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Barefoot and Pregnant: The Education of Paul Van Dalsem

ROBERT THOMPSON

"A lot of these legislators try to keep out of controversy. I thrive on controversy. I'm the best hell-raiser that's ever been in the legislature. If I figure I'm not smart enough to get something, I'll raise enough hell until I get what I want."

—Paul Van Dalsem, *Arkansas Gazette*, March 19, 1966

PAUL VAN DALSEM REPRESENTED PERRY COUNTY in the Arkansas legislature off and on for thirty years between 1936 and 1976. With his bald head and stout frame, his ever-present cigar, his aggressive style, his mastery of the legislative process, his fiscal conservatism, his close ties to Gov. Orval Faubus, and his rural constituency, Van Dalsem came to epitomize for many Arkansas voters the classic southern mossback politician, who practiced politics in smoke-filled rooms rather than on the stump and made deals under the table rather than in the open. In the summer of 1963, after a lively legislative session, Van Dalsem made a now-famous comment about women and the role he thought they should play in society. This comment would plague Van Dalsem a few years later when, because of a new interpretation of the federal Constitution by the United States Supreme Court, he could no longer rely solely on the loyal and satisfied voters of Perry County to send him back to Little Rock.

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Born at Aplin in Perry County in 1907 to natives of that county, William Paul Van Dalsem attended public schools in Perryville and began college at Arkansas Tech in Russellville. Upon arriving at college, Van Dalsem quickly gained a reputation as a fighter who would scrap with anyone who challenged him. He also became known for his industriousness, paying his way through college with a variety of odd jobs, including collecting laundry from other college students for a local cleaner. After two years at Arkansas Tech, Van Dalsem transferred to Louisiana Tech at Ruston, where he played on the football team for three years and earned an undergraduate degree in agriculture. Later, in 1935, he briefly attended the University of Arkansas in hopes of earning a degree that would allow him to join the state university's Agricultural Extension Service and become a county agent. He soon abandoned this plan, he said later, because he did not care for the politics in the Extension Service.¹

Van Dalsem eventually became a successful farmer and gained a reputation as a savvy businessman. Practically penniless when he moved back to Perry County in 1933, he would eventually own and operate a large farm in the eastern part of the county, several cotton gins, a sawmill, and a local telephone company. In the late 1930s he also operated the Toad Suck Ferry, which provided a crossing of the Arkansas River between Perry and Faulkner Counties and which complemented his cotton gin business. In 1934 Van Dalsem borrowed funds to buy the *Perry County News*, the local newspaper, paying off his debt at a rate of twenty-five dollars a month over the next few years. He enlisted his sister and later his wife to serve as editors of the newspaper, while he sold the advertising. Van Dalsem finally sold the newspaper in 1949 to the family that published the *Morrilton Democrat* in nearby Conway County.²

First elected to the Arkansas House of Representatives in 1936, Van Dalsem began his political career as a somewhat progressive state legislator. In the late 1930s he worked to increase funding for the state hospital for the mentally ill, and in an early political advertisement in the *Perry County News*, Van Dalsem promised Perry County voters he would "fight for our

¹Bonna Dale Cunkle, telephone interview by author, May 17, 1998; Dallas T. Herndon, *The Arkansas Handbook 1937-38* (Little Rock: Arkansas History Commission, 1938), 190; *Arkansas Gazette*, January 18, 1953, F5.

²Cunkle, interview; Robert W. Meriwether, *A Chronicle of Arkansas Newspapers Published Since 1922 and of the Arkansas Press Association, 1930-1972* (Little Rock: Arkansas Press Association, 1974), 87-88; *Arkansas Gazette*, January 18, 1953, F5; *Perry County News*, January 6, 1949, 1.

aged, our school children, our citizen's [*sic*] welfare and our roads."³ Nevertheless, early in his legislative career, Van Dalsem gained a reputation as a "one-man economy bloc," a staunch advocate of tight fiscal policies. An opponent of Gov. Homer Adkins, Van Dalsem single-handedly whittled away \$285,000 from the governor's budget in 1941. The next governor, Ben Laney, was more cautious in dealing with Van Dalsem. To gain Van Dalsem's support for adding three new positions to the state Highway Commission, Laney appointed Harry E. Van Dalsem, Paul's cousin, to one of the new spots. It was no coincidence that, not long after the appointment, Highway 10, running from Little Rock to Perry County, was paved.⁴

In his early political career, Van Dalsem was not invulnerable in Perry County. He was defeated at the polls in 1938, after just one term in the legislature, by Roy McNeal, a local farmer who had been involved in Perry County politics for years. The *Arkansas Gazette* attributed Van Dalsem's defeat to the jealousy of older Perry County politicians who had worked to elect McNeal.⁵ Two years later, running on a slate of young candidates arrayed against the older politicians, Van Dalsem easily defeated McNeal by a wide margin. Van Dalsem was narrowly defeated again in 1946, this time by Bill Patterson, a Perry County native who had recently returned home from service in the military during the Second World War. But two years later Van Dalsem once again ran for the legislative seat, beating Patterson by a margin of nearly two to one.⁶

After returning to the House in 1948, Van Dalsem's verbose style and robust physical presence began to garner more and more attention from the media, which portrayed him as "Perry County's Fighting Dutchman." He also displayed few signs of the progressive tendencies of his first term in the legislature. When Rep. Hardy Croxton of Benton County, himself a young reform-minded legislator, attended a southern legislators' conference in

³Roy Reed, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 157-158; *Perry County News*, August 22, 1940, 3.

⁴*Arkansas Gazette*, January 18, 1953, F5.

⁵*Perry County News*, August 11, 1938, 1; *Arkansas Gazette*, January 18, 1953, F5.

⁶Ben Allen, telephone interview by author, June 2, 1998; Jerry E. Hinshaw, *Call the Roll: The First One Hundred Fifty Years of the Arkansas Legislature* (Little Rock: Rose Publishing, 1986), 10; *Perry County News*, August 15, 1946, 1, August 12, 1948, 1. For more on the success of young GIs who sought political office in 1946, see Jim Lester, *A Man for Arkansas: Sid McMath and the Southern Reform Tradition* (Little Rock: Rose Publishing, 1976), 23-32.

