 1921; Note: Patman authored bills to prohibit the wearing of masks in public as well as the bill denouncing the Klan. Neither bill passed. 

\footnote{“Governor Submits his Final Message,” \textit{DMN}, August 7, 1921; “Neff Makes it Plain He will not Request Second Extra Session,” \textit{DMN}, August 7, 1921; “Progress is Shown in Both Houses,” \textit{DMN}, August 9, 1921; “House Rejects Report on Educational Bill by Vote of 66 to 58,” \textit{DMN}, August 17, 1921.}
House, who opposed the bill, resorted to a favorite delaying tactic of Texas legislators—they hid out. After the men came up missing in a quorum call, the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Travis County Sheriff were instructed to find them. Their efforts included a late-night car chase through the streets of downtown Austin. The men were rounded-up and the legislators continued their work.\textsuperscript{16}

The convening of the second special session of the 37\textsuperscript{th} Texas Legislature strained relations between its members and the executive. In a speech on the floor of the House, Representative J. Roy Hardin of Kaufman criticized the governor for failing to provide legislators with proper information to make decisions. Hardin said, “What does he do when members...go to him for information? He dodges the question.” Then Hardin added, “He has assumed an air of patronizing superiority and is playing to the political galleries of Texas.” Neff watched Hardin calmly from the rear of the chamber as he leaned back in a chair. Neff himself came under pressure not to use his veto power on the remaining bills, but instead to use his “blue pencil” or line item veto. Many of Neff’s friends including Annie Webb Blanton, who was State Superintendent of Public Instruction, pleaded with the governor not to “throw things back to the legislature and have the bickering, quarrels, and delays” that had so marked the session. When the legislature finally passed the education appropriation on the 25\textsuperscript{th},

Neff took Blanton’s advice and went to work with his “blue pencil.” In the end, Neff and the legislature did the best they could under difficult fiscal conditions.\(^{17}\)

While the legislature had been at work, the Ku Klux Klan gathered strength and influence. This concerned many Texans, as indicated by Representative Patman’s work during the session. By mid-1921, the Klan was a pervasive influence on the political and social life of Texans. Its rise and growth in the state almost exactly coincided with Neff’s rise to power. The new Klan came to Texas in September of 1920 with the arrival of Z. R. Upchurch, an emissary from Klan headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. Upchurch’s mission was two-fold; he acted as a representative to the annual meeting of the United Confederate Veterans and evaluated Texas’s suitability as an outpost of the “Invisible Empire.” In October, the Klan established its first chapter in Texas in Houston, and over the course of the next year, spread throughout the state. Once the Klan was entrenched in Texas, it grew rapidly. During Neff’s term of office, the Klan sought to impose its moral values and political power on the state. According to historian Charles C. Alexander, “To the Klan, reform meant preserving or restoring the status-quo. To reverse changes wrought by progressive and populist reform as well as the shift from rural to urban values.” As a result, the Klan was a bastion of radical conservatism and was a major source of opposition to more progressive politicians like Neff.\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\) “Legislature Asked to Revoke Part of Appropriation; Neff Under Fire,” \textit{AS}, August 23, 1921; (Representative Hardin is not fully identified in the article.); “Governor Expected to Reprimand Lawmakers for Not Doing More,” \textit{DMN}, August 18, 1921.

As 1921 progressed, news items about the Klan or incidents attributed to it steadily increased, as did public interest in the organization. In January, Imperial Wizard William J. Simmons revealed his plans for the organization. According to one account, the revived Klan was to be a “ritualistic fraternal order, organized along semi-military lines” and was devoted to “keeping forever the government of the United States in the hands of native-born American citizens.” In addition, the organization was to be “thoroughly organized and a somewhat prosaic business organization.” Thus, the base for the new Klan was on vaguely noble, yet somewhat dubious, ideals and designed to be a large moneymaking venture. Many older people remembered, sometimes fondly, the previous organization. Charles L. Martin, a Texas newspaperman, was among those who recalled the Klan of the old days. Martin said, “I can conceive of no purpose...no necessity for a revival of the Ku Klux Klan.” Martin apparently did not think much of the new Klan as he proclaimed it “an imitation affair, in no sense, of the same nature or characteristics of the original.” With increased incidents of lynching and mob justice, curiosity about the Klan continued in Texas.19

The sheer prevalence of the Klan in daily life drove this increased curiosity. Many businesses featured Klan-themed advertising. The Southern Pacific Railroad published an ad with the catch-line of “Klean, Kool, Komfortable.” One Dallas menswear store published an ad featuring a hooded and robed cartoon figure. It is not clear in the ad whether the store actually sold hoods and robes. Meanwhile, the D. W. Griffith film about the Klan, “Birth of a Nation,” made return engagements in Texas.

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theaters. In Austin, another film entitled “The Face at Your Window- A Dramatic Story of the Ku Klux Klan” played at the Hippodrome. Still another film, “Mysterious Eyes of the Ku Klux Klan,” which purported to show the “inside workings of the Klan,” played in Houston. A series of articles on the organization that appeared in the *Dallas Morning News* in the fall further indicated the intense interest in the Klan. The exposé originally appeared in the *New York World* and won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize for journalism. The series included such inside information as the group’s secret handshake, complete with photo illustrations. One article contained excerpts from the organization’s handbook, the “Kloran,” that detailed its pledges and ceremonies. In response to criticism, the Klan also published a one-page ad in the *Dallas Morning News* disavowing violent acts by its members. In the summer of 1921, the Klan seemed to be everywhere in Texas one looked.20

By July, citizens reported Klan-related incidents on an almost daily basis from around the state. Many people were kidnapped and beaten for various moral infractions. In Lufkin, Earl H. Peters was seized by four men and tarred and feathered after failing to heed a warning to leave town. This was the second such incident in Lufkin in twenty-four hours. Another man, W. J. McKnight of Timpson, was actually tarred and feathered twice within five days. The prevalence of incidents like this raised the concerns of many Texans. Though many, as evidenced by its growth, supported

20 Southern Pacific Railroad, Advertisement, August 24, 1921; Dreyfuss and Son, Advertisement, *DMN*, October, 1921; Majestic Theater, Advertisement, *DMN*, Summer 1921; (“Birth of a Nation” also had a run in Houston theaters during 1921.); Hippodrome Theater, Advertisement, *AS*, June 8, 1921; Iris Theater, Advertisement, *HC*, August 14, 1921; “Klan Exposé Wins ’21 Pulitzer Prize,” *DMN*, May 20, 1922; (The series began its run in the *Dallas Morning News* on September 6, 1921 and continued almost daily for two weeks.); “Secret Handshake of KKK,” *DMN*, September 25, 1921; “Kloran of Klan has Dire Dreadfulness Throughout its Pages, *DMN*, September 11, 1921; Ku Klux Klan, Advertisement, *DMN*, August 12, 1921.
the Klan in its efforts to clean up the state’s moral values, many others considered it a danger to organized society. In Neff’s hometown of Waco, eighty of the town’s leading citizens signed a petition stating opposition to the “practices of the present-day Ku Klux Klan.” The petition stated that the Klan was “subversive of constitutional government and civil liberty, and we pledge our moral support to our officers in their efforts to protect citizens against the unlawful violence of such organizations.”

Many citizens were also concerned about the possible involvement of their elected officials with the organization. By this time, the pervasiveness of the Klan was such that public officials could hardly avoid addressing the issue. This was especially true of the governor. Publicly, Neff avoided direct references to the Klan, as he probably realized its growing power and influence. But Neff was not entirely afraid to address the issue, being concerned with what he often termed as “lawlessness” or “mob rule.” In an open letter to McLennan County officials investigating Klan activities there, Neff wrote, “The law can and should by enforced only through the duly constituted authorities...No individual and no organization, however large, should be above the law.” Neff never mentioned the Klan by name, but his allusion is obvious. This began a pattern for Neff throughout his tenure that often led to questions about the governor’s stand in reference to the organization.

Privately, Neff and his friends talked more openly about the Klan. In a letter from George W. Barcus, Neff’s friend, confidant, and former campaign manager, the governor’s personal opinion is more obvious. Barcus wrote:

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22 “Neff Wants Laws Enforced Legally,” *DMN*, October 12, 1921;
Since you were here last week, the K.K.K. has been discussed considerable [sic] locally as well as in the state press. You asked what I thought of you making a statement with reference to the matter. I have changed my views on the question. At that time, I thought it would be best to follow your policy of silence.... There is such a constant demand to know where you stand and your silence is being taken as an endorsement, I fear of the Klan. In my judgment, you should come out with a good, strong statement...that you as governor, are not only opposed to mob law in any form, but are opposed to any form of government that attempts to destroy the government. If necessary, I would call the legislature to stop these parades and the activities of the Klan ...

This passage is important for two reasons. First, it specifically refers to, and reveals, the governor’s “policy of silence” regarding the Klan. Second, it puts to rest the notion that Neff was a supporter of the Ku Klux Klan.

By the fall of 1921, with the legislative session over, Neff probably thought the rest of the year would pass without requiring his services. But, one more trouble spot had been developing since his election. On November 19, 1920, drillers struck oil in the town of Mexia, located approximately thirty miles east of Waco. The town had been the center of drilling activity for over a year. In succeeding months, speculators and job seekers swamped the town. By mid-year, Mexia was the center of busy growth and steadily increasing oil production. By September oil lease deals in the Mexia area totaled over a million dollars. Leases changed hands quickly in the hands of speculators. Thousands flocked to the town, and it became crowded beyond capacity. By late 1921, Mexia had become a boomtown with all that entailed especially the bootlegging and “lawlessness” that Neff reviled.

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23 George W. Barcus to Neff, October 11, 1921, PNP.
24 “Mexia is Excited Over Oil Outlook,” DMN, November 24, 1920; “Mexia Oil Field Grows Important,” DMN, June 5, 1921; “Unusual Activity in Mexia District,” DMN, August 14, 1921; “Mexia Lease Deals Now Total Million,” DMN, September 2, 1921; “Mexia Field Busiest Section in Southwest,” DMN, September 18, 1921; “Thousands Flock to Mexia Field,” DMN, September 25, 1921.
The town’s growth was truly phenomenal, from a population of “a few thousand” to about 30,000 in a year. Though the Mexia city leaders had to have been pleased with the town’s growth, they may have exacerbated the town’s problems by over-promoting it. In October the Mexia Chamber of Commerce ran an advertisement in the *Dallas Morning News* that proclaimed, “There is no place in the United States like Mexia.” The ad touted real estate opportunities and “fortunes for those outside the oil game.” About a month later, the chamber ran another ad stating “Mexia Has Done It.” This ad touted Mexia’s success in going through “the first stages of a real oil boom without a scar.” According to this ad, over five million people had visited the area, more than fifty million dollars had been spent on oil investments, and more than a million dollars worth of new construction had come to the town. Nevertheless, a week later the town apparently entered the second stage of the oil boom because the chamber seemed to change its mind. On November 27, the chamber ran another ad that was a “Labor Warning.” It stated, “If you are without funds and seeking work, don’t come to Mexia this winter” and further noted “we have more workers than there is work to be done.” By the end of the year, the town had outgrown its infrastructure and the ability of its law enforcement officers to maintain control—and the governor would soon have to step in.25

As 1921 drew to a close, an event occurred that gave warning of what Neff was to face in the coming year—labor problems and racial violence. On December 2, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America ordered a

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25 “Mexia is Meeting Civic Problems,” *DMN*, November 27, 1921; Mexia Chamber of Commerce, Advertisements, *DMN*, October 16, 1921, November 20, 1921, November 27, 1921.
nationwide strike. The strike affected some 2,000 workers at the Armour and Swift Companies’ plants in Fort Worth. The strike had barely gotten started when violence broke out. On December 6, there was a clash between strikers and non-union workers as the latter left work at the Armour and Company plant in Fort Worth. Accounts of the incident indicate that two men accosted Fred Rouse, a black strikebreaker, as he left work. Rouse then apparently drew a pistol and shot two brothers, Tom and Tracy Maclin. Tom Maclin was seriously wounded, and the other strikers gathered around, stabbed, and beat Rouse until they thought he was dead. The strikers allowed local police to remove Rouse from the scene and take him to a hospital for treatment. On the 11th, a mob of thirty unmasked men took Rouse from the hospital by. His body was found hanging from a tree, riddled with bullets, some thirty minutes later. About a week later, strikers in Forth Worth reached a picketing agreement that significantly reduced the likelihood of violence. Thus, no one asked Neff to use state force in the strike; however, the incident illustrates the atmosphere of both racial and labor relations in Texas at the time.26

Neff received one letter from attorney G. E. Hamilton of Matador that neatly expressed the governor’s situation at the end of 1921. Hamilton began, “With much interest I have watched the row the legislature has tried to stir up with you. It strikes me the greatest trouble these mad members that made extravagant appropriations...without ever looking up the facts to ascertain if there were any way to pay them.” With reference to the Klan, Hamilton wrote, “I notice there is considerable

sentiment among the members for you to submit to them the subject of legislating against the K. K. K. Of course I do not know as well as you.... However, it occurs to me that the present criminal laws have not been framed...to suppress this kind of lawlessness.” Generally, during 1921, Neff had a rocky relationship with the legislature and had difficulty getting legislation passed. As Hamilton pointed out, the state had serious budgetary problems that continued throughout Neff’s tenure. The Ku Klux Klan was a growing menace in the state, and its pervasive presence and violent extra-legal tactics provoked much controversy. Though Hamilton made no mention of them, labor problems and the situation in Mexia constituted other potential sources of trouble for the governor. Hamilton concluded his letter with the following, “Wishing for you the greatest amount of peace possible in your trying position and trusting you will never reach the place that you will be forced to admit as one of your predecessors did, that, ‘Being Governor of Texas is not just one damn thing after another, but is one damn thing all the time.’” Hamilton could not have known how fitting his sentiment was or just how much Neff would need good luck in 1922.27

Generally, Neff’s own inexperience hampered his first year in office, which resulted in a rocky relationship with the legislature. Very little in the way of progressive reform was made during the 37th legislature and it was marked by the fight to balance the budget. Neff’s experience in dealing with the legislature resulted in a more practical approach with the next legislature. By mid-year, Neff’s attentions, like nearly everyone

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27 G. E. Hamilton to Neff, July 23, 1921, PNP, (Hamilton’s quote was unattributed.).
else's, began to focus on mob violence and the growth of the Ku Klux Klan. Though Neff still needed to grow into his new job, 1922 offered him the opportunity to do so.
CHAPTER 4
1922: KEEPING THE LID ON

In 1922, Pat Neff faced one of the most trying years of any Texas governor. For most of the year, events seemed to careen from one crisis to another as the political and social problems that were the result of liberal-conservative conflict reached a head. The Ku Klux Klan, which had become pervasive in 1921, became even more active in 1922 as it entered mainstream politics. Kidnappings, floggings, and lynching became commonplace. The East Texas oil boom created boomtowns like Mexia where rapid growth and the corresponding gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution demanded state action. Labor problems persisted into 1922. The year, which was wracked by labor problems, reached a crescendo at mid-year with simultaneous strikes of both the United Mine Workers and the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen. The latter put Neff between the union and the Harding Administration. To complicate matters, the governor found himself in the middle of a re-election campaign at the height of the troubles. Overall, 1922 was a pivotal year in the political career of Pat M. Neff. Considering the possibilities, the year either could have made or could have broken the governor.