South Carolina with Van Dalsem in the late 1950s, the Perry County legislator was typically candid with Croxton: "Hardy, my first or second term in the legislature I was just like you were. I was a white knight on a white horse. But I learned in a hurry you can't get anywhere like that, so I abandoned it. Now I'm just the opposite: I take what I want, and I do what I get by with."⁷

By the late 1950s Van Dalsem had become one of the most influential members of the Arkansas legislature. The primary sources of Van Dalsem's power were his knowledge of the legislative process and the hard work he put into the often mundane duties that accompanied legislating. Van Dalsem knew hidden implications of the bills he and other legislators brought before the House, and he was adept at using and manipulating the votes of other representatives who relied on his knowledge. Eleanor Reid, a lobbyist for the American Association of University Women and one of Van Dalsem's political opponents, recognized the influence that Van Dalsem had over other legislators simply because he worked harder than they did: "Most [legislators] had so many bills they wouldn't bother studying them at all. Consequently, the men depended on [Van Dalsem] for an interpretation, and naturally, if they depended on him for that, he got a good many of their votes when he wanted them."⁸

Van Dalsem frequently engaged in legislative gamesmanship which permitted him to exercise enormous influence on the bills passed by the House. He would introduce a large number of bills in a legislative session, expecting to pass only a few and willingly sacrificing the others to gain political leverage. For example, in the 1963 legislative session, Van Dalsem decided he wanted to give the new Commission on Coordination of Higher Education greater control over state colleges' ability to obtain revenue for new buildings. He introduced two bills, one which required the *approval* of the higher education commission before state colleges could issue revenue bonds and another which required state colleges to seek the *advice* of the higher education commission before issuing bonds. Van Dalsem sacrificed the first bill for the second but accomplished his goal of taking power from

⁷Hardy Croxton, interview by author, Rogers, Arkansas, September 8, 1997.

⁸Eleanor Reid, interview by Charlotte Gadberry, April 19, 1978, Oral History Collection, UALR Archives and Special Collections, UALR Library, University of Arkansas at Little Rock.



Paul Van Dalsem, right, with Orval Faubus and A. M. "Bub" McKennon at the signing of HB 175, 1963. Courtesy, Special Collections Division, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville.

state colleges and giving it to a state commission.⁹ In the 1965 session Van Dalsem introduced a bill that would have moved the University of Arkansas School of Law from the campus in Fayetteville to Little Rock. Though opponents of the bill defeated it, they agreed to a compromise plan that established a night division of the state law school in Little Rock. Again, Van Dalsem accomplished what he had intended and claimed victory. This type of political savvy led Roy Reed, then a reporter with the *Arkansas Gazette*, to conclude that Van Dalsem “introduces and passes a volume of legislation far out of proportion to the size of his constituency” and that Van Dalsem “probably exercises as much influence on all legislation as Pulaski County’s 11 representatives put together.”¹⁰

Van Dalsem could be vindictive toward those legislators who did not share his opinions or support the legislation he introduced. When Representative Croxton refused to vote for a teacher retirement bill backed by Van Dalsem, the Perry County legislator threatened to kill one of Croxton’s own bills, snarling, “Hardy, I’m going to send you back to Benton County a defeated young man.”¹¹ Van Dalsem was also quick to attach amendments to reform legislation that would doom the bills to failure. In 1957 Croxton pushed for an investigation into the profitable purchase of stock in Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company (ARKLA) by members of the Faubus administration. ARKLA was regulated by the state public service commission and headed by Witt Stephens, a Faubus supporter. As part of his investigation, Croxton introduced a resolution which would have required ARKLA to turn over records of its stock transfers. Van Dalsem, who was a friend of both Faubus and Stephens, attached an amendment which would have required *all* utilities in the state to turn over records to the legislature. This amendment turned the utility companies against Croxton and effectively ended the investigation into the questionable transfer of ARKLA stock.¹²

Another source of Van Dalsem’s power was his seat on the Legislative Council, the powerful legislative committee established in 1947, which exercised (and continues to exercise) a great deal of influence over the

⁹*Arkansas Gazette*, May 19, 1963, A13.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Croxton, interview. Croxton replied to Van Dalsem’s threat: “Paul, that would be the greatest favor you could do for me.”

¹²Croxton, interview. See Reed, *Faubus*, 144–149.

budget through supervision of budget requests submitted by the executive branch.¹³ A state representative from tiny Perry County normally might not have expected to hold an influential seat on the Legislative Council. However, Van Dalsem was able to retain his place on the Council throughout the 1950s and early 1960s through an unusual agreement based on the number of congressmen Arkansas sent to Washington. Until reapportionment after the 1960 census, Arkansas claimed six congressional districts, with Pulaski County and Perry County included in the Fifth District. Membership on the Legislative Council was based on these congressional districts: Each district received two representatives on the Council. In 1949 legislators from the Fifth Congressional District entered into a “gentleman’s agreement,” whereby one seat on the Legislative Council would go to a Pulaski County legislator and another seat would go to a legislator from one of the other counties in the Fifth District. This non-Pulaski Fifth District spot always went to Van Dalsem, even after 1960, when Arkansas’s Fifth Congressional District was reapportioned out of existence.¹⁴ Reform-minded Pulaski County voters disliked having Van Dalsem represent them on the Legislative Council, yet he was able to hang on to his position until 1964, when Pulaski County legislators no longer agreed to abide by the “gentleman’s agreement.”¹⁵

Van Dalsem’s relationship with Governor Faubus provided the final source of the Perry County lawmaker’s political influence. Mutual backscratching between Faubus and Van Dalsem began in 1954 when Faubus, as a gubernatorial candidate seeking to unseat incumbent Francis Cherry, promised Van Dalsem that, if elected, he would install Carl Adams, Van Dalsem’s friend and Perry county judge, as head of the state welfare department. After Faubus defeated Cherry in the Democratic primary and was elected governor in November, he kept his promise to appoint Adams as welfare director and began to cultivate Van Dalsem as a political ally.¹⁶

Van Dalsem did not always support Faubus’s revenue programs, however. Instinctively, Van Dalsem was fiscally tight-fisted and opposed any

¹³See Diane D. Blair, *Arkansas Politics and Government: Do the People Rule?* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 180–182.

¹⁴*Arkansas Gazette*, March 1, 1963, A8; *Arkansas Gazette*, March 6, 1963, A6.

¹⁵*Arkansas Gazette*, March 7, 1963, A1.

¹⁶Orval E. Faubus, *Down from the Hills* (Little Rock: Democrat Printing & Lithographing Co., 1980), 91; Reed, *Faubus*, 91.

new tax-and-spending measures. In the 1955 legislative session, he helped engineer the defeat of a sales tax supported by Faubus which would have been used to increase spending on education. However, two years later Faubus used Van Dalsem to pass a more sweeping tax increase. Shortly after he was elected to a second term in 1956, Faubus announced a new tax program which increased revenue from sales, income, and severance taxes, with the proceeds to be applied to education. Convincing a historically parsimonious legislature to boost income taxes was particularly difficult, because the state constitution required three-quarters of both the Senate and the House of Representatives to approve such an increase. The governor eventually persuaded Van Dalsem to back the program, and Van Dalsem worked long and hard to ensure that the House approved it. Not only did a sufficient majority approve the governor's revenue program, but two-thirds also approved an emergency clause which caused the taxes to go into effect almost immediately.¹⁷

In return for his support, Van Dalsem extracted a promise from Faubus that he would support Van Dalsem's longtime attempts to ensure the continued operation of the Toad Suck Ferry. In the 1955 legislative session, Van Dalsem and his friend Senator Guy "Mutt" Jones of Faulkner County pushed through a twenty-thousand-dollar appropriation bill that allowed the state Highway Department to hire a private contractor to operate a new ferry on the Arkansas River at the Toad Suck crossing between Faulkner and Perry Counties. Clay Cross of Dumas successfully bid on the project and began operating a ferry at Toad Suck in 1956, charging his customers a small toll. Cross, however, was forced to put a good deal of his own money into the ferry and was unable to operate it profitably. So, in the 1957 session, Van Dalsem introduced a bill whereby the Highway Department would purchase the ferry from Cross for twenty-five thousand dollars and allow people to use it without paying a toll. Van Dalsem justified the expense by explaining that the citizens of Perry County needed the ferry to attend Arkansas State Teachers College across the river in Conway: "Perry County is the poorest and smallest county in the state. We need a free ferry to help our kids get to college and to give them a chance at a college education they couldn't otherwise get." The Toad Suck appropriation bill produced heated debate in the House, with two legislators nearly coming to blows over the

¹⁷See *Arkansas Acts, 1957, 19-21.*

matter, and Rep. W. W. Ward of Lee County angrily denouncing "that frog ferry." Van Dalsem claimed that opposition to the Toad Suck Ferry was meant as a personal attack against him. In spite of the controversy, both the Senate and the House eventually approved the appropriation, and Governor Faubus kept his promise to Van Dalsem by signing the bill. The state's purchase of the Toad Suck Ferry eventually led to the building of a bridge by the federal government at the site, together with a dam built in conjunction with the Kerr-McClellan Navigation Project.¹⁸

Van Dalsem also supported Faubus throughout the Little Rock Central High School desegregation crisis and the events that followed. In 1957 and 1958, as a member of the Legislative Council and chairman of its Education Committee, Van Dalsem led an investigation into the Central High crisis designed to harass, and besmirch the image of, proponents of public-school integration. At the outset of the investigation, both Faubus and Van Dalsem predicted that they would produce evidence of a link between the integration of Central High and a subversive Communist plot.¹⁹ With the approval of Faubus, Van Dalsem's committee used the state police to question teachers, students, and others involved with desegregation.²⁰ All of the Legislative Council's hearings on the crisis were held in secret, and the press was barred from viewing the Education Committee's reports. Despite the strong language and secret reports, the Legislative Council eventually dropped the investigation, and Van Dalsem never made public any of the Education Committee's findings. But Van Dalsem's hearings may have eventually produced sinister results. The *Arkansas Gazette* reported that the Legislative Council investigation contributed to the "teacher purge" of May 5, 1959, when a rump of the Little Rock School District's board refused to renew the contracts of forty-four teachers and administrators who supported desegregation of the schools. At least one teacher claimed that she was fired by the school board because she told one of Van Dalsem's police investigators that integration would have worked in 1957 if more black students had been enrolled in Central High School. The *Gazette* speculated

¹⁸Bill Hardin, "An Inquiry into the Legislation Involving Toad Suck Ferry," *Faulkner Facts and Fiddlings* 40 (Spring and Summer 1998): 26-32; Robert W. Meriwether, interview by author, Conway, Arkansas, March 11, 1998; Faubus, *Down from the Hills*, 172-174.

¹⁹*Arkansas Gazette*, December 10, 1958, A1.

²⁰See *Arkansas Gazette*, June 3, 1979, A1.

that Van Dalsem's committee may have turned over its reports to like-minded school board members.²¹

Van Dalsem, then, was "the man in the legislature."²² Through skill and hard work, positions on influential committees, and a relationship with an entrenched governor, Van Dalsem was a political powerhouse despite a tiny base of support among the voters. It would take an act of God, or possibly the United States Supreme Court, to knock him from his perch.

Some of Paul Van Dalsem's most dedicated political opponents were women, especially the members of the Arkansas Division of the American Association of University Women (AAUW). The Arkansas Division of the AAUW was formed in Little Rock in 1923. Shortly after the Second World War, following reports of fraud and abuse in the 1946 elections, the AAUW began lobbying the Arkansas legislature for reform of Arkansas's election laws but met with defeat in 1947.²³ After Arkansas voters approved a constitutional amendment in 1948 that permitted the legislature to authorize a system of voter registration, the AAUW resumed its lobbying for legislation that would prevent tampering with ballot boxes and other forms of voting fraud.²⁴ In the late 1950s and 1960s, the AAUW's lobbying efforts were led by Eleanor Reid, a feisty blonde Pennsylvania native who, legislators, fellow lobbyists, and friends agreed, was fervent, plain-spoken, and sometimes rude in her support of progressive legislation. While some women interested in political activity in the 1950s initially shied away from direct contact with legislators, Reid quickly saw the influence that groups of women could have on the almost entirely male legislature. "I can testify from personal experience that legislators turn pale when they see a group of polite but determined women descending on them," Reid told Adolphine Terry, a

²¹*Arkansas Gazette*, May 8, 1959, A2. See Sara Alderman Murphy, *Breaking the Silence: Little Rock's Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, 1958-63* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 157-163.

²²Croxton, interview.

²³See Pauline R. Hoeltzel, ed., *History, Arkansas Division, American Association of University Women* (Little Rock, 1947), 7-10.

²⁴See Richard E. Yates, "Arkansas: Independent and Unpredictable," in William C. Harvard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 242.

Little Rock community activist and leader. "Perhaps it brings sudden memories of their mothers, urging them to do the right thing!"²⁵

Reid's lobbying efforts came at a time when women began to exercise a newfound political influence in Arkansas politics. The impetus for unprecedented political involvement on the part of women came in the fall of 1958 after the Central High desegregation crisis, when Governor Faubus closed the Little Rock high schools to prevent the integration of black students into previously all white schools. A group of women in Little Rock led by Terry formed the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools (WEC) and urged Little Rock residents to vote to reopen the high schools and to permit peaceful desegregation.²⁶ While the WEC faced initial defeat when Little Rock voted by nearly three to one to keep the schools closed, the women's movement could soon claim political success. During the 1959 legislative session, the WEC, the AAUW, and the League of Women Voters successfully lobbied against a bill that would have given Faubus power to make appointments to the Little Rock school board. Later that year the WEC scored a major victory in the wake of the purge of teachers and administrators by the segregationist element on the school board. Three segregationist school board members were recalled from office, due in part to the influence and hard work of the WEC. The WEC, the AAUW, and other women's groups continued to remain active in attacking Faubus and supporting moderate Little Rock school board candidates into the 1960s.²⁷ And the AAUW's political activity was not limited to desegregation issues. When the legislature failed to enact a new voter registration system as an alternative to the poll tax in the 1963 legislative session and when the Arkansas Supreme Court invalidated the legislature's attempt to enact a voter registration system in a 1964 special session, representatives from the AAUW and the League of Women Voters joined the progressive Voter Registration Committee and began circulating

²⁵Murphy, *Breaking the Silence*, 115.