One of Neff’s most challenging problems during 1922 was “mob violence” or “mob rule.” As governor, Neff’s job was to further the legitimate enforcement of the law over vigilante justice. Often, mob action was attributable to the Klan—but not always. In either case, Texans could not help but notice the increasing frequency with which “lawlessness” was occurring. To other Texans, the return to “normalcy” was equated with a return to a simpler, more conservative, time. The Klan readily
embraced this idea, and consequently, many Texans embraced that movement. According to Charles C. Alexander, “To the Klan, reform meant preserving or restoring the status-quo. To reverse changes wrought by progressive and populist reform, as well as the shift from rural values to urban values.” Alexander adds, that in the case of Texas, “In the fall of 1920, people in Texas...were ready to adapt the Klan to their own needs and use it as a shortcut to political and moral renovation, to the reestablishment of law and order.” By 1922, conservative Texans had fully harnessed the Klan to the enforcement of their agenda.¹

Governor Neff began the year on a rather troubling note by announcing that he was too busy to issue the traditional Governor’s New Year’s Greeting to the people of Texas. The Governor cited “pressing business” that required “immediate attention.” Neff’s pressing business was the increasing lawlessness in the oil boomtown of Mexia. At the same time, the Meatpacker’s strike was still ongoing and, more importantly, the incidence of mob violence was a near daily occurrence. The year had barely started, and already the governor was “swamped.” The town of Mexia’s meteoric growth over the previous year or so, from a population of 3,000 in 1920 to 30,000 by January 1922, resulted in the usual boomtown problems such as the lack of housing and infrastructure, but more troublesome to the good people of Texas, it had led to gambling, prostitution, and violations of the prohibition laws.²

² “Neff too Busy to Issue New Year’s Greetings,” Dallas Morning News, January 1, 1922. (Henceforth cited as DMN.)
By the beginning of 1922, Mexia showed signs of being out of control. In fact, the town’s law enforcement officers were thought to be part of the problem. According to Neff, “With the fortune hunters came…the gambler, the thief, the thug, pickpocket, burglar, bootlegger...and every other species of the lawless element.” He added that, “houses of infamy and lawlessness” operated “unmolested.” The governor specifically mentioned two of these, the “Winter Garden” and the “Chicken Farm,” which were guarded by men with “high-power” guns and that were known to be frequented by local officials. As a result of hearing of these activities, Neff sent several undercover Rangers to investigate. He also instructed them to raid both the Winter Garden and the Chicken Farm. Twenty men were arrested, but local officials apparently never prosecuted them. So, after making a personal inspection at Mexia, the governor decided to declare martial law.³

When the declaration was made on January 12, it affected parts of Limestone and adjacent Freestone Counties, including the city of Mexia. The action was intended to be part of a “state-wide campaign” to rid Texas of lawlessness. Neff placed the enforcement of martial law in the hands of seven Texas Rangers and forty Texas National Guardsmen of the Fifty-Sixth Cavalry Brigade from Brenham. The reasons given for the declaration were the:

...open and flagrant violation of the law, in this, that highway robbery is of frequent occurrence accompanied in some cases by the murder of peaceful and law-abiding citizens; gambling houses are in full operation day and night, protected by armed men; intoxicating liquors are being openly sold; a multitude of unfortunate women ply their nefarious business in house of ill-fame and the local officers are either unable or unwilling to maintain and enforce the law.⁴

⁴ “Neff Determined to Run Out Vice,” DMN, January 18, 1922.
The troops quickly set to work, their jobs having been made easier by the fact that hundreds of probable troublemakers left town on the same train on which the troops arrived. Twenty-eight men were in custody at the end of the first day. Ultimately, according to Neff, more than a thousand witnesses were interviewed, 77 stills were destroyed, 6,000 gallons of alcoholic beverages seized, $5,000 worth of gambling paraphernalia destroyed, and $4,000 worth of narcotics seized. Neff summed up his determination to maintain law and order by saying, “While I am Governor of Texas, no band of criminals will ever take charge of a community as long as a Texas Ranger can pull a trigger.”

Undoubtedly, martial law did reduce crime and tame the wild and wooly boomtown that was Mexia. But, not everyone supported the action and many thought it too severe. In a letter to the governor, shortly after the imposition of martial law, J.M. Rieger of Mexia wrote, “The good people here are united in their agreement with your course...Their actions [criminal’s] were in open defiance of the law. Conditions here are not so bad as they were some months ago.” Rieger added that there was still “much complaint” in Ranger and Eastland, which were also under martial law. On the other hand, George McQuaid, editor of the Mexia Evening News noted, “The declaration of martial law in Mexia...is nothing short of an outrage. The present situation is indefensible for the reason that the state has ample power through employment of the Rangers.” Rieger concluded that the use of martial law indicated that the “theory of

civil law enforcement” was in a “bad way.” Perhaps to temper some of these complaints, the governor called a mass meeting in Mexia for February 18 to formulate a law enforcement plan for the area. Following a town hall meeting presided over by Governor Neff; he lifted martial law on March 1. Neff’s use of martial law continued to be controversial for the balance of his tenure.6

Meanwhile, mob violence in the form of floggings, kidnappings, and lynching continued to be a problem. Over the course of 1922, these incidents seemed to occur on an almost daily basis. They appear to have stemmed from a variety of causes. Many were the result of conservatives, often Klansmen, who wished to enforce Victorian morals on hapless transgressors. Many were not the work of these moral enforcers at all, but were perpetrated on strikebreakers by strikers. Of course, the worst of these were racially based incidents. On several occasions, mobs removed African-American males from jails wishing to hurry-along the cause of justice. These incidents circumvented the power of the state to enforce the law and protect the rights of citizens, and thus placed Governor Neff in the position of having to reassert that power.

In March of 1922, McLennan County court indicted two African-American males, Bennie Young and Cooper Johnson, for the murder of W.H Barker, his wife, and a thirteen-year-old boy. County Attorney Frank Tirey requested and received the presence of Rangers during the trial, and the men were guarded by six Rangers and several sheriff’s

6 J. M. Rieger to Neff, Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas; “Editor Terms Martial Law Declaration an Outrage,” DMN, January 14, 1922; “Neff Puts Law Enforcement up to the People of Limestone County,” DMN, February 19, 1922; “Martial Law Ends at 6 A.M. Wednesday,” DMN, February 27, 1922.
deputies throughout the proceedings. Because of Neff’s actions, Young and Johnson were tried by a jury instead of a lynch mob 7

During 1922, several lynchings occurred in the state. Often, they were savage in nature—at least three involved the burning of the victims. One of these in particular is very indicative of the level of social and political strife at the time. The lynching of three men on May 6 in the town of Kirven in Freestone County, part of that county had been covered under Neff’s martial law declaration earlier in the year and was the frequent scene of trouble. The sheer brutality of the incident was such that the story was picked up by the Associated Press and distributed widely, especially in Texas. In all likelihood, this is because of the graphic depiction of the incident in the *Dallas Morning News* the following day.8

According to the *News’s* account, a mob of some five hundred men dragged the men from the Freestone County Jail at three in the morning. They were being held for the assault and murder of a local seventeen-year-old white girl, Eula Ausley. One of the men, “Snap” Curry had reportedly confessed to the crime. The mob hauled Curry and the other two men, Mose Jones and John Cornish, from the county jail to the town square. The leaders of the mob, who were unmasked, began by forcing Curry to recount his earlier confession. Curry implicated the other two men as well. At that point, while Jones and Cornish watched, Curry was held up while he was mutilated and had his abdomen slashed. He was then chained to a plow, which had been dragged into the square, cordwood and old crates were then heaped around him, and crude oil

drenched over him. When informed of his fate, Curry who had been brave all along said, “Go ahead and burn me. I am not afraid. Only burn these other two...too. They are just as guilty as I am.” To which the leader of the mob replied, “So be it, then.” Jones and Cornish, who had by this time themselves been mutilated, watched as Curry burned. Curry’s last words were, “Oh Lord I’m coming home. Goodbye Mr. Otis” [his employer]. The account then states, “As one of the ropes burned through, partly freeing him, his body was seen to writhe and twist. Death came speedily.” Jones and Cornish were then burned in their turn. The *News* recorded their deaths but not as graphically. Anyone who read this could not help being either deeply outraged or terribly shocked.9

The aftermath of this event reveals much about the political and social climate of the day. The African-American community in Freestone County was upset that the mob thwarted the legal process, and in all probability, two innocent men had been killed. Many residents, including Sheriff W.M. Mayo, feared a race war in the county. For this reason, Mayo requested state help. Governor Neff sent two detachments of Texas Rangers to Fairfield, the seat of Freestone County. The Rangers were instructed to work under Mayo and not to conduct an investigation. Apparently, in this case, Neff wanted the public to view him as supporting local law enforcement rather than perpetrating state interference. As governor, Neff frequently championed law enforcement and condemned “lawlessness.” Three weeks after the Kirven lynching, Neff’s frustration at mob rule became apparent. In a statement to the press, Neff

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9 Ibid.
specifically mentioned that nine African-Americans had been lynched in the previous three weeks. The governor noted, “The growing tendency of mob law is indeed a sad commentary on our civilization. Each person accused of a crime has a right to his day in court. To deny him that right is contrary to Anglo-Saxon civilization.” Neff then suggested that a law be passed to prosecute members of lynch mobs in counties outside those in which the crime occurred. Neff’s sense of fairness and duty was apparent when he concluded, “All our laws should be enforced through the organized channels of the court.10”

At the time, however, another organization, the Ku Klux Klan, was vying for control either through the pursuit of political office or through the more silent and insidious use of intimidation. One final aspect of the Kirven lynching may show the workings of the “Invisible Empire.” In the weeks following the incident, it was a frequent topic of letters to newspapers. A little more than a week after the lynching, the Dallas Morning News received one such letter to the editor. The man, Joseph Kelly of nearby Mexia, was apparently very disturbed by the incident. In the letter, Kelly denounced the barbarity of the event and called for a complete investigation and punishment of the individuals involved. About a week later, the paper received another letter that was either a retraction or a disavowal of the previous letter. In the second letter, Father Joseph H. Kelly, of Mexia wrote, “…not only am I not the author, but the writer does not in any way voice my own personal convictions or sentiments in this regard.” In what was no doubt a genuine sentiment, Kelly added, “I will be grateful if

10 “Rangers Rush to Freestone County,” Austin Statesman, May 8, 1922. (Henceforth cited as AS); “Growing Tendency of Mob Law in Texas is Scored by Governor,” DMN, May 25, 1922.
you will likewise publish this letter in order that those who might have believed me to be the author may be rightly informed.” Whether or not, the letters were written by the same man, Father Kelly had definitely experienced some sort of harassment. 11

The Kirven lynchings were a good example of what Texans and their governor faced daily—violence, intimidation, and near anarchy. On the heels of this terrible incident, Texans faced another challenge from the Klan, this time at the ballot box. By 1922, the Klan had become so pervasive in the lives of Texans that it had become almost mainstream. And with broad acceptance, the Klan was able to prosecute its agenda through normal political channels. With Texas’s one-party system, many feared that the Democratic Party had been co-opted by the Klan. Furthermore, with the Klan’s “invisible” nature, it was impossible to tell who was a member and who was not. Therefore, during the 1922 election season, a candidate’s potential membership in the organization was often an issue. This was true in the governor’s race and was even more the case in the senate primary race between Earle B. Mayfield and former governor James E. Ferguson. In what has do go down in the annals of political history as one of the worst choices ever presented to voters, an acknowledged Klansman faced a corrupt, impeached ex-governor. Neff, of course, had his own problems as he announced his candidacy for reelection on June 3. The governor was still trying to control the situation in Freestone and Limestone Counties where a posse had killed two more African-Americans that day. Meanwhile, the country was facing a strike of the

Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen on July 1. In the summer of 1922, Governor Neff had his work cut out for him.\textsuperscript{12}

Under these circumstances, Neff began his reelection campaign on June 3. In a single-party state like Texas, victory in the Democratic Primary set for July 22 was tantamount to victory in the fall election. The governor announced his bid for reelection in a press release in which he stated:

While gaining an intimate knowledge of our government, I have at the same time kept in close touch with the people and their conditions...Perhaps I have made mistakes in the past. I doubt not that I shall make mistakes in the future. I have tried to serve the citizenship of the State in the highest and truest sense, and at all times, I have had a clear conscience. If the Democratic voters of Texas feel they can honor me with a second term, I shall deeply appreciate it, and shall continue my efforts in behalf of the welfare of our people.\textsuperscript{13}

The governor set his campaign to begin on June 24 with speeches in Lubbock and Plainview. Neff made it known that he intended to “visit and speak to the citizenship of the state during the summer regardless of whether or not he had any opposition.” Neff was often willing to take his case to the people of Texas, and this time was no different. During Neff’s first campaign for the office, he “used every means of travel from a mule to a flying machine” and drove his own car for some 6,000 miles throughout the state. Neff reported having spoken in thirty-seven counties in which no gubernatorial candidate had ever spoken. In addition, Neff made 850 speeches, having once spoken twenty-one times in three days while campaigning in Dallas and Tarrant Counties. As

\textsuperscript{12} (This treatise of the general state of Texas politics in 1922 comes mostly from Chapter 6 of Alexander’s \textit{Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest}.) “Neff Announces for Re-election,” \textit{DMN}, June 4, 1922; “Kirven is Quiet Following Clash,” \textit{DMN}, June 4, 1922.

\textsuperscript{13} “Neff Announces for Re-election,” \textit{DMN}, June 4, 1922.
the governor began his reelection campaign, one had to wonder whether events would allow him to complete it.\textsuperscript{14}

During the 1922 elections, the central issue was the Ku Klux Klan itself. In many ways, these elections represented a battle-royal between conservative forces in the form of Klan-backed Democratic Party candidates and liberal forces in the form of “citizen’s leagues.” These leagues generally existed in Texas’s urban areas such as Houston, Waco, Dallas, and Fort Worth. By far, the strongest of these was the Dallas County Citizen’s League led by lawyer, and well-known progressive, Martin M. Crane. The league was established in April 1922, following a mass meeting held in Dallas City Hall Auditorium. Four hundred of Dallas’s most prominent businessmen and professionals signed a petition against the Klan. Crane’s name led the list. According to the petition:

Recent events constitute our excuse for this call. Some of our citizens have been driven from the communities in which they live by threats of personal violence. Others have seized in the presence of their wives and daughters and dragged away to some secluded spot and there brutally beaten and otherwise maltreated...The undersigned do not hesitate to say that they believe that these crimes were committed by the Ku Klux Klan or by others on account of the atmosphere created by the Klan....\textsuperscript{15}

The petition went on to point-out that the Klan oath required obedience and loyalty to that organization above all others. Hence, Klan membership was inconsistent with sworn public service. The petition concluded, “...we must determine whether we are to have a government of law or government by the mob, which means anarchy and ruin.

\textsuperscript{15} “Text of Mass Meeting Call,” \textit{DMN}, April 2, 1922.
There is no middle ground for a good citizen to take. We must demand of our officer's undivided allegiance.”

Though the Dallas County Citizen’s League did in fact make it very difficult for those running for office in that county, for an astute politician such as Neff, there was in fact a middle ground. Neff, like some others, simply avoided being too closely associated with either side. One of the first things the league did was to distribute questionnaires to all public office holders and candidates thereof that included questions about Klan membership and loyalty. The responses to the questionnaires were made known to the voting public; Neff apparently never returned his. Despite this non-committal public persona, privately the governor maintained a dialogue with many of the more progressive personalities. These included Crane and Cullen Thomas, a senate candidate who campaigned on the notion that the Klan should be reformed or destroyed. Nevertheless, because of Neff’s evasive stance with reference to the Klan, the governor was frequently quizzed both publicly and privately.