²⁶See *ibid.*, 67-91. Sara Alderman Murphy's book on the Women's Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools provides an insightful account of the events of 1958-1959 by someone who was involved with the group. For a more neutral view of the WEC, see Lorraine Gates, "Power from the Pedestal: The Women's Emergency Committee and the Little Rock School Crisis," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (Spring 1996): 26-57.

²⁷*Arkansas Gazette*, January 7, 1962, E1.

petitions to enact a new registration system by initiated constitutional amendment. Voters approved the amendment in 1964.²⁸

Van Dalsem, the perennial symbol of the traditional way of doing things, quickly became the *bête noir* of the women's movement. The AAUW and Van Dalsem consistently took opposing positions on the implementation of a new voter registration plan and reform of county and local government. Van Dalsem began to display his frustration with the AAUW in 1961, when he agreed to participate in a debate on state politics and government sponsored by the organization. Van Dalsem's opponent in the debate was David Pryor, then a young reform-minded state representative from Camden. The debate marked an open meeting between a representative of Old Guard legislators, or those who were usually supportive of Faubus and were resistant to reform of state government, and one of the so-called Young Turks, who were persistent and sometimes passionate in their advocacy of reform. In the AAUW's debate, Pryor charged that the major problems in state government were structural, and he argued for a new state constitution and for voting machines to curb corruption in elections. Van Dalsem answered that the only corruption in state government was due to the weaknesses of officeholders and especially to special interest and advocacy groups. "And the worst and most uncompromising is your women's groups," said Van Dalsem. The audience of three hundred, mostly sympathetic to Pryor's positions, laughed and howled.²⁹ The debate was mostly good-natured, but it demonstrated Van Dalsem's growing hostility toward the AAUW and other women's groups who advocated positions contrary to those of Van Dalsem.

Tension mounted between Van Dalsem and the AAUW during the 1963 legislation session. Van Dalsem and the AAUW first locked horns over voter registration reform. Hardy Croxton and other Young Turks, backed by the AAUW, introduced bills that would have required each voter to fill out his own voter registration form as a means of preventing multiple voting by a single individual. Van Dalsem opposed this requirement. Reid, who had begun serving as the legislative chairman of the AAUW, was permitted to address the House Rules Committee during a hearing on voter registration.

²⁸Yates, "Arkansas: Independent and Unpredictable," 243. See Calvin R. Ledbetter Jr., "Arkansas Amendment for Voter Registration without Poll Tax Payment," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 54 (Summer 1995): 134-162.

²⁹*Arkansas Gazette*, November 16, 17, 1961, B1, A1.

As Reid began to speak, Van Dalsem, a member of the committee, interrupted her and tried to prevent her from speaking on procedural grounds. When Glenn Walther, the chairman of the committee, overruled the objection, Van Dalsem stormed out of the meeting, refusing to entertain any of Reid's ideas about voter registration.³⁰ Attempts at enacting voter registration reform were generally frustrated in the 1963 session, largely due to Van Dalsem, and would not come to fruition until the passage of the constitutional amendment in 1964.³¹

The AAUW was more successful later in the legislative session when it opposed moves by Old Guard legislators to depose Winthrop Rockefeller as chairman of the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission (AIDC). As the first chairman of the AIDC, Rockefeller had been remarkably successful in bringing new businesses to Arkansas. Rockefeller's ties to the Republican Party, however, infuriated Old Guard legislators, who were all Democrats. By 1963 Rockefeller had served for two years as the Republican Party's national committeeman from Arkansas. More important, Rockefeller had begun personally financing Republican opposition to Democratic incumbent legislators, including Van Dalsem's opponent in the 1962 race for state representative from Perry County. The Perry County legislator had another reason to dislike Rockefeller. The newspaper in nearby Conway County, the *Morrilton Democrat*, was run by controversial editor Gene Wirges, who was a persistent critic of both Van Dalsem and his friend Marlin Hawkins, the sheriff and political boss of Conway County. Because of his criticism of Old Guard politicians, Wirges was constantly in financial and legal trouble, and much to Van Dalsem's and Hawkins's chagrin, Rockefeller provided Wirges with much needed support and encouragement.³² Thus Van Dalsem eagerly led the fight to oust Rockefeller from the AIDC leadership.

In late February Old Guard legislators announced that they were considering bills which would have abolished the AIDC and simultaneously

³⁰Ibid., February 15, 1963, B1.

³¹Ibid., March 12, 15, 1963, A4, A6.

³²Ibid., March 3, 1963, A1. For contrasting viewpoints on the confrontations in Conway County between Gene Wirges and Marlin Hawkins, see Gene Wirges, *Conflict of Interests: The Gene Wirges Story* (North Little Rock: Riverboat Publishers, 1992), and Marlin Hawkins with C. Fred Williams, *How I Stole Elections: The Autobiography of Sheriff Marlin Hawkins* (Morrilton, AR: n.p., 1991).

created a new AIDC, with Rockefeller no longer serving as chairman.³³ While Faubus supported the move to oust Rockefeller, he did not approve of a bill that would abolish the AIDC in the process, so Van Dalsem began leading a fight to introduce a bill that would have prevented any officer in the AIDC from simultaneously holding office in a political party. Rockefeller, of course, would have been the only person affected by the new law. To counter Van Dalsem, reform-minded legislators from Pulaski County introduced a resolution that would have praised Rockefeller's "outstanding service" in bringing new jobs to Arkansas and urged him to continue his efforts. On February 25 Van Dalsem took the floor of the House and unleashed a bitter, vitriolic attack on Rockefeller and his leadership in the Republican Party.³⁴ "Just who the hell does Mr. Rockefeller think he is that he can get you opposition and take credit for everything?" Van Dalsem asked his fellow legislators. "Rockefeller is meddling in Arkansas politics. The time is coming when you will have to choose between Rockefeller and Orval Faubus."³⁵

The AAUW had already made its choice. Women's groups joined in a "save Rockefeller" grassroots effort to convince the legislature to oppose Faubus and Van Dalsem and refuse to terminate Rockefeller as AIDC chairman. The AAUW released a statement praising Rockefeller's work and extending "a personal vote of confidence to Winthrop Rockefeller as chairman."³⁶ Other groups, including the chambers of commerce in Morrilton, Paris, and Russellville, soon joined the AAUW in pressuring legislators to drop the entire matter. Legislators from Jonesboro and Conway County announced that they would vote to retain Rockefeller as chairman of the AIDC.³⁷ Students at the University of Arkansas hanged Faubus and L. H. Autry and Walter M. Day, two of the anti-Rockefeller legislators, in effigy.³⁸ A newspaper in Tulsa invited Rockefeller to move to Oklahoma,

³³*Arkansas Gazette*, February, 20, 1963, A1.

³⁴*Ibid.*, February 23, 1963, A1.

³⁵*Ibid.*, Feb. 26, 1963, A1. See Cathy Kunzinger Urwin, *Agenda for Reform: Winthrop Rockefeller as Governor of Arkansas, 1967-71* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1991), 28; John Ward, *The Arkansas Rockefeller* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 6-8.

³⁶*Arkansas Gazette*, February 24, 1963, A1.

³⁷*Ibid.*, February 26, 1963, A2.

³⁸*Ibid.*, February 28, 1963, A1.

where it was promised that his efforts to spur industrial growth would be better appreciated.³⁹

State lawmakers began to fear a no-win roll call vote, where they had either to vote for Rockefeller, whom many of them personally disliked, or against the wishes of their constituents. After taking one parting shot at Rockefeller from the House floor, Van Dalsem finally agreed to drop his bill to terminate Rockefeller in exchange for the Pulaski County legislators' pledge to withdraw their resolution praising the AIDC chairman. For his part, Rockefeller announced that he was flattered at the support he had received from around the state. He also defended the Republican Party and argued that a two-party system would benefit Arkansas. "If we don't have it, we will spend the rest of our lives listening to the buffoonery of Mr. Van Dalsem," Rockefeller said.⁴⁰

After Van Dalsem backed down on his attempt to terminate Rockefeller, the AAUW continued to attempt to curb his power in the legislature. AAUW members lobbied Pulaski County legislators, urging them not to return Van Dalsem to the powerful Legislative Council. Despite the AAUW's efforts, Van Dalsem retained his Legislative Council seat when Pulaski County's legislative delegation narrowly agreed to uphold the "gentlemen's agreement" and elect one non-Pulaski legislator to the council. Thus Van Dalsem finished the 1963 legislative session mostly victorious. He had helped block the passage of a voter registration bill. He had prevented Young Turk legislators from passing a bill that would have allowed the state police to investigate gambling in Garland County.⁴¹ And though Rockefeller remained as chairman of the AIDC, Van Dalsem remained on the Legislative Council.

Not everyone was pleased with the results of the 1963 legislative session. In a speech before the Little Rock Kiwanis Club shortly after the session ended, Croxton, who was being touted by the *Arkansas Gazette* as a potential gubernatorial candidate, complained that the session had been "lousy" and had accomplished very little. Croxton singled out Van Dalsem for harsh criticism, saying that Van Dalsem showed nothing but contempt for the democratic process and claiming that he wanted Rockefeller removed from the AIDC so that agency could be used as a political tool for Governor

³⁹*Ibid.*, February 23, 1963, A1.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹*Ibid.*, February 19, 1963, A1.

Faubus. Croxton also decried cynicism among Arkansas voters, reporting that student groups he visited assumed that all legislators personally profited from corrupt activities.⁴² Later in the summer, Rep. Virgil J. Butler of Independence County, another reform-minded legislator, told a Lions Club audience in Little Rock that Arkansas needed a political housecleaning.⁴³

Van Dalsem did not take such direct and indirect criticism lying down. On August 1, Van Dalsem spoke to the Little Rock Junior Chamber of Commerce and told them he believed that the legislative session had in fact been productive and that Arkansas government overall was in good shape. He also complained that his image had been tarnished by the AAUW and by Little Rock newspapers.⁴⁴ Then on Tuesday, August 27, Van Dalsem spoke to the all-male Little Rock Optimist Club at the Albert Pike Hotel. In a speech that would become part of Arkansas's political folklore, Van Dalsem expressed his view that women should not participate in politics:

We don't have any of these university women in Perry County, but I'll tell you what we do up there when one of our women starts poking around in something she doesn't know anything about. We get her an extra milk cow. If that don't work, we give her a little more garden to tend to. And then if that's not enough, we get her pregnant and keep her barefoot.⁴⁵

Van Dalsem's statements appeared in the *Arkansas Gazette* the next day, and Van Dalsem faced immediate criticism. On Thursday Rep. Jim Brandon of Little Rock, a Young Turk legislator, declared that Van Dalsem must be suffering from "political senility" and that Van Dalsem had "dipped deeply into the pit of vulgarity and public disrespect for the institution of motherhood."⁴⁶

AAUW president Reid saw an opportunity to use Van Dalsem's statements against him. She recognized that Van Dalsem had embarrassed himself, and she knew that she needed to keep his "joke" in the media as long as possible to serve as a rallying point. She figured that if she could

⁴²Ibid., May 29, 1963, A3.

⁴³Ibid., August 6, 1963, A5.

⁴⁴Ibid., August 2, 1963, A2.

⁴⁵Ibid., August 28, 1963, B1.

⁴⁶Ibid., August 29, 1963, B1.

keep the story in the paper for nine days, it would stick in readers' minds. At Reid's insistence, Katherine Hamilton, a fellow AAUW member, appeared smiling on the front page of the *Gazette* with her arms around a cow. "All summer I've been trying to learn about the legislative process," she said, "but now I've found out I have to learn to milk a cow to please him."⁴⁷ Van Dalsem's "barefoot and pregnant" comment did indeed stay in the public eye for the next few days. The *Gazette*'s editorial page compared Van Dalsem to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in the way they both spoke in "barnyard homilies."⁴⁸ That Saturday evening a group of seventy-five mostly Perry County women appeared on the courthouse lawn in Perryville to protest Van Dalsem's remarks. Some of the picket signs read, "Veto Villain Van Dalsem's Vulgarity" and "Poor Paul's Power has Petered Out." They had with them a statement with 154 signatures which read that Van Dalsem's remarks were "offensive, tasteless and vulgar" and that Van Dalsem had "exposed himself as the boor that he is." One of the women declared that at the next legislative session, Perry County women would be lobbying alongside members of the AAUW. The AAUW sent the women a telegram: "We are proud of the women of Perry County. More power to you." Van Dalsem was invited to make a public apology to the women, but he declined.⁴⁹

Publicly Van Dalsem responded that his remarks were "nothing but a joke" and dismissed the demonstration of women in Perry County as a Republican plot. He also criticized the *Arkansas Gazette* for quoting only part of a longer speech.⁵⁰ Privately, however, Van Dalsem was furious that the *Gazette* had published his "barefoot" and "pregnant" remarks at all, and he held journalist Roy Reed, who had reported them, accountable for the bad publicity he received. Previously Van Dalsem had gotten along well with Reed and had even defended him when other lawmakers began complaining about the *Gazette*'s coverage of the legislature. After Reed left Arkansas to pursue a Nieman Fellowship at Harvard University, he happened to run into Van Dalsem in Boston. Van Dalsem flew into a tirade and accused Reed of being an "ingrate." Only years later, when Reed was working as a reporter

⁴⁷Reid, interview; *Arkansas Gazette*, August 30, 1963, A1.

⁴⁸*Arkansas Gazette*, August 31, 1963, A4.

⁴⁹Ibid., September 1, 1963, A1.