The press was often the source of these questions. In an editorial, the *Dallas Morning News* noted “There are a good many people who have come to suspect that, in addition to being Governor of Texas, Mr. Neff might be a subject in that ‘Invisible Empire’ which has its capital in Georgia.” The editorial further noted that when being directly questioned by one of its reporters, Neff had denied being a Klansman or of ever

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17 “Questionnaire on Klan Being Drawn,” *DMN*, April 9, 1922; “Klan Must Reform or be Destroyed,” *DMN*, April 4, 1922; Note: Neff had frequent correspondence with Crane during 1920 and 1921. Thomas was a lawyer friend of the governor's and the maintained correspondence throughout Neff’s tenure.
having been one. The editors then made the very good point that a mere denial was not good enough because it did not answer the question central in the minds of voters: Did the governor approve of the organization and its methods? So, despite the denials, questions persisted. People often wrote the governor and asked him directly. In a reply to one such letter, “I am not a member of the Ku Klux Klan, never have been a member, never made application for membership, and it is not my intention at any time to become a member.” Neff then reiterated his public stand that he was for “law enforcement” through “organized channels.” Though Neff often strongly denied Klan membership in private letters, this of course did not help his public image.¹⁸

Many voters were so opposed to the Klan that the mere hint of support from the organization was a mark against a candidate. To complicate matters, the Klan sometimes endorsed candidates, but others were simply identified as being “Klan leaning.” Through the years, and especially at the time, there was considerable debate over Neff’s supposed membership in the Klan in spite of the continued denials by him, both public and private. The source of much of this went back to a Klan meeting held in Dallas’s Fair Park in July of 1922. At this meeting, Klan members distributed flyers listing candidates either “In Favor with Klan” or “Not Klan Sympathizers.” The former listed Neff’s name. However, the organization never formally endorsed the governor. This tacit approval of Neff by the Klan probably actually gained Neff some votes in the primary, but it also probably lost some others. The net effect of this was that, by not taking a strong stand either way, the governor avoided serious political damage. This

¹⁸ “The Reticence of Governor Neff,” Editorial, DMN, March 28, 1922; Neff to Ben Gross, Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
was one of the ways that Neff balanced a liberal-conservative conflict. In this case, it probably had the long-term result of tainting Neff’s reputation.\footnote{“The Klan Issue is Presented in Rival Lists of Candidates,” \textit{DMN}, July 16, 1922.}

Another of the serious challenges facing Governor Neff as he entered the 1922 political season was the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen’s Strike. The strike had far-reaching consequences, not just for Texas, but also for the entire nation. In a time when the country’s highway system was just beginning to be developed, and air travel were both rudimentary and unproven, the railroads were the only option for long-distance travelers and shippers of heavy freight. This strike also coincided with a strike of the United Mine Workers’ coal miners. Together, these two strikes threatened to bring the American economy to its knees. The administration of President Warren G. Harding was greatly concerned by the situation and was willing to bring the full power of the United States government to bear in order to end the strikes. Neff, being in the middle of reelection campaign, found himself in an almost untenable political situation. He needed the votes of labor, yet was expected to help break a strike by a desperate federal government. The only question was how Neff would balance these two competing interests in order to maintain his own political interests.

The strike itself had been brewing for years as a product of both the First World War and the post-war economy. As part of the country’s mobilization for war, the railway system was placed under the direction of the United States Railroad Administration on December 28, 1917. Prior to the war, the industry was marked by inefficiency. The railroads were generally “under equipped and technically backward”;
moreover, they were often financially burdened. This inefficiency compelled the federal
government to take over the railroads to facilitate the movement of war materiel. Furthermore, the government was worried that strikes and other labor disruption on the railroads and other industries would hamper the war effort, so wage increases were applied liberally. The immediate result of this was inflation and labor conflict. During 1919 and 1920, the nation’s economy suffered massive inflation. When compared to 1914, the cost of living had risen by 77 percent by 1919 and 105 percent by 1920.20

During the war, the Railroad Administration ran equipment to the breaking point and placated labor, all in the name of prosecuting the war. By the end of the war, the railroads were in terrible technical and financial shape while their employees, like many others, balanced greatly increased wages with sharply higher prices. Partly because of this, the nation’s railroads remained under government control even after the war. In order to deal with potential labor problems, the Transportation Act of 1920 established the Railroad Labor Board. The Board was charged with settling nation-wide disputes either through collective bargaining or arbitration. Though the board could fix wages, neither labor or the railroads were required to abide by these decisions. However, it was hoped that public opinion would force compliance. Ultimately, it was the ability of the Railroad Labor Board to force wage cuts that led to the Railroads Shopmen’s Strike of 1922.21

The membership of the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen comprised some 400,000 machinists, boilermakers, electricians, sheet-metal workers and railway Carmen. These highly skilled men were responsible for the repair and maintenance of steam locomotives, as well as railcars, and without them, the railroads would grind to a halt. Their activities centered in a series of “shops,” or repair facilities, scattered throughout the country. In Texas, there were ninety-seven such shops employing some 15,850 men. The shop at Denison belonged to the financially troubled Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad (M, K, &T, popularly known as the “Katy”). Denison is located approximately sixty miles north of Dallas in Grayson County. The city billed itself as the “Gate City of Texas” because it was the first and last city that northern travelers saw. The Katy line running through Denison was Texas’s main north-south rail link, and the shop there was crucial to keeping the line running. When the strike did come, it affected approximately 1,000 men in the Denison shop.22

For the Katy, the strike threatened the very existence of the company. Just two weeks before the strike, the Texas Railroad Commission valued the Katy at $62.2 million against a debt of $74.8 million. At the same time, the company had been in receivership since 1917 and was struggling to reorganize. The Katy was not alone, and the railroad industry as a whole began to petition the Railroad Labor Board for wage cuts in 1921. In May of that year, the board agreed to cut wages across the board. Meanwhile, talks broke down between the railroads and the shopmen over the issue. A month previously, Katy employees had rejected a proposal by the railroad that would

have effectively canceled the raise granted them the previous year. Haggling over the wage issue continued into 1922 with little progress.\(^{23}\)

As the hot Texas summer approached, the situation heated up as well. On May 28, the Railroad Labor Board, meeting in Chicago, voted to cut wages by three to five cents per hour effective July 1. The vote was a six to three split with the government and railroad representatives voting together against labor. In the dissenting vote, labor representatives stated that the action set wages “below the minimum standard of subsistence.” They continued:

The rates of pay established under this decision are not based upon the needs of the hundreds of thousands of families involved...They are insufficient to provide these families with the absolute essentials. The earnings of this large group of railroad employees will not provide the father of a family with as much food as is allowed convicts in the Cook County [Illinois] Jail. The pre-war standard perpetuated by this decision is the product of inequitable wage bargains.\(^{24}\)

This remained the position of the union throughout the strike.

On May 30, the executive council of the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopmen, meeting in Detroit, authorized the mailing of ballots to the union membership to call a strike. If the members voted “yes,” the strike was set to begin in the first week of July. Union officials reported that their “treasure chest” was full and that funds were “plentiful” to tide over workers during the strike. Meanwhile, railroad officials fully expected the shopmen to go on strike. According to one source, “Executives frankly admit that they are anxious for the expected ‘show-down,’ and that over the period six weeks prior, “Thousands of freight and passenger cars have been rushed into shops for


\(^{24}\) “Wages of 400,000 Men Cut Three to Five Cents an Hour,” \textit{DMN}, May 29, 1922.
repairs not necessitated by conditions.” So, the battle lines were drawn. Railroad officials were spoiling for a fight while the union voted on whether to strike or accept the $60 million wage cut.\(^{25}\)

During the next few days, the union began to reinforce its position. As provisions were being for the distribution and counting of the strike ballots, it also began to make overtures to a public that would likely be greatly inconvenienced by the strike. The union enumerated its complaints in a press release as follows:

1. Seven unsatisfactory rules recently promulgated by the Labor Board including five rules wiping-out time and a half pay.
2. “Farming-out” of shop work to outside firms; alleged illegal installation of piece work, and alleged arbitrary and unauthorized reduction of wages by several roads.
3. The $60 million pay-cut effective July 1.\(^{26}\)

The union also made a personal appeal to President Harding in a letter, who released it to the press. The letter protested “starvation wages” and asked the President if he thought the wages were “sufficient to maintain an American standard of living and properly sustain a family.” The union also accused the Railroad Labor Board and the federal government of favoring the railroads. Shopmen union head R. M. Jewell said, “The employees can not help noticing the contrast between their losses [wages] and the increasing profits of the railroads...The danger lies in the fact that the board is one branch of the government.\(^{27}\)”


\(^{26}\)“400,000 Shopmen Vote on Strike,” *DMN*, May 31, 1922.

\(^{27}\)“Rail Leaders Will Appeal to Harding,” June 9, 1922; “Rail Board Helps Roads, Shopmen’s Chief Charges, *DMN*, June 7, 1922.
As both the strike and the Democratic Primary approached, Governor Neff’s uneasy relationship with labor became more apparent. Generally, Neff needed to appear friendly (or at least non-confrontational) with labor in order to placate the progressive wing of the state Democratic Party. Yet, Neff could not afford to be too friendly in order to avoid offending conservative Democrats who were suspicious of organized labor. The crux of the problem was that in 1920 Neff had only narrowly won a run-off with conservative icon and former Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey while receiving considerable support from Texas progressives. By 1922, the political climate had changed. Conservative forces such as the Ku Klux Klan were running rampant in the state. Also by this time, “normalcy” had begun to set in, and Texans did not appear to be in the mood for progressive-style politics. In these days prior to modern political polling, and given the apparent political realities, Neff simply could not be assured of winning the nomination if he alienated either progressives or conservatives. So, as Neff was often forced to do, he walked the line between these competing forces. The governor never said enough to get him into trouble, but what he did say, often left people wanting. Neff’s noncommittal posture often made him seem to be indecisive when actually it was simply a political strategy designed to avoid upsetting competing factions.

One issue on which Neff often appeared to be indecisive on was the controversy over “opened” and “closed” shops, or workplaces. At this time, unions were still struggling for recognition, and this issue was at the core of the struggle. Unions supported closed shops in which the workplace was “closed” to all but union members.
Of course, businessmen supported workplaces that were “opened” to all who wanted to work. This was the root of Neff’s uneasy relationship with labor. Many progressives supported the closed shop whereas conservatives supported the opened shop. During Neff’s 1920 election campaign, he was very careful not to say too much or too little on the issue. In one speech, just a few days before the run-off with Bailey, Neff spoke to a large crowd in Beaumont, which billed itself as the “town that made the open shop famous.” During most of the speech, Neff’s main topic was Bailey and his unsuitability for office. When Neff finally turned to the topic of labor, the crowd listened intently as he stated general support for labor—but not necessarily union labor.28

In another speech a few days later in Mexia, Neff proceeded to bash Bailey through most of the speech. The key difference was that this time Neff had a list of seventeen questions to which he asked Bailey to respond. One of the questions specifically addressed the issue of the open shop. Neff began by stating that he supported “the present law, under which the open shop, union shop, and all similar organizations are permitted to organize.” Neff elaborated:

I believe that both capital and labor have the right to organize, each has the right to bargain collectively, each has the right to deal with the other through duly elected representatives...a man has the right to quit his job, or the right to do the work his neighbor didn’t want to do. The employee should be left free to join the open or closed shop or stay out of both.29

It was Neff’s refusal to come-out squarely for the closed shop that caused many of his problems with labor.

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28 “Neff Cheered in Open Shop Town,” DMN, August 12, 1920.
29 “Neff is Greeted Gladly at Mexia,” DMN, August 15, 1920.
So, two years later, as the Shopmen's Strike threatened, labor remembered Neff's seeming lack of support. In June of 1922, the *Southwestern Railway Journal*, a mouthpiece of the railway brotherhoods published in Fort Worth, reminded its membership of Neff's earlier transgressions. During the 1920 campaign, the Railway Employee's Legislative Board sent Neff a questionnaire on his attitudes toward labor, not once but twice, and received no response. It was further noted that the problem was not that Neff had not gotten the questionnaire as the board had received acknowledgement from the Neff campaign that it had. The *Journal* went on to mention Neff's veto of a minimum wage act and was especially hostile on Neff's support and use of the Open Port Law that was supposed to maintain the flow of commerce but was actually used to limit labor. The *Journal* concluded that though it held “no malice toward the governor” it could not see how his record made him a “friend of labor.” It was this perception that led many in labor circles to support Neff's opponent, Fred S. Rogers, for the Democratic nomination for governor in 1922. Rogers was rabidly pro-labor and was probably considered too liberal by conservatives. Rogers received endorsements from several labor leaders.30

Another factor that soured Neff's relationship with labor was his use of the Open Port Law to declare martial law in various locations throughout the state in order to put-down “lawlessness.” The law had been passed late in the administration of Neff's predecessor, William P. Hobby, specifically to deal with a longshoreman's strike in Galveston that began in March 1920. This law was aimed at protecting workers

involved in the transport of goods from violence or other intimidation. Though ostensibly, as its name implied, the law was to insure that ports would remain open and that commerce would flow, it was really aimed at breaking strikes. Hobby used the Open Port Law as a basis for declaring martial law in Galveston and sending both Texas Rangers and National Guard troops to secure the port. Hobby’s decision had several repercussions. First, it set the precedent of the governor using the law as a pretext to declare martial law. Second, it also set the precedent of using the force of the state to try to break labor. Finally, and most important to Neff’s relationship with labor, state forces still remained in Galveston at the time of his inauguration. To complicate matters further, Governor Hobby had ordered the removal of the forces as one of his last actions as chief executive but left it to Neff to carry out the order. A few days later, when Neff became governor, he made an investigation into conditions at Galveston and decided “no changes” would be made in the “system of policing the city.” By reversing Hobby’s decision, and keeping Rangers in Galveston, Neff alienated labor from the outset.31

Neff’s opening speech in Plainview on June 24 addressed many topics, including prisons, public schools, law enforcement, the establishment of state parks, and conservation of the state’s water resources, among others. Neff devoted a portion of the speech to “The Cause of Labor” in which he began by defending his administration’s record. According to the governor, “The State Department of Labor is carefully looking after the interest of the laboring people.” He noted that his administration had

representatives in one hundred eighty-three cities and had inspected 2,500 workplaces employing 112,704 employees. Neff then reiterated his views on organized labor:

That the cause of labor has the right to organize, and when organized, the right to deal collectively with their employer, there can be no question. Differences between labor and capital should be settled in peace around the council table. Above the employer and the employees stands at all times, to be respected and obeyed, the law of the land.32

Although this statement seems consistent with Neff’s 1920 position, there are some differences apparent to the careful observer. The first sentence supports the right of labor to organize for the purpose of collective bargaining. Neff also seemed to be stressing the need for conciliatory negotiation as well as respect for the law. In the final analysis, Neff seemed to be letting labor know that while he respected its position, he expected it to respect his. This would be especially true of the railroad shopmen who would be going on strike one week hence.33

On June 27, the union prodded the railroad executives one last time by offering to avert the strike if they began negotiations on the wage issue. As expected, the railroads rebuffed the offer. Two days later, union leaders issued the order for a walkout at 10:00 A.M. on July 1. Meanwhile, the Railroad Labor board summoned both labor and railroad leaders to appear before the board. Labor flouted the order, and the strike began as scheduled. The union also reported that 96 percent of its membership had voted for the strike. When the strike did begin, it quickly became apparent that the railroads intended to break the union and that the federal government was supporting the endeavor. Almost immediately, railroad executives sent out calls to employment

32 “Governor Neff Makes Opening Speech,” DMN, June 25, 1922.
33 Ibid.
offices all over the country for men to fill the positions of the strikers. The Harding Administration endorsed the move and offered to use its “full power” to protect those workers remaining on the job. Back in Texas, the Southwest Railroad Journal, a publication of the railroad unions headquartered in Fort Worth, heaped criticism on both the labor board and the administration. In an editorial, the journal referred to the board as a “tool of the railroads” and criticized it for continuing to “whittle” at wages. It went on to state that the President and “vile set of humans” [railroad executives] who proposed to destroy the men who they had treated as “galley slaves” should expect to see a “real contest.” As the month of June dwindled and the July 1 strike date approached, it appeared that neither side was willing to compromise.34

On July 1, shopmen all across Texas walked-off their jobs. In Houston, workers began leaving the shops shortly after 10:00 A.M. Many announced that it was a “one-hundred percent strike” as they walked away. Walkouts were reported all over the state; 300 in Dallas, 1,000 in Marshall, 1,400 in Fort Worth, and 1,100 in San Antonio. The Katy shops in Denison were reported to be “continuing operation with a small force.” All of the Katy shopmen had left their jobs. The strike began in Denison when the shop whistle blew over the Katy yard precisely at the scheduled time. The men left railroad property peacefully, carrying with them their own personal tools. Union officials instructed them to avoid disturbances or loitering on railroad property, and this they did. But one question remained, would the strikers remain peaceful? The

Southwestern Railway Journal warned that they might not and laid the blame squarely on the railroads and the government if that happened. The editor noted, “The government, as well as the railroads, must know that the limits of this strike may reach to a dangerous point, if permitted to continue with respect for the striker’s rights, and if it does, who could avoid the danger point if they will.” Violence could be avoided if only the men in suits would make it so.35

Neff could have only hoped that the powers of his office would not be called upon too early, as he tiptoed through the political minefield in which he found himself. But that was not to be. Although things were generally quiet for the first week, as the strike continued, incidents of violence began to be reported in rail shops all around the state. These incidents often prompted local officials to appeal for help in keeping order. On July 10, federal authorities sent several hundred United States deputy marshals to protect both trains and railroad property throughout Texas. This included 150 men sent to guard the Katy shop in Denison. Yet, the governor remained silent on requests for action. He had good reason to be quiet. Controversy was then swirling over the Open Port Law that would likely be employed if state action were called for. At the annual meeting of the Texas Bar Association, the organization’s president, Richard Mays, criticized the use of the open port law as a “usurpation” of municipal authority. Mays specifically cited the case of Governor Hobby’s use of the law with the Longshoremen’s Strike in Galveston in 1919, as well as Neff’s, in the case of Mexia. Others openly