⁵⁰Ibid., September 2, 1963, A1.

for the *New York Times* in the 1970s, was Van Dalsem able to shake hands and speak cordially to him.⁵¹

Van Dalsem's joke was incredibly offensive to women for more than one reason. On its face, the comment was crude and boorish, and, indeed, showed a lack of class. Instead of attacking his political opponents' positions on the issues of the day, he attacked them because they were women. But women at the time also recognized that, beneath the obvious sexism on the surface, the remarks were more than a little sinister. Van Dalsem's claim that in Perry County women were kept barefoot and gotten pregnant suggested physical aggression and even forced sex. The fact that Van Dalsem later claimed that he was only joking was hardly a defense. The women in Perry County took Van Dalsem's comments seriously enough to carry signs at their protest meeting that read, "We've Been Pregnant—By Choice, Not by Force." Van Dalsem's remarks made him a pariah with the female voters whose support he would later seek in Pulaski County; and the remarks would haunt him for the rest of his political life.

In the short term Van Dalsem suffered few political consequences for his controversial remarks. Opposition groups did spring up in Perry County, including two calling themselves the "Better Government League" and the "Perry County Women in Politics," which began efforts to oust Van Dalsem from his place in the legislature in the 1964 election.⁵² Van Dalsem responded by attempting to make amends with women's groups: He tempered his remarks about the AAUW and the League of Women Voters in speeches he made before the House, and he began giving friendly talks to predominantly female groups like the Arkansas League for Nursing.⁵³ In spring 1964 Van Dalsem drew strong opposition in the Democratic primary when Len E. Blaylock, a principal and schoolteacher in Perry who would later serve as Gov. Winthrop Rockefeller's welfare director and run for governor in 1972 as a Republican, announced that he would run against the veteran legislator. Blaylock told the newspapers: "I am not an experienced politician, but I aim to replace one."⁵⁴ The election was heated, with the Perry County political reform groups supporting Blaylock, and Blaylock pointing out that after decades with Van Dalsem as its representative, Perry

⁵¹Roy Reed, interview by author, Little Rock, Arkansas, September 26, 1997.

⁵²*Arkansas Gazette*, October 9, November 6, 1963, B5, B1.

⁵³*Ibid.*, April 18, May 1, 1964, A1, A5.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, April 30, 1964, B1; *Perry County News*, April 30, 1964, 1.

County was last in the state in economic advancement. Shortly before the election, Blaylock sued the Perry County Democratic Central Committee members, who supported Van Dalsem, and forced them to allow Blaylock to name two of the officials who oversaw the absentee ballot box.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, Perry County voters were not prepared to turn out a longtime state representative who had brought state money and capital improvements to Perry County for years. Van Dalsem received twice as many votes as Blaylock in the Democratic primary in the summer of 1964, and he went on to defeat his Republican opposition, Billy Gipson, in November.⁵⁶ As long as Van Dalsem was accountable only to the voters of Perry County, he could make outrageous remarks to Little Rock men's clubs with political impunity.

At about the same time Van Dalsem made his famous speech to the Little Rock Optimist Club, the United States Supreme Court began issuing opinions that would establish the constitutional doctrine of "one person, one vote." Throughout most of American history, federal courts refused to enter the "political thicket" of reapportionment of state legislatures, and these legislatures were free to determine the size of legislative constituencies. By the early 1960s, the legislatures of many states, including that of Arkansas, were grossly malapportioned. Under the system of legislative apportionment in Arkansas before 1965, each of Arkansas's seventy-five counties elected one member to the one-hundred-member state House of Representatives, with twenty-five other seats apportioned among the more heavily populated counties.⁵⁷ The effect of this system was that in 1960, 35.7 per cent of Arkansas residents could elect a majority of fifty-one in the House of Representatives. Rep. John Paul Capps of White County, with 32,745 constituents, represented the largest number of people among members of the House. Each of Pulaski County's state representatives had about 22,000 constituents. Van Dalsem, however, represented only the 4,927 people of Perry County, which in 1964 was the smallest Arkansas county in terms of population. According the *Arkansas Gazette*, "a Perry County resident [drew] four times as much water in the House as a Pulaski County resident,

⁵⁵*Arkansas Gazette*, July 25, 1963, A1; *Perry County News*, July 23, 1964, 1.

⁵⁶*Arkansas Gazette*, July 30, 1964, B6; *Perry County News*, November 5, 1964, 2.

⁵⁷Donald T. Wells, "The Arkansas Legislature," in Alex B. Lacy, ed., *Power in American State Legislatures* (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1967), 15.

and 6½ times as much as a White County resident.”⁵⁸ Therefore, Van Dalsem was the most visible beneficiary of Arkansas’s unequal apportionment scheme.

In 1962, in a series of opinions beginning with *Baker v. Carr*⁵⁹ and reaching full strength with *Reynolds v. Sims*⁶⁰ and several companion opinions, the United States Supreme Court developed the principle that has been popularly known as “one person, one vote.” Under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Court decided, voters have a right to legislative representation apportioned according to population, and “one man’s vote . . . is to be worth as much as another’s.”⁶¹ While the right to an equally weighted vote is seen today as one of the basic rights of political participation guaranteed by the Constitution, in 1962 some voters and politicians in Arkansas saw *Baker v. Carr* and *Reynolds v. Sims* as examples of undesirable meddling with states’ rights by the federal government. Shortly after the Supreme Court in *Reynolds v. Sims* declared that state legislatures must be apportioned according to population, Governor Faubus described the decision as “haywire and cockeyed” and warned that it meant “lots of trouble” for Arkansas. “This ruling lends an awful lot of credence to the views of those extremists who want to impeach [United States Chief Justice Earl] Warren,” Faubus said.⁶² The Arkansas legislature was already considering a resolution recommending that Congress propose a constitutional amendment prohibiting federal courts from deciding state legislative apportionment cases.⁶³

Others, however, welcomed the potential effects of *Baker v. Carr* and *Reynolds v. Sims* on the Arkansas legislature and on one legislator in particular. The *Arkansas Gazette* approvingly predicted that “[t]he good thing [*Reynolds v. Sims*] now seems certain to achieve is the exile of Paul Van Dalsem.”⁶⁴ Soon after the opinion was handed down, John Yancey filed suit in Pulaski County Circuit Court, arguing that Arkansas’s apportionment

scheme should be declared unconstitutional. Yancey also announced that he would be a candidate for state senate: “I am taking this action on behalf of the citizens of Pulaski County and other urban areas who too long have suffered under the domination of the bombastic rural dictator Paul Van Dalsem and others like him.”⁶⁵

Federal courts did eventually strike down Arkansas’s scheme of legislative apportionment. In early 1965 a three-judge panel consisting of Judge Pat Mehaffy of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, Chief District Judge J. Smith Henley, and District Judge Gordon E. Young considered legislative apportionment in both the Senate and the House.⁶⁶ The court noted that while the ideal ratio was one state representative for every 17,860 people and one senator for every 51,028 people, the actual numbers varied sharply from this constitutional ideal.⁶⁷ After carefully reviewing *Reynolds v. Sims*, the panel declared the method of apportionment in Arkansas unconstitutional and ordered the Board of Apportionment to come up with new numbers by July 15.

The Board of Apportionment, which was composed of Governor Faubus, Attorney General Bruce Bennett, and Secretary of State Kelly Bryant, began its work beset by criticism from the legislature and the media. The *Arkansas Gazette* predicted that Faubus, as chairman of the Apportionment Board, would use the ability to redistrict legislative seats to benefit his allies in the legislature.⁶⁸ Some lawmakers believed that the legislature, not the Board of Apportionment, was the proper body for legislative redistricting.⁶⁹ That matter was settled in May 1965 when the Arkansas Supreme Court held that the Board of Apportionment was, indeed, the appropriate authority to implement the mandate of the federal courts.⁷⁰ Finally, in July the board revealed its scheme for a legislature apportioned according to population. Much of the work had been done by Faubus’s son, Farrell, who worked as a lawyer for Bruce Bennett in the Attorney General’s

⁵⁸*Arkansas Gazette*, June 19, 1964, A6.

⁵⁹*Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186 (1962).

⁶⁰*Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964).

⁶¹*Wesberry v. Sanders*, 376 U.S. 1, 8 (1964). See Laurence H. Tribe, *American Constitutional Law*, 2nd ed. (Mineola, NY: Foundation Press, 1988), 1062–1066.

⁶²*Arkansas Gazette*, June 16, 1964, A1.

⁶³Wells, “Arkansas Legislature,” 16.

⁶⁴*Arkansas Gazette*, June 19, 1964, A1.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, June 21, 1964, A1.

⁶⁶*Yancey v. Faubus*, 238 F. Supp. 290 (E.D. Ark. 1965).

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 297–299.

⁶⁸*Arkansas Gazette*, April 17, 1965, A4.

⁶⁹See Wells, “Arkansas Legislature,” 16–17.

⁷⁰*Faubus v. Kinney*, 239 Ark. 443, 389 S.W. 2d 887 (1965).

office.⁷¹ The *Gazette* expressed surprise that it did not appear that Faubus had tried to use his seat on the apportionment board to benefit his cronies.⁷² Though Faubus had voted for the new apportionment plan, he was clearly not pleased with being charged with the task of reapportionment. If anyone didn't like the plan, Faubus declared, "I suggest they cuss the United States Supreme Court."⁷³ The three-judge federal panel, and eventually the United States Supreme Court, upheld the board's new plan, writing that the board "undertook in good faith" to comply with *Reynolds v. Sims*.⁷⁴

The hallmark of the Board of Apportionment's redistricting scheme was multimember districts, single legislative districts that sent several representatives each to Little Rock.⁷⁵ While multimember districts have more recently come under attack as being unfair to racial and ethnic minorities, in 1965 the Board of Apportionment apparently saw them as an easy way of complying with *Reynolds v. Sims*'s one person, one vote requirement. One effect of the system of multimember districts was that one legislator might have to represent diverse communities with competing legislative interests, such as heavily rural and heavily urban areas. Nowhere was this more true than in District Twenty-two of the Arkansas House of Representatives, which would elect thirteen representatives and included Perry County, Arkansas's most rural county, and Pulaski County, the state's most urban. Van Dalsem's political base had been coupled with Arkansas's only true city, the home of the most progressive elements in the state. To retain a seat in the legislature, Van Dalsem would have to win votes in Little Rock.

One might expect that Van Dalsem would have been horrified by the necessity of appealing to Little Rock voters for political support. In fact, Van Dalsem had worked to ensure that Perry County would be placed in a legislative district with Pulaski County. While a less savvy politician might have seen *Reynolds v. Sims* as a stumbling block, Van Dalsem saw it as an opportunity: representing Little Rock would broaden the base of his

⁷¹Orval E. Faubus, *Down from the Hills II* (Little Rock: Democrat Printing & Lithographing, 1985), 367.

⁷²Wells, "The Arkansas Legislature," 17.

⁷³*Arkansas Gazette*, July 15, 1965, B1.

⁷⁴*Yancey v. Faubus*, 271 F. Supp. 998 (E.D. Ark. 1965), *aff'd*, *Crawford County Bar Ass'n v. Faubus*, 383 U.S. 271 (1966).

⁷⁵Arkansas Secretary of State, *Historical Report*, 1968, pp. 444-448.

constituency, which would further increase his power in the legislature.⁷⁶ In early 1965 Van Dalsem began proposing redistricting plans to the governor and other legislators which put Pulaski and Perry Counties in the same district. Rep. Glenn Walther of Pulaski County, another Faubus crony, floated a plan that would have put Perry County and Yell County in the same district, which would have meant that Van Dalsem would have had to run against Lloyd George, a popular young representative.⁷⁷ But Van Dalsem's relationship with Faubus paid off in July, as evidenced by the Board of Apportionment's final plan, which put Little Rock and Perry County in the same legislative district.

At first Van Dalsem was coy about the prospect of running for election in the newly reapportioned legislature. When asked about apportionment in March 1965, he replied that he did not want to discuss it and that, anyway, he probably would not run for reelection.⁷⁸ By December, however, Van Dalsem was hinting that he would run again and began asserting that his experience could benefit Pulaski County voters. "I might, I just might, offer myself down here next time," the Perry County legislator told a Little Rock reporter. "If you've got a good man, keep him in there long enough to do you some good, and if he's not any good, you can't talk to him, spend a little money and get him out of there."⁷⁹ Van Dalsem would emphasize this theme again and again in the 1966 campaign. Rather than eschew his notorious reputation as a legislative insider, he promised to bring it to the aid of Pulaski County:

What I'm trying to sell is that when I represented Perry County nobody ever said that I didn't represent those people. With my seniority, my membership on the Legislative Council, and experience, I could make Pulaski County a real good representative. I don't think they'd be taking a chance. All I want is one try. If I don't do any good, hell, boot me out.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Herbert C. Rule, interview by author, Little Rock, Arkansas, July 11, 1997; Reid interview.

⁷⁷*Arkansas Gazette*, March 14, 1965, A1.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, December 7, 1965, B1.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, March 16, 1966, A6.

On Saturday, April 16, 1966, Van Dalsem announced that he had decided to run for the House one more time, and that he would file for Position Thirteen, District Twenty-two. He promised that if Pulaski County voters would give him just two years as a state representative, he would not disappoint them. Though he attempted to brush aside the "barefoot and pregnant" comment as a "thirty-second joke in a thirty-minute speech," Van Dalsem frankly admitted that he was not sure how he would attract women's votes.⁸¹

In terms of substantive issues, Van Dalsem made a 180-degree turnaround. A longtime opponent of progressive new voter-registration laws, restructuring of county and local government, and constitutional revision, he began advocating some reform in all of those areas. Van Dalsem promised to push for a revenue bill that would have helped counties pay for the cost of new voting machines; he promised to sponsor a constitutional amendment that would have reduced the bloated size of county quorum courts; and he advocated a constitutional convention limited to consideration of certain issues like reform of county and local government.⁸² Van Dalsem's change of position was transparent to anyone at all familiar with his political track record. The Old Guard legislator was obviously modifying his philosophy to attract a new constituency.