35 “Strike is 100 Percent, Workers Here Announce; No Demonstrations Held” Houston Chronicle, July 1, 1922. (Henceforth cited as HC); “Train Operation Not Affected by Shopmen’s Strike,” DMN, July 2, 1922; “Officials Do Work of Car Cleaners,” DMN, July 2, 1922; “Crafts Enjoined Against Disorder,” Denison Herald, June 30, 1922; “Strike of Shopmen,” Southwestern Railway Journal, July 1922, 8.
suggested the use of the law to limit the shopmen’s strike. This included Thomas Finty, managing editor of the *Dallas Morning News*, who told the governor as much privately during a phone call and then publicly in an editorial. Neff struggled to balance political realities with events as it became increasingly clear that he would have to act.\(^{36}\)

Finally, on July 12, an incident occurred in Denison that Neff could not ignore. On that morning, the Katy brought in forty-eight strikebreakers. Upon the men’s arrival, four U.S. marshals escorted them from Union Station to the Katy shop. An angry mob of several hundred intercepted the men before they could get to the shop. One man was shot and seriously injured, sixteen were shoved into cars and taken to the Red River bottoms and flogged. Four men were found wandering along the railroad tracks across the river in Oklahoma later in the morning. In the end, the strikebreakers were quickly hustled out of Denison and calm returned to the town. At the time of the incident, Governor Neff was campaigning in Stephenville. In the meantime, J. L. Lancaster, receiver of the Texas and Pacific Railroad, asked the governor to provide state troops to protect its workers. When a reporter asked Neff about Lancaster’s request, he responded cryptically, “We’ll have to let those matters take care of themselves as they come along.” The governor first learned of the Denison incident via an Associated Press dispatch read to him over the telephone. Neff interrupted the party on the other end with “There is no use reading all that to me. I’ll let you know when I

decide what I shall do.” For the next two weeks, the question on everyone’s mind was, what, if anything, would the governor do?37

The next day, Denison was quiet, and the striking men continued their picketing. If anything, the previous day’s events caused the men to be more diligent about keeping out strikebreakers. A picketing force of fifty men guarded every entrance to railroad property and changed shifts every six hours. In addition, other men guarded adjoining parks and the highways leading into town through which the railroads could bring in strikebreakers. Meanwhile, pressure began to build on Governor Neff to take action. Charles C. Huff, an attorney for the Katy, announced that a request had been made to the governor to send state troops into Denison. Federal authorities reacted quickly to the call for help by sending U.S. deputy marshals into the town. At the same time, and rather ominously, Secretary of War John W. Weeks instructed Major General John L. Hines, commanding the Eighth Army Corps stationed in San Antonio, to prepare to deploy a contingent of federal troops to Denison. Despite this, the governor remained unmoved. Neff’s response to the Katy’s request for state troops reveals much about his state of mind at the time. In a telegram to Huff, the governor stated, “I have been doing, and am still doing, preliminary investigating in order that...I might do what is right in this matter. I am exceedingly anxious that I do not do the wrong thing or the right thing at the wrong time or in the wrong way. I am keeping in close touch with the situation.” This statement is very revealing especially if one interprets “the right

37 “Riot at Denison,” AS, July 12, 1922.
thing at the wrong time” as sending in the National Guard to break the strike anytime prior to the Democratic Primary.\(^{38}\)

With a little less than two weeks until the primary, Neff began his investigation of the situation at Denison. Authorities in Denison had already issued assurances that they did not want or need state troops. Mayor W. F. Weaver stated that, “There is no basis for any reports that there is any disorder or fighting in Denison on account of the strike. We respectfully request that no troops be sent to Denison.” The mayor went on to point-out, that Denison was a “railroad town,” that local merchants were already hurting because of the strike, and that a declaration of martial law was likely to erode business further. Grayson County Sheriff Boyd Craig met with a committee of strikers and told them that though he had been requested to ask for troops in Denison, he did not think that “conditions warranted it at this time.” However, Sheriff Craig also warned that he would not stand for “lawlessness.” Despite these assurances, Governor Neff sent Adjutant General Thomas D. Barton and Texas Ranger Captain Thomas Hickman to investigate the situation in the town. The two arrived on July 14. After taking a day or two to review conditions there, General Barton expressed surprise at the “calmness of the situation” and noted “little indication that conditions were not

under control of local officers.” This is the report that Neff ultimately received. But, Barton and Hickman were not the only men investigating the situation in Denison.³⁹

Rumors emanated from Washington that the Harding administration was not satisfied with the governor’s actions and was considering sending federal troops to Denison. Therefore, Colonel Charles S. Lincoln, who was General Hines’s chief of staff, arrived in Denison from San Antonio on July 15. Two days later, Lincoln’s report was given to President Harding. Lincoln concluded that though the situation was generally peaceful, no trains were moving and that the Denison shop was effectively shutdown, which meant that it would be unable to repair engines or keep the line open. Meanwhile, Governor Neff continued to mull over his course of action. Neff sought and received the advice of several people in addition to Tom Finty. In a letter to Neff’s secretary, R. B. Walthall, attorney R. U. Grisham of Eastland counseled caution with reference to the strike. Grisham advised that labor would “support him [Neff] if force is not required at his hands of a drastic nature.” Another friend of Neff’s, Benjamin G. Gross, in a letter dated July 14 noted that many were saying that Neff should have already intervened in the strike. Gross wrote, “This is something I cannot advise you on, but I’m afraid it may lose you votes for no other purpose than your enemies saying you are trying to dodge the issue.” Neff continued to bide his time.⁴⁰


⁴⁰ Ibid.; “Denison Probe Results Given to President,” HC, July 17, 1922. R. U. Grisham to R. B. Walthall, July 15, 1922. Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. (Henceforth cited as PNP.); Benjamin Gross to Neff, July 14, 1922, PNP.
The governor’s time ran out at 4:00 P.M. on July 16, when Colonel Lincoln unexpectedly appeared in Neff’s office. By this time, the governor had almost decided to send the Texas Rangers into Denison, but had made no firm plans. According to Neff, Lincoln introduced himself, and after the two exchanged greetings, announced that he had been “commissioned by the federal government to call at your office and remain here until I get an answer, ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer,” as to your intentions in regard to the placing of the state militia at Denison for the protection of life, property, and commerce.” At this point, Neff reached a politically decisive moment. With any action he took, the governor could appear indecisive, obstructionist, or uncooperative, or he could appear to be a pawn of the administration. Any mistake, any escalation of violence, could lose the election just six days away. Upon hearing Lincoln’s statement, Neff coolly replied that he had already begun to arrange to use the Rangers at Denison. To this Lincoln replied, “I have not been delegated to discuss the merits of the case with you, but to get a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. If your answer is ‘yes’ the federal government will leave it to the state to handle; if the answer is ‘no’ a thousand federal soldiers out of San Antonio will be on their way to Denison in about thirty minutes.” Lincoln added that Neff was free to take the time he needed to make the decision, but he had been instructed to remain in the governor’s office until an answer was received.41

For the next three hours, Governor Neff made calls to various official and advisors all around the state. Lincoln remained in the office the entire time. At this

41 Neff, The Battles of Peace, 74-5.
point, Lincoln left the office, and Neff did not immediately declare martial law in Denison. It is not known exactly what happened in Neff’s office, but the events speak for themselves. It seems highly unlikely that a U. S. Army colonel, when ordered to get a specific answer to a specific question, presumably by no less than the President of the United States, would have returned without some kind of answer. Neff must have given Lincoln, and therefore the President, some kind of conditional answer. That condition would eventually become clear.\(^{42}\)

In making his decision, Neff would have taken several political realities into account other than the election. As Governor of Texas, a southern state, Neff had to be mindful of “state’s rights,” an issue that was then important to many Texas voters. Any perceived usurpation of the state’s sovereignty by the federal government would be politically damaging to Neff. Furthermore, the governor also had to be mindful of President Harding’s power as commander-in-chief. The president would have been within his legal rights to federalize the Texas National Guard and take command of it away from the governor. From a political standpoint, Neff was looking at a double-edged sword that could cut him both ways. If Neff allowed federal troops to be placed in Denison, he would have been allowing the usurpation of Texas’s right to maintain order within its own borders. On the other hand, if Neff allowed the federalization of National Guard troops, he would have effectively allowed the usurpation of his own power as commander-in-chief of the state militia. The governor was clearly thinking along these lines. According to Neff:

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
I was unwilling for federal troops to march on Texas soil for the purpose of enforcing Texas laws. I felt that Texas men, and if need be, Texas bullets and Texas blood, should protect Texas life and property, and keep open the channels of Texas commerce. I took my stand for the supremacy and for the sovereignty of the state.\textsuperscript{43}

If anything, it is obvious that, at the time, Neff was thinking about the State of Texas and his role as its chief executive.\textsuperscript{44}

So, with Lincoln and the prospect of immediate federal interference safely removed from his office, Neff began to plan his course of action. On July 19, Governor Neff suspended his reelection campaign in order to concentrate on dealing with the strike. As he had done earlier when “lawlessness” had presented itself in the oil boomtown of Mexia, Neff made a personal inspection of Denison. The governor apparently took pains to make sure he was getting the real story. Neff reported that he had disguised himself and “made the rounds at night, and talked with those on picket duty.” The governor met with union leaders, city officials, businessmen, and ordinary people. Though the situation had been peaceful since the railroad had last tried to bring in strikebreakers, local peace officers told Neff that they would not be able to maintain order if the Katy repeated its attempt to bring in outside workers. This was probably crucial as Neff made his next decision. All indications were that the governor was going to do something, but he remained quiet as to exactly what that would be. Yet, Governor Neff had not even sent the Rangers to Denison, even though Mayor Weaver had finally requested this action. Before Neff left Denison, he conferred with General Barton and Captain Hickman, presumably about the action to come. Neff also

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
reiterated his desire to maintain the sovereignty of the state and keep commerce open. He made no mention of his plans. Neff returned to Austin to make final arrangements and then went home to Waco to await the judgment of the voters.45

In the meantime, there were continued calls for Neff to take action that only elicited coy responses from the governor. In an editorial, the *Dallas Morning News* chided the governor for his apparent dithering. According to the editors, “One would perhaps be unduly optimistic to see in this announcement of Governor Neff’s purpose to go to Denison indubitable evidence that he has at last found out what he ought to do. At last he has discovered, if not his duty, a clue thereto.” Despite the jibes, Neff maintained his uncommunicative demeanor. In a Waco press conference, the typically aloof chief executive was seen as being “unusually guarded.” When asked about the situation in Denison, and specifically about the possible use of the Open Port Law, Neff replied that he was not sure the law applied. Upon further questioning, Neff refused to say what action, if any, would be taken in Denison. Then in a move surely designed to befuddle everyone, the governor remarked that the presence of Barton and Hickman in Denison did not indicate that either the National Guard or the Rangers would be used in the town. Finally, Neff divulged that he would determine his course of action in “a few days.” This was the press’s last opportunity to talk to the Governor of Texas before the Democratic Primary to be held the next day.46


And so the votes were counted, and at Camp Mabry, home of the Texas National Guard in Austin, troops prepared for deployment. Early election returns on the gubernatorial race appeared somewhat inconclusive. In one press release by the Texas Election Bureau, Neff was only “assured a place” in the run-off, probably against labor-backed Fred Rogers. Another release gave Neff a solid majority of votes with the note that if present trends continued, the governor would avoid a run-off. Despite the initial uncertainty, everything soon became clear. Newspapers across Texas proclaimed Neff’s victory. More tellingly, newspaper reports indicated that the state was moving on Denison. On July 24, Neff ordered Texas Rangers into the town. The following day, fearing that the force would be inadequate, five hundred National Guard troops were moved into the town as well. In addition, more Ranger forces were being recruited. Finally, on July 26, the governor declared martial law in Denison. Neff had not been dithering or indecisive at all; he had been waiting to act until a time that was politically expedient.47

Once martial law came to Denison, the town remained quiet and there were no more serious incidents of violence. The strikers maintained their picket lines. National guardsmen, Rangers, and local police patrolled the city’s streets. The troops remained in Denison until the end of the year. During the railroad strike, Neff placed sixteen Texas cities under martial law based on the Open Port Law. Only in the case of Denison was the governor under federal pressure to do so. Other governors also came

under pressure to use state troops to break the strike. Because of the application of military force to protect railroad property and workers, the railroads were able to bring in replacement workers. Thus, the strike was broken. Most of the men who did return to work lost their seniority and took the pay cut. As for Governor Neff, he showed himself to be an adroit politician. He had dealt effectively with a major crisis in the midst of his own successful reelection campaign. Neff had also managed to stall the Harding administration just long enough to meet his own political needs.48

With Neff’s reelection in the fall virtually assured, the governor needed only to stay out of trouble until the November election. This proved to be a difficult task. The race to replace U.S. Senator Charles A. Culberson was the source of considerable controversy and constituted a battle royal between Texas’s conservatives and liberals. At the root of this conflict was the Ku Klux Klan’s foray into organized politics. The Democratic Primary had pitted Klansman Earle B. Mayfield against former Governor Jim Ferguson, who had been impeached and removed from office in 1917. Though Mayfield had reportedly quit the Klan, he was, nevertheless, its endorsed candidate. The election threatened to split the state’s Democrats. Many feared that the Klan would successfully co-opt control of the Democratic Party. In a letter to Governor Neff, Houston physician E. W. Reeves wrote, “You doubtless realize that the time is fast approaching...when no man will be permitted to hold a public office...unless he is squarely a PROTESTANT GENTILE AMERICAN otherwise known as a KLANSMAN.” Another letter from Beaumont attorney Stuart Smith revealed much about the divisive

48 “Neff Lifts Open Port in All Cities,” DMN, December 30, 1922; Brown, , 86.
political climate. Smith wrote, “There is a very angry and irritated condition here now due to Klan agitation...the candidate involved is thrown into the Klan melee, and if he happens to be proposed by an anti-Ku Klux Klan man the Ku Klux are against him and vice versa.” The senate campaign exacerbated this situation and Neff’s chief worry in fall of 1922, was getting caught in the mess.⁴⁹

The ensuing contest marked one of the messiest episodes in Texas political history—and Neff was smart enough not to get involved. As the Texas Democratic Party Convention approached, Neff announced that he had “no platform plans.” Furthermore, Neff was “…not expected to take any part in writing the document.” When the convention convened in San Antonio September 3, one of the proposed agendas included an “anti-Klan” plank. The fight over the plank constituted an all-out war between liberal and conservative Texas Democrats. Through the next few days, the Resolutions Committee debated the anti-Klan plank and eventually drafted a weak version. When the issue went to the floor of the convention, debate was closed by a vote of 691 to 135. Thus, the convention rejected the anti-Klan plank. The action caused uproar on the floor of the convention and probably strengthened the resolve of liberals. Neff’s decision to minimize his own participation at his party’s convention probably helped him maintain his favorable public image.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 103; Note: Brown includes an entire chapter entitled “Farmer Jim v. Prince Earle” on this topic.; Dr. E. W. Reeves to Neff, September 9, 1922, PNP; Stuart R. Smith to Neff, July 17, 1922, PNP.
In addition to their rejection of the Klan, progressive Democrats also refused to accept its candidate for the Senate. Just days after the close of the party convention, progressives began to search for an independent candidate to face Mayfield in the election. They chose Harris County Assistant District Attorney, George E. B. Peddy. In a surprise move, Texas Republicans removed their own candidate for Senate and replaced him with Peddy. This fusion candidacy was very controversial. Part of this controversy centered on the “primary pledge” in which those who voted in the primary had to pledge to vote for the party’s candidate in the fall election. Some said that voters should adhere to their pledges, others said voters should not be obligated to vote for someone they did not support. In the midst of this controversy, one question remained on the minds of Texas voters: What did Governor Neff think?51

The governor was often pressed on the issue, both publicly and privately, but steadfastly refused to say too much. Of course, the press was particularly interested in getting an answer. In mid-September, P. E. Fox, managing editor of the *Dallas Times Herald*, sent Neff the following telegram: “Please wire at our expense which candidate you will vote for or support in the senatorial election; Mayfield or Peddy.” Fox received a reply, not from the governor, but from his secretary, R. B. Walthall, who acknowledged receipt of the telegram and promised to “call his [Neff’s] attention to your message.” Walthall could very easily, and conveniently, have “forgotten” to pass along the message. In any case, Neff was very careful to avoid mention of the Senate

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race to the press. In fact, Neff never endorsed either candidate. Just before the November election, a Democratic Party rally was scheduled in Dallas in Fair Park at which Mayfield was to attend. Neff was asked to attend and speak at the event by Lewis T. Carpenter, a candidate for the legislature. Carpenter made a personal appeal to the governor and characterized his visit as “a purely personal matter.” Ultimately, Neff decided not to attend the rally citing “pressing official business.” It seems likely that Neff wanted to avoid close proximity to Mayfield.52

The contest between Mayfield and Peddy was hard and bitter. Both sides challenged the legitimacy of the other’s candidacy. Both filed suit to have the other’s name removed from the ballot, and Mayfield’s case went to the Texas Supreme Court. Just four days before the election, the Secretary of State was ordered to postpone the printing of ballots. By Election Day, the issue was still not settled, and it was not clear whose name would be on the ballot. Voters were upset and confused. Eventually, Mayfield was declared the winner. Despite this, the legality of Mayfield’s candidacy remained in the courts for the next year. Furthermore, it was not immediately clear that Mayfield would even be allowed to take his seat. Throughout this, Neff remained quiet. For the remainder of Neff’s tenure, he maintained a cordial yet limited relationship with Texas’s newest United States Senator.53

With 1922 drawing to a close, Neff had survived one of the most trying years in history for any Texas governor. His ability to weather the political storm and stay

52 Telegram to Neff from P. E. Fox, September 19, 1922, PNP; Walthall to Fox, PNP; “Neff Not to Attend; Mayfield off to Dallas,” DMN, October 28, 1922.
53 “Mayfield’s Name Ordered on Ballot After Ruling by Supreme Court,” DMN, November 7, 1922; “Official Told to Hold-Up Printing,” DMN, November 4, 1922; “Voters In Today’s Elections and Dissatisfied with both Big Parties,” DMN, November 7, 1922.
above the fray showed great skill. Neff’s handling of the crisis at Mexia and Denison also revealed considerable political skill. By staying out of the fight between Mayfield and Peddy, Neff showed a keen understanding of the dangers of divisive partisan politics. Above all else, in a year that would have broken a lesser politician, Neff’s performance drew national attention. At the end of a year that Neff must have been glad to have behind him, he began to prepare an agenda for the coming legislative session.
CHAPTER 5
1923: TOWARD A MORE PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

During 1923, Governor Pat Neff pursued his legislative agenda more successfully due to experience gained during his first term of office. Generally, Neff continued his emphasis on law and order through tougher laws and better enforcement, and emphasized fiscal matters, especially deficits and taxation. Though Neff continued to have problems in his relationship with the legislature, he was able to claim two important achievements. First, he led in the establishment of a state park system, a success for which he became well known. Second, and more important, the governor was able to secure a complete geographical and hydrological survey of the state. This survey formed the basis of much of Texas’s future water reclamation and flood control efforts. In the governor’s second term, issues that took much of his time during his first term proved less demanding. Mob violence continued but seemed reduced. The Ku Klux Klan began to operate less as a vigilante movement and more as a political organization as it attempted to move into the mainstream. Neff continued his dialogue with Texas clubwomen and progressives. After the legislature completed its work, the governor was able to look forward and, for the first time, enjoy the trappings of his office, making several important out-of-state trips during his second term. Neff’s participation in the National Governor’s Conference, as well as the annual meeting at the Chautauqua Institute in New York State, drew him much attention that became important as 1923 came to an end.
As the 38th Texas legislature began, incoming Speaker of the House, R. E. Seagler of Palestine, announced that the session would closely follow a program guided by the 1922 platform of the Texas Democratic Party. These included such progressive reforms as passage of the Sheppard-Towner Child Welfare Act, conservation of natural resources, tax equalization, regulation of public utilities, and calling a constitutional convention. Seagler also addressed the state’s fiscal problems, noting that it was “the duty of the legislature to solve the problem of the state’s financial deficiency and to do justice to everybody in regard to taxation.” When Governor Neff issued his first message to the legislature, he echoed some of Seagler’s sentiments. In particular, Neff strongly endorsed the calling of a constitutional convention, noting that “the progress of the state is hobbled and hamstrung.” Neff saw changing the constitution as a means of altering the state’s tax structure to solve its fiscal problems. Neff also called for improved funding of education. The governor also suggested improving the highway system, promoting water conservation, and bringing industry to the state. So, as the session began, political leaders hinted at progressive reform—the only question was how successful it would be.¹

The governor issued his first message to the legislature, in person, in a joint session of the 38th Texas Legislature on January 13, 1923. In the speech, Neff struck a tone that was both conciliatory and progressive. He began, “I come not in the spirit of one who would dictate but in that finer and higher spirit of friendship. We are here to work out a great program to make Texas a better place in which to live.” Neff also

promised not to force any bills through the legislature and to be generally cooperative.
A main theme of Neff’s speech was the need for improvement of education and the
necessary funding. Neff also touched on the issue of taxation, not just for the purposes
of funding education, but in terms of the state’s growing deficits. The governor’s first
instinct was that government was too big and inefficient. Thus, Neff advocated
consolidation and elimination of wasteful agencies. However, Neff also recognized that
part of the problem was an antiquated tax system. Neff specifically mentioned the
reliance on property taxes, which he considered to be too high in many cases. The
governor also argued for greater taxation of corporations.²

Neff’s views on education and taxation, in fact, offer the best examples of his
progressive philosophy. Although Neff’s public statements would often seem to put him
solidly in the business progressive camp, a closer look reveals a more traditional strain
of progressivism. The governor was a strong supporter of education. In his political
memoir, published shortly after he left office, Neff noted:

Money spent for education is the best expenditure the state can make. Education is an investment that builds up the state. Ignorance is a burden that destroys it. The cost of education is a proper and legitimate charge against the public treasury. It cost the state more to leave a child in ignorance than it costs to educate it.³

² “The Governor’s Message,” AS, January 14, 1923; Note: During this time period, the Texas Constitution required that the legislature meet for ninety days beginning in January. This was the regular session. If the appropriation bills were not completed within the regular session, the governor called a special session to pass the appropriation. By the 1920s, the legislature simply had too much to finish in ninety days. Thus, Neff had to call several special sessions. The governor could also call special sessions to deal with any legislation deemed important enough to warrant legislative action. Neff often included other proposed legislation for consideration in addition to appropriations during special sessions.
In this passage, Neff made no distinction between public schools and universities, but the primary issue was funding public schools. At the time, there was considerable financial inequity among Texas school districts. On this point Neff stated, “This responsibility cannot be left solely to local communities. Some localities are poor in educational environment...to each of these, the strong and far-reaching arm of the state should lend a helping hand.” Here Neff seemed to be saying that education was an important enough topic to warrant greater power and involvement of the state. On the surface, this sentiment does not seem to be inconsistent with a business progressive philosophy; however, the argument for greater state power does.⁴

Governor Neff’s views on taxation were really quite interesting, especially when being attributed to a business progressive. During his tenure, state officials were engaged in a constant battle to balance increasing demands for public services and infrastructure against decreasing revenue from an antiquated tax system. At the time, state and local government were very reliant on property taxes for revenue, and these sources were virtually exhausted. On the subject of taxation, Neff noted that, “taxes taken from the people are supposed to go back in services.” Furthermore, Neff noted that taxes are paid based on either “property” or “privilege.” Correspondingly, Neff noted the difference between “tangible” assets, like property and “intangible” assets like income or stocks. Generally, Neff equated intangible assets with privilege, arguing that wealth and privilege enable people to amass intangible assets. Neff believed that Texas often overtaxed property and under taxed privilege, thus under taxing the rich at the

⁴ Ibid.
expense of relatively poor property owners. According to Neff, “In our system, we are taxing land most heavily because it is tangible, though those who own it are often least able to pay; whereas in dealing with privilege which is more profitable than land, we tax less because of its intangible quality.”

Neff believed the state’s tax structure should be changed to reflect this reality. Neff wrote, “Our statutes should be broadened. This done we shall find that the field of taxation is rich in untaxed taxables.” This statement alone is mind-boggling in terms of Neff’s being a business progressive. But, Neff’s opinion as to the solution to this tax problem was most indicative of his progressive philosophy. Neff wrote:

> If I were privileged to write the tax laws of Texas, there should be no ad valorem tax for state purposes. I would release all property tax to the counties for purposes of local taxation. It would be far better for both the counties and the state, if real estate and personal property were assessed and taxed only for local purposes; while for state purposes taxes should be levied on public utilities, franchises, inherited property, incomes, banks, insurance companies, and enterprises of like character earning large profits from privileges conferred by the state.

This statement indicates a strong inclination toward a progressive solution to the state’s fiscal problems and is definitely not pro-business. Neff was keenly aware of the need for fiscal reform. Although he was not beyond using the line-item veto to slash government expenditures, Neff must have realized that it was not enough and that the state would need to seek new revenues to provide services. This was the issue that the governor and legislature faced during the 1923 session.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
On January 17, just one week after the convening of the legislative session, Governor Neff spoke at a “Mass Meeting for Law Enforcement” held in Fort Worth. Generally, these kinds of meetings were progressive responses to Klan rallies and marches, held under the auspices of groups such as Martin Crane’s Dallas County Citizen’s League. In this case, the meeting centered on the need for law enforcement versus “lawlessness” and “mob violence” perpetrated by the Klan and other vigilantes. Neff began, “In keeping with the spirit of this splendid gathering, I come as a citizen of Texas and as the Governor of this state to speak on the supremacy of the law.” Neff broke the problem down to its simplest form by noting, “The law is the...only guarantee we have for life, liberty, and property.” He added, “The first duty of government is to uphold the law. When a government ceases to enforce its laws, it ceases to be a government and becomes a mob.” Neff appealed to the virtuous nature of the progressive-minded crowd and alluded to their enemies, as he noted, “It is indeed a challenging day to the forces of righteousness to know that the forces of evil are making claim to respectability in this state.” With that, Neff offered a rather succinct assessment of the situation.8

The governor spoke on a variety of topics that day, all related to the state of law enforcement in Texas. Neff called for the impartial and equal application of law, saying said, “No man should ascend so high that the strong arm of the law could not reach him, and no one should descend so low that his whispering voice could not be heard in the temple of justice.” The governor also called for the strict punishment of criminals

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8 “The Supremacy of the Law: Address Delivered by Pat M. Neff at the Mass Meeting for Law Enforcement at Fort Worth, Texas, Tuesday Night, January 17, 1923,” Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. (Henceforth cited as PNP.)
and the supremacy of the state in the enforcement of the law. One of the most enlightening of Neff’s comments concerned the rampant problem of lynching. According to Neff:

Another form of lawlessness that is causing an ever increasing disrespect for the courts is mob violence. Lynching is one of the darkest blots on the escutcheon of our civilization ... Every lynching party strikes a deathblow to civilization. Lynching is a disease. We should have some legislation that would cure it ... If the officers who permitted these lynching were made to lose their offices, and in addition to that, the state should hang about a dozen high-grade lynchers, Texas would no longer lead the world in [lynching].9

This was one of the strongest statements made by Neff on this topic, and it showed much about the character and personal philosophy of the man. The governor ended the speech by expressing his confidence in the people of Texas. Neff concluded, “By the united effort of all right thinking people, we can whip the enemies of good government and make Texas the safest and best place in all the world to live.” Overall, it was a progressive-sounding speech made to a progressive-minded crowd.10

By 1923, Texas progressives had made considerable progress in fomenting change. One important change was the increasing political power of women. Texas women voted for the first time in a presidential election in 1920, the same election that put Pat Neff in the governor’s mansion. No doubt, most Texas women were glad for the change, and many were unapologetic about the exercise of their newly acquired power. Lily Joseph, President of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs (TFWC), was one of the latter. Joseph remarked, “When I say that the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs is in politics, I make no apology. For years, we have sought to affect legislation

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
in this state.... We are in politics as patriotic women, as thinking citizens. We are vitally concerned in the government of Texas and the nation.” As the 38th Legislature of Texas convened, a feminine voice was heard on the floor of the House of Representatives. That voice belonged to Representative Edith Williams of Dallas. The editors of the *Austin Statesman* cited Williams’s election as evidence that times had changed and that the “great body of voters” desired “a progressive program of legislation” to “keep pace with a new era.” The *Statesman* also cited the calls for a new constitution “to broaden the basic law of the state,” a measure supported by Neff, as evidence of the new era. The editors rightly conceded that law enforcement, education, fiscal responsibility, and soil and water conservation would all require the legislature to act “deliberately.”

Neff’s proposal for the conservation of water resources constituted an early success for the governor. Up to this time, efforts to build reservoirs and create flood control were somewhat disjointed, often being left up to local governments. Neff’s plan to centralize these efforts enjoyed wide support and brought direction to an important issue. In semi-arid Texas, water was always an important and contested issue. In 1923, the state faced an interesting position in regards to water—East Texas often had too much and was subject to flooding, while West Texas often had too little and was subject to drought. The goal was to tame floods in the east and ease drought in the west, while using hydroelectric power for economic development. According to Neff, “The work of water conservation and of land preservation has just begun. Its ultimate

value, no one can forecast.” When Neff signed the bill into law on January 31, it
provided $600,000 for a “topographic and hydrographic survey...as a basis for
reclaiming overflowed lands and conserving storm waters for utility purposes.” In
addition, federal interest in the project yielded an additional $600,000 and the valuable
support of the U. S. Geological Survey. The $1.2 million project began almost
immediately as teams of surveyors crisscrossed the state by land and air. By identifying
sites for future dams, lakes, and reservoirs, the project may have provided Neff’s most
important and lasting legacy.12

Another of Neff’s progressive successes was the establishment of a state park
system. Neff first suggested the need for state parks near the end of the 38th
Legislature. In making the suggestion, he argued that, “nothing is more conducive to
the happiness and contentment of a people, the state’s most valuable asset, than for
them to go back to nature where the bees hum, the birds sing, the brooks ripple, the
breezes blow, the flowers bloom, and the bass bite.” Because of Texas’ fiscal problems
at the time, Neff took the novel approach of proposing a six-member board, serving
without compensation, to solicit donations of tracts of land for parks. When the
necessary legislation passed, Neff himself took the lead by donating a tract of his
family’s land near Waco. As one of his last official duties, Governor Neff presided over
the opening of Mother Neff State Park on December 12, 1924.13

Legislators continued to struggle with the need to fund government services, and
again they faced budget shortfalls. Neff, even though committed to fiscal responsibility,

12 Neff, The Battles of Peace, 51-4; “Reclamation Bill Signed By Neff,” DMN, February 1, 1923.
13 “Neff Urges State Sytem of Parks,” DMN, May 2, 1923; “Mother Neff Park Given to Citizens,
DMN, December 12, 1924.
did not merely favor cutting expenditures to meet available revenues. On April 16, he submitted to the legislature an eight-point plan to raise revenue—and taxes. These were: a corporate income tax on oil producers, refiners, and pipeline operators; a franchise tax on out-of-state companies operating in Texas; an increase in the gross receipts tax; inheritance tax; better collection of property taxes; collection of other delinquent taxes; statewide equalization of property taxes; and finally, an income tax.

In reference to the income tax, Neff noted:

A considerable number of persons, who have little or no physical property to be taxed, yet in their particular fields, prosper far beyond the average citizen. Their children, like those of their tax-paying neighbors, are educated at public expense. They have equal protection of the law; they should bear their rightful share of the expense of government.14

Again, on the issue of taxation, Neff does not exactly fit the description of a business progressive. It is apparent that Neff realized that revenues would have to be raised to provide services, and he was willing to do it.15

Despite Neff’s conciliatory overtures to the legislature, the relationship between the two was often strained. In March, Neff and the legislature had a blow-up over the lack of progress on Neff’s law enforcement program as well as the appropriations bills. When both houses agreed to adjourn on March 13, thus ending the regular session without completing the aforementioned bills, Neff issued a proclamation to reconvene the legislature immediately the next day. Neff rebuked legislators for adjourning “without having made appropriations for the life and operating expenses of the Texas government and her institutions.” He then provided a laundry list of complaints such as

14 “Governor’s Revenue Program as Laid Before Special Session,” AS, April 16, 1923.
the legislature's failure to pass a law for “punishing outlaws who openly and unfearingly manufacture and sell whisky in Texas.”

Neff was particularly critical of the Senate in his message. When word of the governor's decision to reconvene reached that body, one senator immediately rose to have two of Neff's negative references expunged from the record. As it turned out, several senators had taken offense at Neff’s wording in his criticism. This was especially true in reference to the “Quo Warranto” bill, which was aimed at removing corrupt public officials. The controversial bill would have allowed the governor to remove law enforcement officers from their posts. Neff’s comments made it seem as though the senators were not concerned about the issue. The senators continued to stew and some accused the governor of being “narrow minded” and of trying to “dictate to the senate.” The next day, legislators urged the governor to rescind the order to reconvene on the basis that many members had pressing personal business at home. Finally, Neff backed-down, although he refused to rescind the order. Instead, the governor simply let the legislature know that if it voted to adjourn again, he would not recall them until sometime between “the middle of April and June 1.”

When the 38th Texas Legislature finally did adjourn in June 1923 after a string of special sessions, it showed rather mixed results. The state's fiscal crisis remained. Legislators had approved no major new taxes; the income tax failed. In fact, they had cut the budget to the bone, yet it was expected to fall short by some $4 million short

over the following two years. As a result, Neff did not take out his “blue pencil” to any of the appropriations. Instead, he simply filed them with the Secretary of State, and they became law without the governor’s signature. Neff must have realized that he and the legislature had done all that was politically possible, but he was still unwilling to have his name attached to a budget in deficit. Neff took a similar course with the so-called “White Man’s Primary” bill, which kept blacks from voting in the all-important Democratic primary. This too Neff filed without his signature.18

On the other hand, some important pieces of progressive legislation were passed during the session. Among them was the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act. Federal legislation passed in 1921 had provided matching funds for states that authorized funds to establish clinics and distribute hygiene and nutrition information. The act aimed at lowering high infant and child mortality rates and Texas’ entry into the program was a progressive victory. Another example of progressive success in Texas was the defeat of the Stroeder bill, which would have prohibited the teaching of evolution in public schools. Thus, two years before the famed Scopes Monkey Trial, Texas allowed the teaching of Darwin’s theory in schools. During the 38th Texas Legislature, the governor and progressive legislators sought to solve the state’s fiscal problems through fairer and more extensive taxation. Though some new taxes were established, they did not significantly improve the situation. In the final analysis, the move to a more progressive agenda met with limited success.19

Of course, Neff’s inability to prosecute a significant progressive agenda lay in the ability of conservative forces to counter it. As previously mentioned, the movement of the Klan into mainstream politics provided many conservatives with a new political voice. After their successful attempt to have Earle B. Mayfield elected to the U. S. Senate in 1922, the Klan continued to propose and support their own candidates for office. As governor, Neff frequently received letters of support for various prospective appointees to state office—especially those seeking appointments as judges. In a few cases, Neff received overt endorsements from local Klans. These were hard to miss because of their gaudy Klan letterhead. In one case, J. M. Elliott of Memphis, Texas, was endorsed to fill the bench of the 100th Judicial District. Elliott received many endorsements from friends, acquaintances, and Klan Number 165 in Clarendon, Texas. Generally, prospective judges with as many references as Elliott did receive appointments. Neff, however, rejected him, writing in his letter of explanation, “My failure to appoint you...is in no way a reflection upon you as a man, or as an attorney.” Perhaps it was instead a reflection upon Elliott’s choices of friends. In another case, Neff received an endorsement of N. T. Stubbs by Klan Number 47 in Mexia to the bench of the 87th District. Neff instead appointed J. Earl Bell to the position. Though these examples are in no way conclusive that Neff discriminated against Klan-endorsed candidates, it at least indicates that such endorsements did not necessarily help.20

With the adjournment of the legislature, most of Neff’s constitutional duties ended. As a lame-duck governor, he took on a caretaker role awaiting the election of

20 Clarendon Klan Number 165 to Neff, March 30, 1923, PNP; Neff to J. M. Elliott, June 8, 1923, PNP; Mexia Klan Number 47 to Neff, March 25, 1923, PNP; Neff to William F. Kerr, April 23, 1923, PNP.
his successor and began to look ahead to the next chapter of his life. Neff was also able to enjoy some of the benefits of his office and made several visits out of state. In July, the governor took an eighteen-day trip to Panama and Cuba. Upon his return to Austin, supporters greeted Neff warmly, and he noted that he had “been shaking hands with Presidents.” One of Neff’s most important trips was in mid-August to the annual meeting of the Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. The movement centered there was part of the larger Social Gospel movement. With its beginning in 1874, the Chautauqua movement had a significant influence on the development of modern liberalism amongst the middle class. By the turn of the century, the movement had branches around the country and flourished everywhere but the South where many found it to be too liberal. Its annual meeting constituted a sort of combination of college, summer resort, and revival meeting. Thus, Neff’s presence at the meeting is interesting on several levels.  

The Chautauqua movement was closely associated with the women’s club movement of the time. One member of the “old girls” network at Chautauqua was Anna Pennybacker, longtime friend and supporter of the governor and former President of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, as well its parent, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. More importantly, Pennybacker was very influential at Chautauqua and helped bring Neff there to speak. By the time of Neff’s New York trip, his name had already begun to be mentioned as a possible candidate for president or vice-president in 1924. Because of this, Neff said that he would keep his trip non-political and limit his

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speaking to his favorite topics of prohibition and law enforcement. At the same time, however, Governor Neff avoided comment on prospective presidential nominee Governor Alfred E. Smith’s recent signing of a bill to repeal prohibition in New York State. So, in a way, what Neff did not say was almost as important as what he did say.22

During his speech at Chautauqua, Neff was in fine form. He began, with an appeal to the basic tenets of both progressivism and the Social Gospel movement:

Life is a battle. Civilization is bought with blood. The story of the human race is one of struggle. Slow as the centuries, constant as time, tragic as death, has been the making of the world’s civilization. Mankind has always moved slowly, but its march has always been, and is now, onward and upward. Where the vanguard of civilization camps today, the rear guard camps tomorrow. Through countless ages of mingled glory and gloom, the children of men have marched through rivers of tears and oceans of blood ...seeking at all times, by Divine guidance, the light and learning of a higher, a better civilization.23

Neff focused the speech on prohibition and its enforcement. Like many progressives, Neff saw alcohol as the root of much of the crime and violence in society. Thus, he saw prohibition as both a “moral triumph” and a “crowning achievement” in the “steps of progress.” Neff connected the issues of prohibition and law enforcement based on the perceived relationship between crime and alcohol. Neff went on to condemn the proposed legalization of wine and beer in some states. Here, Neff was referring to Smith’s earlier action, although he never mentioned him by name. Generally, the

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speech was often quite eloquent and well targeted to its audience, so it was well received and gained a considerable amount of attention.24

In fact, there was some anticipation of Neff’s speech at Chautauqua. The day before the speech, Neff received a telegram from United Press International in New York City requesting him to wire a copy of it “at our expense.” Other more important people expressed interest in the speech. One of these was Democratic Party leader and former presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. A few days after the speech, Bryan wrote John F. Marrs of Wichita Falls a letter that Marrs forwarded to the governor’s office. Bryan wrote, “I was very much impressed by Governor Neff. His speech in Chautauqua, New York is perfect both in thought and expression.” Bryan’s interest lent new credibility to the possibility of Neff as a possible candidate for president. Neff received many congratulatory letters after the speech from old friends and colleagues such as Claudia Hightower of the Texas Women’s Christian Temperance Union, who expressed “great satisfaction.” In the end, Neff thanked Anna Pennybacker for the experience at Chautauqua. Neff wrote, “For your many acts and words of kindness, I shall ever be grateful. Every moment of my visit to Chautauqua was pleasant and was enjoyed to the fullest extent. To you I am debtor in many ways for the pleasure, the profit, and the honor that were mine.” At the time Neff wrote that, he probably knew exactly how pleasurable the trip had been—but he could not have known just how profitable it would be.25

24 Neff, Battles of Peace, 85, 91.
25 Telegram to Neff, August 13, 1923, PNP; Claudia Hightower to Neff, August 22, 1923, PNP; William Jennings Bryan to John F. Marrs, August 16, 1923, PNP, Neff to Anna Pennybacker, August 23, 1923, PNP.
In October, Neff made another trip out of state. The main purpose of the trip was to attend the National Governor’s Conference held in West Baden, Indiana. In addition, Neff gave an address in Springfield, Illinois, and went on to attend a President’s Conference on Law Enforcement, Prohibition, and Immigration in Washington, D.C. These events once again put Neff in the spotlight. Neff’s performance at the governor’s conference drew a great deal of attention. The meeting proved to be a stormy one in which two factions surfaced. One faction believed the governors should concentrate their efforts on limiting the Klan, while the other, led by Neff, believed in strict enforcement of prohibition laws. Eventually, Neff’s faction held sway. The failure of the conference to address the Klan issue adequately incensed Governor John M. Parker of Louisiana where the organization had been particularly violent. During the course of the debate, Parker threatened to quit the conference, saying that, “the Ku Klux Klan is the greatest issue in America today and that question demands the time and attention of this meeting.” Neff retorted:

I have declared martial law twenty times in various parts of Texas to insure law enforcement…. President Coolidge has invited the Governors to Washington to discuss prohibition enforcement and not the Klan, and we therefore should confine ourselves to the purpose of the meeting.26

Parker interrupted Neff by saying, “The Ku Klux Klan is seeking to take charge of the Constitution” and that Neff was thus “encouraging the enemies of the Constitution.” Governor Percival Baxter of Maine, chair of the session, was only able to restore order through “vigorous pounding of the gavel.”27

26 “Pat Neff Defends Signing Resolution,” DMN, October 20, 1923.
27 “Neff Will Attend Governors’ Session,” DMN, October 14, 1923; “Pat Neff Defends Signing Resolution,” DMN, October 20, 1923;
Ultimately, the governor’s conference produced a resolution that placed prohibition and its enforcement above all else. It read:

Observance of law is the fundamental basis of American citizenship and enforcement of the law is the primary duty of every official. National prohibition is now, by constitutional amendment, the law of the land. An overwhelming majority of the citizens of the United States are law-abiding and desirous of the enforcement of law.²⁸

The resolution made no mention of the Ku Klux Klan. Neff signed the resolution, but Governor Parker did not, having followed-through on his threat to leave the conference. When the governors moved on to Washington, D. C., and Neff was identified as a “central figure” in the meeting there. At that meeting, Neff reiterated his position from West Baden. When a reporter asked Neff what the main issue of the coming presidential campaign would be, he responded, “Law enforcement. No man may expect election who does not stand for law enforcement and the eighteenth amendment to the Federal Constitution. The people will stand for nothing less.” Neff’s concentration on the issue of prohibition may have made him seem to be something of a political “one-trick pony.” On the other hand, many potential voters may have liked that. At any rate, Neff had definitely been noticed and was in a position to capitalize on it.²⁹

At the close of 1923, Neff had effectively completed his work as governor. Though the move toward a more progressive agenda had been largely unsuccessful, the governor enjoyed some long-term successes such as the establishment of a state park system and the statewide water resources survey. By this time, Neff’s hard work

²⁸ “Memorial Addressed by The Forty-Four States and Territories of the Union to Calvin Coolidge, President of the United States,” October 19, 1923, PNP.
²⁹ “Texas Executive Central Figure in Gathering of Governors at Capital,” DMN, October 21, 1923.
as governor had begun to pay off in the form of national political attention. The
governor consolidated this political capital by his performance at the National
Governor’s Conference and at President Coolidge’s conference in Washington. As he
looked forward to 1924, Neff needed only to decide how he was to use his political
capital.
CHAPTER 6
1924: A LAST HURRAH

Pat Neff's last full year as Governor of Texas should have been anticlimactic. Instead, he became involved in divisive national politics by waging a backdoor campaign for the presidency. William Jennings Bryan's mention of Neff as a possible Democratic Party presidential candidate in 1923 put the governor in the national spotlight. His performance at the National Governor's Conference and at President Coolidge's conference on prohibition and law enforcement later that year further concentrated the spotlight as Neff cast himself in a leadership role during the two conferences. As 1924 began, Neff looked like a serious contender for either place at the head of the Democratic Party's ticket. However, in the course of the governor's backdoor campaign, he made several critical political errors that only served to alienate his Texas political base. In the final analysis, Neff played an important and, thus far, largely forgotten role in the infamous Democratic National Convention of 1924. Furthermore, the mere consideration of Neff for a place on the ticket was indicative of Texas's growing power and influence in national politics as well as a hint of things to come.

By late 1923, many influential Democrats, including Bryan, thought that their coming convention might be deadlocked. There were two main reasons for this. First, there was the divisive nature of American politics at the time. The conflict between rural conservatives and urban progressives had become personified by the Democratic Party's two leading presidential candidates, William Gibbs McAdoo of Georgia and Al
Smith of New York. McAdoo was favored by conservatives especially in the South, but he also had some appeal to progressives for having served in the Woodrow Wilson Administration as Secretary of the Treasury and as Railroad Administrator during the First World War. McAdoo was married to Wilson’s daughter Eleanor and had been favored by many in 1920 because of his strong connection to Wilson. Unfortunately, Wilson was late to announce that he would not run for a third term that year, and McAdoo, out of respect for the president, did not enter the race. Meanwhile, urban progressives favored Al Smith, Governor of New York. Smith was the polar opposite of McAdoo, being urban, progressive, and anti-prohibition. Smith was also closely associated with Tammany Hall and, thus, the big-city machine politics that rural conservatives disliked. To further complicate the situation, Smith was Roman Catholic, and McAdoo had received Klan backing. The candidacies of these two men were highly representative of the political climate of both the Democratic Party and the nation itself.¹

The second, and most important, factor was the Democratic Party’s “two-thirds” rule, the requirement that two-thirds of the delegates support the nominee. Thus, with a total of 1,098 delegates, 732 votes were required to nominate as opposed to a simple majority of 550 had the rule not been in place. The “unit rule” added further complication by allowing state delegations to cast all of their votes for the candidate holding a majority of support within the delegation. Not all states used the rule, but it served to keep candidates from splitting a delegation’s vote and also kept the total vote

from reflecting real support. Texas was one of the delegations that used the rule. In fact, the Texas delegation was popularly known as the “Faithful Forty” for consistently casting all forty of its votes for one candidate. Texas Democrats were quite proud of this moniker, and many were reluctant to depart from the practice. This combination of factors practically assured contentious conventions in both Waco and New York City. Many, including Bryan, thought the result would be the nomination of a “dark horse” candidate at the national convention.²

Governor Neff was first suggested as a possible presidential candidate in mid-1923. One of the earliest public suggestions of Neff’s name for national office came from his former private secretary and long-time advisor, R. B. Walthall, in a circular letter sent to Texas newspaper editors in June. According to Walthall, the governor should be considered “as a possible standard bearer of the National Democratic Party for President of the United States.” Walthall continued, “His strength of character, his devotion to justice, his fearlessness and humility in service of this people. His sagacity in dealing with difficult political situations enabled him to...overcome every obstacle both in elections and in policies of administration.” Walthall concluded that these qualities made Neff “the most available candidate for the Democratic nomination.” In the course of his comments, Walthall also managed to invoke the name of Woodrow Wilson while asserting Neff’s ability to “lead the people of the United States in the onward and upward movement of civilization and progress.” Considering Walthall’s

closeness to Neff, and the nature of the letter, this could be considered a “trial balloon” for a Neff candidacy.³

The biggest boost to a Neff candidacy came in the fall of 1923 when William Jennings Bryan proposed the possibility that the governor could lead the Democratic Party’s ticket. Bryan had been impressed by Neff’s speech at the Chautauqua Institute in August in which the governor had staunchly defended prohibition and its enforcement. In a letter to the editor of the *Jacksonville* [Florida] *Observer*, a copy of which was forwarded to Neff’s office, Bryan wrote, “Governor Neff is the chief executive of the biggest state in the South. He defeated ex-Senator Bailey, and defeated him largely on the liquor question. He is on the people’s side on public questions and he has the courage to take his position and risk his future upon the righteousness of his position.” Bryan concluded that Neff was “the kind of man we need” and closed the letter with “WHY NOT GOVERNOR NEFF!” Of course, any kind of endorsement by a man of Bryan’s stature resulted in considerable attention being placed on the governor.⁴

Bryan did not give a formal endorsement of Neff, mentioning other possible candidates as well, but the governor’s friends were understandably excited by the news. M. S. Lemly of Temple wrote a letter to Bryan in which he stated, “Your friends and admirers in this state are glad to note that you are avowing an encouraging appreciation of the fact that Texas possesses a presidential possibility in the person of Pat M. Neff.” Lemly sent a copy of the letter to the governor’s office with a notation on

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³ “Suggests Neff as President,” *Dallas Morning News* (Henceforth cited as *DMN*), June 19, 1923.
⁴ “William Jennings Bryan Applauds the Masterly Effort of Governor Neff of Texas and Declares he Would Make a Great President of the United States,” Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas (Henceforth cited as *PNP*).
the bottom addressed to Neff’s secretary, Espa Stanford. The notation read, “Tell Mr. W. [Walthall] that the Downs family here and Mr. H. C. Glenn will also write letters to Mr. Bryan. Mr. Glenn has twice met Mr. B.....” Clearly, Neff’s friends were working on his behalf to gain additional support from Bryan. In addition, it appears that the efforts were in some way being coordinated through Walthall, who had been responsible for releasing the Neff trial balloon.\(^5\)

Some of Neff’s friends, although supportive of his candidacy, warned against waging an informal, or backdoor, campaign. Attorney J. W. Madden of Crockett in a letter to Texas Secretary of State R. L. Staples wrote, “I note with pleasure and satisfaction the efforts you are making in behalf of the governor’s candidacy, if he should finally enter the race. I hope you and other friends will keep the good work going.” Madden also assumed “that the mention of his name is something more than a mere compliment.” At this point Madden warned, “In other words, my doctrine is that a thing that is worth having is worth fighting for, and a ‘half-hearted’ fight rarely ever gets you anywhere.” Madden went on to make the point that it would be much easier for Neff’s friends to work for him, and more importantly, raise money, if the governor waged a formal campaign. This was probably the best piece of political advice that Neff got during his flirtation with national politics. At the top of Madden’s letter was a notation “204/ N-P.” This is consistent with the filing system in Governor Neff’s office; correspondence was filed with reference to subject matter and the files were numbered. File 204 was one of Neff’s political files that generally dealt with feelings of

\(^5\) M. S. Lemly to W. J. Bryan, August 15, 1923, PNP.
sentiment, often personal, but sometimes political. By November 1923, when Madden’s letter was received in Neff’s office, his staff had begun to add the N-P designation to letters related to the governor’s possible run for the presidency.⁶

Although support for Neff’s candidacy began to solidify late in 1923, the governor did not make a formal announcement. In December, Neff and Bryan had arranged to meet under the guise of a duck hunt to be hosted by W L Moody, Jr., a mutual friend of both men. Bryan wrote to Neff, “It will be a great pleasure to take this trip with you; it will give us an opportunity to visit our old friends the Moody’s, and at the same time settle all the difficult questions.” At this point, Bryan got to the crux of the matter:

You may have noticed a statement in the paper that I am to present the name of a Southern candidate to the convention ...I want to make an argument that will refute the long standing argument against the nomination of a Southern man. This argument will be of advantage to any Southern man who may be a candidate. As the man whom I shall present is bone dry and progressive, my argument will be of advantage to every Southern candidate who is bone dry and progressive.⁷

Bryan seemed to indicate that he had someone in mind when he stated that the man he would present “is” bone dry and progressive. Neff was very much “bone-dry” and “progressive”; nevertheless, Bryan’s statement is still vague with respect to a candidate. Bryan concluded by offering Neff good wishes and advice as he wrote, “I hope that you will go to the convention with the delegates from your state and as many more as you can secure.”⁸

In mid-December, Neff received the official presidential endorsement from the Texas Democratic State Executive Committee. The committee called Neff “one

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⁶ J. W. Madden to R. L. Staples, November 10, 1923, PNP.
⁷ Bryan to Neff, December 22, 1923, PNP.
⁸ Ibid.
possessing the wisdom strength, courage, and sense of justice that would make a great President and in whose personality are happily combined all the elements of character ability and magnetism...in the ranks of democracy today.” At this point, Neff had received the full support of the Texas Democratic Party—all he had to do was maintain it. Shortly after Neff received this nomination, he once again took his case to the people of Texas, letting it be known that the intended to make a series of speeches all over the state in the coming spring for unexplained reasons. There was considerable conjecture about the purpose of Neff’s tour. Some thought the tour would precede a special session of the legislature that Neff intended to call in 1924. Of course, many surmised that it had something to do with the Neff’s possible presidential campaign. A “friend” of the governor noted that usually lame ducks “remain quiet” during their last year in office “unless they should be candidates for other public office.” Neff’s friend concluded that the governor was “determined that such obscurity shall not come to him, and will make a report to the people in person and thus refuse to be forgotten. This would put him in line for public office in the future if he should desire to aspire again.” Thus, Neff became an undeclared presidential candidate.9

Neff maintained his contact with Bryan, sending him a telegram on January 2, setting the date for the duck hunt during the last week of January. Unfortunately, a few days later, it became known that Bryan intended to nominate an unnamed Floridian at the national convention. In spite of this news, Neff refused to stop the effort to get Bryan’s support, and the duck hunt went on as scheduled. Neff later recalled how on

the morning following the hunt, he arose to find a duck decoy on his breakfast plate. According to Neff, Bryan explained, “It has been decided that each person is to eat for breakfast the duck killed by him on the previous day.” Neff responded, “Jealousy makes even distinguished men do foolish things. The report that I had never fired a gun almost cost me the governorship, and now my expert marksmanship is about to rob me of my breakfast.” This is Neff’s only public mention of the meeting, and it is made totally outside the context of presidential politics.10

Bryan’s visit to Texas also included a speaking tour to shore-up support before the fall elections. Before the Democratic leader left the state, Neff took one last opportunity to talk to him, traveling to Galveston to meet Bryan’s train. A photographer from the *Austin American* captured the meeting, and the paper published the photos. One of the photos shows Neff and Bryan looking at a piece of paper. In the caption below the photo, the paper speculated that the two were looking at a diagram of Madison Square Garden, scene of the upcoming 1924 Democratic National Convention. At about the same time, a reporter asked Neff whom he would support for president. Neff replied, “The best progressive, aggressive, forward-looking, law-enforcing democrat that can be found between the oceans is the man that will get my vote for president.” The governor’s typically cryptic response probably left many wondering if he was talking about himself. Neff could hardly be blamed if he was; his photograph,

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10 Neff to Bryan, Telegram, January 2, 1924, PNP; “Bryan Not to Nominate Governor Neff,” *Austin Statesmen* (Henceforth cited as *AS*), January 8, 1924; Neff, *The Battles of Peace*, (Fort Worth: Pioneer Publishing, 1925), 251-2; Note: In Neff’s book, he is curiously quiet on the entire episode involving Bryan and the flirtation with presidential politics. The book itself, however, is less a political memoir and more a compilation of speeches and anecdotes related to Neff’s governorship.
as well as a discussion of his presidential possibilities, had already appeared in the “National Affairs” section of Time Magazine.\textsuperscript{11}

As would be expected, William Gibbs McAdoo was Neff’s chief rival in Texas. By early 1924, the Tea Pot Dome scandal had begun to unfold. Unfortunately for McAdoo, his name came-up in the congressional investigation of the scandal. During the testimony of California oilman Edward L. Doheny, it was learned that McAdoo had been paid $250,000 to represent his company in Washington concerning a Mexican oil deal. At the time, McAdoo was a partner in the Los Angeles law firm of McAdoo, Cotton, and Franklin. The allegations against McAdoo had immediate political repercussions. Up to this point, the scandal had been limited to Republicans, but now they tainted the man many considered the Democratic front-runner. McAdoo decided to meet the charges head-on when he testified a few weeks later, and afterwards at a meeting in Chicago he and some of his key supporters agreed that he should continue his presidential bid. In the end, nothing came of the allegations against McAdoo. Nevertheless, they were quickly noted in Austin.\textsuperscript{12}

On February 1, 1924, Silliman Evans, a reporter for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in Washington, sent a telegram to Neff concerning McAdoo’s connection to the scandal. Evans wrote, “Final knock-out blow delivered to McAdoo in the Senate this afternoon when news of his being attorney for Doheny during corrupt oil deals.

\textsuperscript{11} “Austin American Presents First Pictures to be Published of Bryan and Neff’s Meeting,” Austin American, February 1, 1924; Note: The clipping appears in one of two scrapbooks that Neff’s office compiled between December 1923 and November 1924. The scrapbooks are part of the Pat Neff Papers; “Governor Neff Goes to Waco to Pay Poll Tax,” DMN, January 29, 1924; “National Affairs”, Time Magazine, December 24, 1923, 2.

\textsuperscript{12} Burl Noggle, Teapot Dome: Oil and Politics in the 1920s, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962.), 100-1, 110-4.
Congratulations. Hit the ball.” This last line is obviously a baseball analogy implying that Neff had been given a pitch that was “low, slow, and over the plate.” All Neff had to do was to connect, and the result would be a homerun. A few days later Neff replied to Evans’s telegram. The governor noted that he had just returned from a speaking engagement in Chicago and had just accepted another in Denver. Neff wrote that he enjoyed “getting out of the state now and then and seeing how the other fellow does things.” Neff also noted his visit with Bryan and added, “Things are moving along nicely here.” It appears that Neff was enjoying a new role and looking forward to better things.  

In many ways, Evans’ baseball analogy was very fitting. If the disclosure of McAdoo’s association with the Doheny oil deal was the first pitch, it was also the first strike against Neff. Generally, Neff made the mistake of speaking too strongly against McAdoo based on what proved to be weak charges. McAdoo was still widely popular in Texas as Neff began to separate himself from his perceived rival. During a trip out of state in mid-January, a reporter had asked Neff if he supported McAdoo in the coming election—and the answer had seemed to be yes. Neff was asked the same question when he returned to Texas and replied, “The Washington report that I committed myself to McAdoo for President was without the slightest foundation in fact as was the statement that I favored Texas sending an uninstructed delegation. I did not, and have not said, whether I was for or against McAdoo.” During this period, Neff must have been formulating his course of action, hence the apparent waffling. In the end, Neff

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13 Silliman Evans to Neff, Telegram, February 1, 1924, PNP; Neff to Evans, February 13, 1924, PNP; Note: Evans was a close friend of Amon Carter, publisher of the Star-Telegram. Evans went on to become publisher of the Nashville Tennessean.
decided to campaign against McAdoo and for an uninstructed Texas delegation to the Democratic National Convention. Both of these proved to be critical mistakes as the governor began his statewide speaking campaign in the spring of 1924.14

Neff’s tour of the state generated controversy almost immediately because he began to charge that McAdoo was “unfit” to be President. In a speech at Groesbeck, Neff elaborated while openly comparing himself to his would-be opponent, “I’m not saying McAdoo is not a gentleman or a lawyer, but I do say that he is not the proper man to lead the Democratic Party. He has been the paid attorney for the corrupting influences while I haven’t received a cent.” B. C. Brown of Fort Worth was one of many who were taken aback by Neff’s actions. Brown wrote, “Really I was surprised when I learned you were going to stump the state against William Gibbs McAdoo…. I said to my friend his [Neff's] political enemies will just give him enough rope so he can hang himself and sure enough, they have.” Brown continued, “I’ll call your hand before you get thru throwing your dirty mud. You are not talking about Joe Bailey, but McAdoo…. I voted for you and you have made a splendid governor, but you just happen to get a hold of the wrong man this time.” Neff thanked Brown for his letter but noted, “If the spirit of your letter...had been just a little different...I would have appreciated it more.” Brown was probably echoing the sentiment of many and, as evidenced by the letter, Neff’s actions were causing him to lose political support. Despite letters like Brown’s, Neff continued to wage his campaign.15

14 “Neff Denies Rumor He Favored McAdoo,” DMN, January 22, 1924.
15 “Neff Challenges McAdoo to Show Fitness to Lead,” AS, April 17, 1924; “Governor Assails McAdoo-Underwood,” DMN, April 19, 1924; B. C. Brown to Neff, April 25, 1924, PNP; Neff to Brown, May 2, 1924, PNP;
McAdoo made a campaign swing through Texas in mid-April, and many Texans, of course, expected their governor to welcome any important visitor, especially if the two were of the same political party. Neff probably further alienated the Democrats of his state by disrespectful treatment of McAdoo during the tour, refusing even to introduce the visitor at any of his speaking engagements. This was in spite of the fact that Neff had reportedly been offered an “uninstructed” delegation that would eventually go to McAdoo. During his visit, McAdoo criticized Governor Neff for his pursuit of an uninstructed delegation. In a speech in San Antonio, McAdoo said, “It is a matter of keen regret that Governor Neff has taken the position that the people of Texas should not instruct their delegates.” McAdoo warned, “It will not do to split the forces of progressive democracy in Texas on this question.” In this case, Neff’s actions were, at best, not in keeping with the ideal of southern hospitality. At worst, Neff’s actions probably looked petty and self-serving.\(^\text{16}\)

The stated reason for Neff’s speaking tour was his fight for an uninstructed delegation. This, the governor said, he was “definitely, decidedly, and unalterably” for. In a speech in Fort Worth, Neff began by stating, “I am not out for the candidacy of any office...or any political party,” and then quickly moved on to the issue of the delegates. “The thing is to instruct our delegates in the fundamentals of democracy, and when they are up there, let them vote for the cause and not the individual.” Neff argued, “I am not willing for the forty Texas delegates to vote for the man I may have in mind as the best man for the office, when he may not be in the running when the

\(^\text{16}\) “Governor Neff Refuses to Introduce McAdoo as Candidate Tours Texas,” \textit{DMN}, April 12, 1924; “McAdoo Again Argues for Instruction,” \textit{Houston Chronicle} (Henceforth cited as \textit{HC}), April 13, 1924.
last vote is cast.” Finally, in a dig at McAdoo, Neff added, “I would hate for Texas to have the delegation go north and find that the man they were instructed to vote for was in jail or out on bond.” Statements like these, greatly disturbed Texas Democrats who were largely for McAdoo. So, in the weeks leading up to the county conventions, Neff used much of his political capital as he argued for sending uninstructed delegates to New York in a thinly veiled presidential bid.17

Unfortunately for Neff, he managed not only to alienate the party faithful, but also the party functionaries. One of these was Thomas B. Love, Democratic National Committeeman from Texas. In a speech at Dallas’ City Hall Auditorium, Love said, “For Texas...not to send an instructed delegation to the national convention would be an advertisement...that Texas has no nominee for the presidency.” Love added, “If Texas instructs for McAdoo...it means we will have a dry candidate for the presidency. If Texas does not send an instructed delegation, it means placing the nomination in the hands of the wets....” Here, Love probably had much sympathy from conservatives on the prohibition issue alone, but implicit in his statement was the even stronger argument that Texas would essentially be letting others choose a candidate if it sent and uninstructed delegation. Love was also investigating Neff’s use of state funds. A week prior to the speech, Love telegraphed State Comptroller Lon Smith concerning the governor’s travel expenses. In the course of the speech, Love accused Neff of improper usage of state funds for both travel and phone expenses. Prior to this, Neff and Love had enjoyed a happy working relationship; by late April, they seemed to be

17 “Neff has a Tilt with McAdoo Man,” DMN, April 25, 1924.
enemies. In the first week of May, Love ran advertisements detailing Neff’s “misstatements.” Love was one of the most powerful and influential Democrats in Texas, and Neff needed him.  

Neff’s speaking campaign lasted about three weeks before the county conventions that were to decide who would represent them at the state convention and, more importantly, how they would be instructed to vote once there. On the eve of the county meetings, Governor Neff issued a statement. It read: “It is my firm conviction that the interest of Texas Democracy can better be served by the selection of an uninstructed delegation than by the naming of a delegation tied to the apron strings of either of the two candidates now seeking to have our forty votes.” Of his own personal interest in the endeavor, Neff wrote, “Had I wanted the delegation instructed for me, or had my object been to get myself named as a delegate to the convention, I know how that could have been done without making a single speech anywhere on any subject.” The irony was that, on this last point, Neff was undoubtedly right. Apparently, Neff’s sly, back-door approach to presidential politics was not appreciated by Texas Democrats. McAdoo’s victory was “decisive,” and he carried Bexar, Dallas, Harris, and Tarrant counties, the largest in the state. Many political observers saw the vote as a “rebuke” to the governor. Several counties had gone so far as to adopt

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resolutions condemning Neff’s actions. Despite Neff’s campaign, the county conventions decided that they would be “Seeing it Through with McAdoo.”

As the state Democratic convention approached, many wondered if the governor would participate, but on May 7, sources announced that Neff would participate in the convention to be held in his hometown of Waco on May 27. In a speech, Neff expressed the opinion that he “opposed too much harmony” at the upcoming convention. With regard to his earlier efforts to gain an uninstructed delegation to the national convention, Neff said, “I suppose I am the happiest man in the country; I don’t want anything at all politically. I have been saying just what I wanted to say because I wanted to say it, and I don’t give a darn whether it pleases anybody or not.” When the convention did begin, Neff himself became an issue. Neff’s supporters wanted to send him as a delegate to the national convention, but his opponents, who were still bitter over the governor’s actions earlier in the year, opposed it. Eventually, named a non-voting “delegate-at-large,” Neff apparently felt the need to be his own man and declined the seat in the delegation, probably because it was to be instructed for McAdoo. The day after the convention, Neff’s old friend and advisor, G. W. Barcus, wrote the governor concerning its outcome: “I want to congratulate you on your action in the convention...I was very glad indeed that you refused to be sent as a delegate under the instructions that the convention voted. I was proud that you did not retract, because I did not think there was anything for you to retract.” At least, Neff’s diehard supporters were still behind him. Though Neff was not apologetic for his campaign

19 “Governor Neff has No Apology to Make,” DMN, May 3, 1924; “McAdoo Choice in Precinct Conventions,” DMN, May 4, 1924; “McAdoo Delegations are Victorious in Precinct Meetings,” HC, May 4, 1924; Note: “Seeing it Through with McAdoo” was the would-be campaign slogan for McAdoo in 1920.
against McAdoo and for an uninstructed delegation, the loss of support from Neff’s political base resulting from the episode constituted a “second strike” against him.\footnote{20}

In the aftermath of the state convention, many wondered whether Neff would attend the national convention. Love had given Neff a ticket to attend the convention, but apparently, he was ambivalent about attending until one of the governor’s political contacts helped him make a decision. In mid-May, Chesley Jurney, a fellow Waco native, who served as an aide in the office of Senator Royal Copeland of New York, sent Neff a three-page letter describing the then-current insider thought on Democratic Party politics. The main theme of the letter was that McAdoo would not be nominated. A few days prior to the beginning of the convention, Neff wired Jurney from Austin about the likelihood of McAdoo’s nomination. Jurney wired back: “There is not the slightest possibility of McAdoo’s nomination. Everybody here admits he has no real chance. A dark horse is certain to be selected. You must come to the convention by all means. We will not take no for an answer.” It is not clear who Jurney meant by “we,” but it was enough to get Neff on a train to New York City.\footnote{21}

When Neff arrived at the convention site on June 21, political observers awaited the outcome of the battle between McAdoo and Smith. Meanwhile, pundits speculated who the dark-horse candidate would be if the frontrunners did not get the nomination. Among those named were; John W. Davis, a congressman from West Virginia; E. Carter

\footnote{20} “Neff to Take Part in Session at Waco,” \textit{DMN}, May 8, 1924; “Neff Opposed to too Much Harmony,” \textit{DMN}, May 22, 1924; “State Convention Opens with Harmony on Surface but Fight on Neff Underneath, \textit{HC}, May 27, 1924; “Decide on Neff as Delegate to National Democratic Meet,” \textit{DMN}, May 27, 1924; G. W. Barcus to Neff, May 28, 1924, PNP.

\footnote{21} “Texas Delegation Firm for McAdoo, \textit{DMN}, June 22, 1924; \textit{Chesley} Jurney to Neff, May 18, 1924, PNP; Neff to Chesley W. Jurney, Telegram, June 14, 1924, PNP; Jurney to Neff, Telegram, June 14, 1924, PNP.
Glass, a senator from Virginia; James M. Cox, the 1920 nominee; and Oscar W. Underwood, a senator from Alabama. Neff’s name was not mentioned, probably because of his alienation from the Texas delegation. Though Neff said he was there only as a “spectator,” many feared the governor would continue his crusade against McAdoo. This included, ironically, Love who had supplied Neff with the pass. In a statement to the press, Love said, “There is to my mind, nothing less harmful, or more helpful to the cause of Mr. McAdoo than a broadside directed at him by Governor Neff.” Of course, many of those attending the convention questioned why Neff was even there after having turned-down the offer to attend as an alternate delegate. Neff’s opponents, also McAdoo supporters, had good reason to question the governor’s motives.  

On June 22, Neff made one more critical error. The governor released a statement to the press in which he denounced not just McAdoo, but Smith as well. Neff’s statement reads, “The Democratic Party meets tomorrow to name a candidate who should and who can win. The selection of either Mr. McAdoo or Governor Smith means defeat for the party. Smith is too wet. McAdoo is too oily.” So, after successfully alienating both wings of the Democratic Party, Neff made an important point. According to the governor, “The unfortunate division of our party at this moment between these two impossible candidates has caused the delegates to overlook temporarily the strength and virtue of many able and better fitted men such as Davis, Davis, Davis.

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22 “Favorite Sons’ Partisans Await Outcome of McAdoo-Smith Tug-of-War,” *DMN, June 22, 1924*; “McAdoo Holds Lead in Pre-Convention Experts’ Analysis,” *DMN, June 22, 1924*; Note: Love’s statement appears here as originally printed. However, the article mentioned that Love was “peeved” at Neff. It is likely that the words “more” and “less” were confused. Love was a McAdoo supporter. “Texas Delegation Reaches New York,” *DMN, June 23, 1924.*
Copeland, Ralston, Baker, and [Nebraska Governor Charles W.] Bryan.” Whether or not Neff had himself in mind, at this point, is unknown. Shortly after Neff released his statement, a reporter asked William Jennings Bryan about his earlier endorsement of Governor Neff. Bryan responded, “I don’t care to discuss that.” When prodded, Bryan said, “When I complimented Governor Neff some time ago and said he was good presidential material, a lot of people construed it as meaning that I didn’t think anyone else would fit the place.” In fact, Bryan had mentioned other possibilities, but now he distanced himself from Neff. This was Neff’s third strike—and he was out.23

The 1924 Democratic National Convention convened on June 23 and soon found that, as predicted, the two-thirds rule had created a deadlock. Both the McAdoo and Smith camps were understandably nervous. In the course of trying to get enough votes to win the nomination, the Smith campaign began to look for a way to present a balanced ticket in order to overcome the deadlock. At some point, a “special messenger” was dispatched to bring Neff to Smith’s New York office. It was later rumored that the Smith campaign was considering proposing Neff as a vice-presidential candidate. Of course, by this time, Neff had probably alienated his own political base to the point he was not a viable candidate. The nomination never came. By July 9, the delegates had been released from their pledges, and the convention had gone through one hundred roll call votes with no candidate chosen. Finally, the next day, the convention nominated John W. Davis for the presidency, and Charles W. Bryan, William

23 “Governor Pat Neff Scores Candidacy of McAdoo-Smith,” *DMN*, June 24, 1924; “Bryan Reticent when Reminded of Recent Laudation of Governor Neff,” *DMN*, June 25, 1924.
Jennings’ Bryan’s brother, for the vice-presidency. A dark horse candidate from the small state of West Virginia had won the nomination.24

Neff had to have speculated about what went wrong. At the beginning of the year, he had looked like a strong possibility for the democratic presidential nomination. Instead of going on the campaign trail, however, the governor remained in Austin. Neff seems to have gotten it in his mind that he could not run a formal campaign and be considered a dark horse. Perhaps if he had taken J. W. Madden’s advice, and waged a formal “front-door” campaign, he would not have alienated so many Texas Democrats in his criticism of McAdoo. On the other hand, if Neff had not stumped the state in opposition to McAdoo, and simply waited until the convention, perhaps he could have been the dark horse nominee with the full support of his delegation. Perhaps, the popular governor of a large and increasingly influential state like Texas would have made a better candidate than a congressman from a small state like West Virginia. Smith’s consideration of Neff, despite the political realities, bears this out. In the end, what went wrong was the Neff wasted valuable political capital on a needless fight against McAdoo in Texas. Had Neff not alienated the grassroots Democrats who were represented by the delegates on the floor of the convention and their leaders like Love, he may well have been a viable alternative when the time came.

Had Neff’s name been offered as a presidential candidate, a nominating speech was already written. It proclaimed, “Sitting under the dome of the great State House of

24 Neff, The Battles of Peace, 236-7; “Smith Forces to Nominate Neff as Vice-President is Report Reaching Texas Headquarters, San Antonio Express, July 1, 1924; “Delegates Freed from All Pledges,” DMN, July 8, 1924, “Convention Adjourns after 100 Ballots,” DMN, July 9, 1924; John W. Davis and Governor Bryan of Nebraska to Lead Party,” DMN, July 10, 1924.
the imperial, rock-ribbed, democratic State of Texas is the one man for whom the eyes of the nation are now searching. Pat Neff, the present Governor of Texas, is a born executive with a wonderful grasp...of all the problems of the state, nation, and world.” The consideration of Neff for the presidency is of interest to historians because it may have marked an important step in Texas’ rising importance in presidential politics. By this time, the state’s growing wealth and influence meant that Texas candidates could be used to bring balance to national tickets. During the 1924 Democratic Convention, one of Smith’s key advisors was his campaign manager, Franklin D. Roosevelt. When Roosevelt himself was nominated for president in 1932, he chose Texan John Nance Garner as his running mate. It was a winning combination. The same strategy was also used successfully by John F. Kennedy in 1960 and Ronald Reagan in 1980. In the past fifty years, Texas has given the country three presidents.25

Neff returned to Texas, leaving the excitement of national politics and going back to the position of a lame duck governor in his last few months in office. He dutifully sent his congratulatory letter to Davis and campaigned for him in the fall. In a letter to J. V. McClintic of the Democratic National Committee, Neff graciously wrote, “You may assign me to the territory you feel I may be of greatest service.” In his final year of office, Governor Neff concentrated on developing the State Park system that he had created. He also worked to improve education with a statewide survey of schools and the creation of a special commission to study its findings. Meanwhile, the state

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25 “Pat Neff for President” Undated, PNP; Note: The speech is signed by Larry Mills of Austin. A notation at the top reads: “Written to be used by the Texas delegation if he had been nominated for President;” Neff to John W. Davis, July 12, 1924, PNP; J. V. McClintic to Neff, August 25, 1924, PNP; Neff to McClintic, August 30, 1924, PNP.
commissioned surveys of the state’s prisons and mental institutions. In Neff’s farewell address as governor, he said, “During these four gladsome years, my purpose in life has been strengthened, my heart made mellow and my soul enriched. I am going to forget the piercing thorns and those who thrust them and remember only the flowers and those who gave them.”26

26 “Neff Retiring, Says He Kept the Faith,” *DMN*, January 21, 1925.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

Pat M. Neff had the misfortune, or perhaps opportunity, to govern Texas during a precarious time in its history. The period's potential for social and political strife was perhaps only exceeded by that of Sam Houston's tenure as governor just prior to the Civil War. Neff successfully negotiated a path through the turmoil, and in the process displayed his leadership skills. Often, Neff found himself in the middle of some of the key issues and events of the early 1920s. Texas was one of the main battlegrounds in the conflict between urban liberalism and rural conservatism, and Governor Neff found himself caught between those two interests. Neff disassociated himself from the Ku Klux Klan as it tried to insinuate itself into Texas politics. Moreover, the governor countered the Klan by such actions as sending Texas Rangers to protect jailed African-Americans from lynching. There is also reason to believe that Neff systematically eliminated Klan candidates for political appointments. In the cases of the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike and the declaration of martial law in Mexia, Neff also found himself in the position of maintaining order. Both of these incidents helped to cast Neff as an effective leader and brought national attention.

Neff's election in 1920 was a manifestation of budding urban-rural conflict. His opponent, former Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey, was very conservative, even for the 1920s. Bailey, his attitudes, and his political stands, represented the heart of Texas conservatism—he was its symbol. Neff, on the other hand, led the progressives who rallied to defeat Bailey. In the process, Neff maintained close contacts with Texas
progressives such as Dallas attorney Martin M. Crane and women’s club leaders such as Lily Joseph, Jessie Daniel Ames, Florence Floore, and Anna Pennybacker. Neff’s contact with these women’s organizations and his interest in their issues were crucial in his election because 1920 marked the first opportunity for Texas women to vote in a gubernatorial election. By defeating Bailey, the standard-bearer of Texas conservatism, Neff became the standard-bearer of Texas progressives.

As governor, Neff pursued several progressive goals such as reform of the state prison system, education, and the tax system. Neff is widely credited for starting the state park system. Another achievement that is less well known, but just as important, was the statewide survey of water resources. By identifying sites for new dams and lakes, the survey insured continued growth and economic development of Texas for years to come. Though Neff was by no means a liberal progressive in the mold of Robert Lafollette, he was not always simply a business progressive in that his views, particularly those related to the taxation of corporations, were really unfriendly to business.

Neff’s ability to bring forth progressive legislation was constantly hampered by conservative opposition, as evidenced by the refusal of the legislature to pass an income tax. The state’s fiscal problems at the time were also a source of conflict between the governor and legislators. Both the 37th and 38th Texas Legislatures struggled through multiple sessions to have expenditures meet projected revenues. The state’s antiquated tax structure made this difficult, and Neff did not always appreciate the problem. The governor often micromanaged the legislature by sending
it multiple “suggestions” for legislation, and thereby, often made the work of legislators more difficult. In the final analysis, Neff had a troubled relationship with the legislature but was still able to produce some progressive reforms.

One of the most important events of Neff’s tenure was the Railroad Shopmen’s Strike of 1922. This incident put Neff in the thick of the battle between labor and big business interests, and pitted the governor against the administration of President Warren G. Harding during a gubernatorial election season. As a progressive candidate, Neff counted on the support of labor in the election, and his ability to stall the administration just long enough for the votes to be counted was an impressive show of political fortitude. The episode also displayed Neff’s abilities at managing crises. This event, in particular, and the governor’s performance in general, brought him national recognition. The next year, Neff built upon these successes with both a well-received speech at the Chautauqua Institute and by taking on a leading role at the National Governor’s conference. The latter two events ultimately rewarded Neff with the suggestion of his name as a possible presidential candidate by William Jennings Bryan.

Bryan’s “endorsement,” put Neff in the national spotlight. Subsequent conversations and correspondences between the two men resulted in the governor’s conclusion that he could be Bryan’s “dark horse” candidate. At the time of the endorsement, Neff was at the height of his political power and influence. Neff then made a serious political miscalculation. Instead of shoring up his Texas political base, the governor instead eroded that base by an unwise and unnecessary assault on William Gibbs McAdoo. Had Neff not alienated his grassroots supporters and

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Democratic Party functionaries in Texas, he may well have been in a position to take a place on the party’s national ticket at the New York City convention. Nevertheless, Neff’s consideration for a place on the national ticket indicated the increasing importance and influence of Texas’ in presidential politics.

In Neff’s personal papers, there is a letter from the governor to Herbert Spencer, a supporter from San Antonio. Spencer had apparently heard Neff’s recitation of a poem and requested a copy of it. Neff complied. In his letter accompanying the poem the governor wrote, “I am not able to advise you as to where this poem may be found nor do I know its author. The sentiment, however, is fine, and it is worthy of being passed along down the line.” The poem read:

I live for those who Love me.  
For those who know me best.  
For the heaven that bends above us,  
and awaits my spirit too.  
For the rights that need assistance;  
For the wrongs that need resistance;  
For the things that are in the distance;  
and the good that I can do.¹

The poem reflects the tenets of the progressive movement as well as embodies the spirituality of the man.

¹ Neff to Herbert Spencer, June 6, 1921, Pat M. Neff Papers, Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas.
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