Two days after Van Dalsem filed for a fourteenth term in the House, a second candidate filed for the same position. Herbert C. Rule was a twenty-eight-year-old lawyer with a prestigious Little Rock law firm, Rose, Meek, House, Barron, Nash, and Williamson. A Little Rock native, Rule attended law school at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville after graduating from Yale University and serving two years in the United States Marine Corps. Rule had become interested in politics during law school, where he mixed with notables like David Pryor, Farrell Faubus, and James Moody and William Overton, who eventually became federal judges in Little Rock. After returning to Little Rock to practice law, Rule served briefly on the Pulaski County Democratic Central Committee after a group of young progressives, including women involved with the WEC, successfully ran for positions in the party that had been held for years by allies of Orval Faubus.

⁸¹Ibid., April 17, 1966, A1.

⁸²Ibid., April 20, May 11, 1966, A14, A5.

In 1966, with the encouragement of Reid and others, Rule filed for the legislative seat sought by Van Dalsem.⁸³

When he announced his candidacy, Rule made clear that the major issue in the campaign would be Van Dalsem himself. "I didn't want to get into a race against a pushover or patsy," declared Rule, who predicted that his contest with Van Dalsem would be "one of the state's most spirited races for a seat in the General Assembly." The younger candidate attacked Van Dalsem's claim that Pulaski County would benefit from Van Dalsem's legislative skills: "We don't need a self-proclaimed parliamentary master whose main efforts have been to bury a colleague's bill before it has had a chance for debate. What we need as a state representative is not old-time wheeling and dealing, no matter how comic." Rule also ridiculed Van Dalsem's adoption of a progressive platform, calling the need for voting machines and smaller quorum courts "excessively obvious issues" and saying that "the problem is one of our entire county government structure."⁸⁴

Van Dalsem's campaign strategy was old-fashioned. Early in the campaign he visited civic, business, and political leaders, securing promises of support from many of them and expecting to coast to victory with their backing. He also courted union and African American leaders, hoping that they would likewise deliver him votes. Van Dalsem's appearances at political rallies were not always helpful to him. He faced hecklers and catcalls at some of his campaign stops and eventually began to shy away from some public appearances. Only late in the campaign, a few weeks before the late-July primary election, did Van Dalsem begin running a few newspaper advertisements.⁸⁵ Many of these advertisements were endorsements by people in the community whom Van Dalsem hoped other voters would respect. When Van Dalsem attempted to bridge his gender gap with female voters through such an ad, the scheme backfired. Three days before the election, Van Dalsem ran an ad in the *Arkansas Gazette* containing a letter supporting Van Dalsem with the names of nearly five hundred Pulaski and Perry County women below it. The morning the advertisement appeared in the newspaper, angry women began calling the *Gazette* claiming that they had not authorized their names to appear in Van Dalsem's ad. Van Dalsem could only respond that some of the women had

⁸³Rule, interview; Reid, interview.

⁸⁴*Arkansas Gazette*, April 22, 1966, A11.

⁸⁵*Arkansas Democrat*, July 24, 1966, A1; Rule, interview.

endorsed his advertisement and later denied it, attempting to embarrass him.⁸⁶

Rule worked hard at his race against Van Dalsem, which eventually became a full-time job. Beginning in bakeries at four-thirty in the morning, Rule attempted to visit every place of business in Pulaski County during the three-month campaign, including factories and plants, restaurants, grocery stores, liquor stores, and bars. Rule quickly learned to break the golden rule of political campaigns—never mention your opponent—because of the interest people took in him when he mentioned that he was running against Van Dalsem. If Rule worked hard, he also had plenty of help. State senator Jim Brandon of Little Rock served as Rule's chief campaign advisor, and Rule enlisted a group of Little Rock high school students to hand out campaign literature for him. But the core of Rule's support came from women. An organization made up of many former WEC members calling itself "Barefoot Women for Rule" gave coffees, erected yard signs, organized mailing lists, and attended political rallies. The sort of people that Van Dalsem had belittled and criticized for years became Rule's strongest supporters.⁸⁷

Two or three weeks before the election, without Rule's knowledge, high school students working in Rule's campaign conducted an informal poll, asking people on Main Street in downtown Little Rock whether they preferred Van Dalsem or Rule. The poll showed Rule beating Van Dalsem by two to one. Although the students did not tell Rule about the results of their poll, it accurately predicted the returns on election day: Rule captured roughly twenty-two thousand votes, while Van Dalsem got about twelve thousand.⁸⁸ Van Dalsem's gamble that he could win in Pulaski County had failed. A political novice had defeated the veteran legislator from Perry County. The *Arkansas Gazette* summarized Van Dalsem's loss: "Mr. Van Dalsem was overwhelmed in Pulaski, which, along with other urban areas, he fought so stubbornly in 26 years as Perry County's representative. . . . The Van Dalsem candidacy was based on political opportunism and his enlarged constituency recognized it for what it was."⁸⁹

⁸⁶*Arkansas Gazette*, July 24, 25, 1966, F:29, A2.

⁸⁷Rule, interview.

⁸⁸Ibid.; *Arkansas Gazette*, July 28, 1966, A1; *Arkansas Democrat*, July 28, 1966, A2.

⁸⁹*Arkansas Gazette*, July 30, 1966, A4.

In the general election in November, Rule went on to defeat Republican Marion Burton, a lawyer and friend of the newly elected Governor Rockefeller, who would serve as executive secretary in the new Republican administration, by a much narrower margin.⁹⁰ On the night of the general election, an excited Rule waited for the ballot box returns in the lobby of the Marion Hotel in Little Rock. As Rule was discussing the election with a supporter, Van Dalsem walked by, muttering, "Hell, anybody could win a seat in the legislature if he had all that Republican money behind him." "You're a damn liar," Rule responded to this accusation that he won with Republican backing. "What did you say?" asked Van Dalsem, swaggering and drawing back as if he were about to strike Rule. Suddenly, the fifty-nine-year-old Perry County man and the twenty-eight-year-old former Marine squared off, and a crowd began to form, ready to see this confrontation between new politics and old turn very physical. However, before blows were exchanged, Van Dalsem's friends restrained him and led him away from Rule. Defeated and angry, Van Dalsem drifted away.⁹¹

After his defeat in 1966, Van Dalsem carried on in many ways as if he continued to serve in the legislature. The rules of the House of Representatives at the time permitted former members to be on the floor of the House while it was in session, so on the day the 1967 session opened, Van Dalsem was back in Little Rock at the state capitol, on the floor of the House lining up support for bills he liked. "I'm taking a sixty-day vacation, and I'm spending it here [in Little Rock] while the legislature is in session," he explained.⁹² After the legislature adjourned each day, Van Dalsem continued to fraternize with lobbyists and legislators, drinking beer and playing poker late into the night. Van Dalsem even managed to mend some political fences. On the first day of the 1967 legislative session, Van Dalsem ran into Eleanor Reid and said hello. "Would you care for a little political advice, Paul?" Reid asked, savoring the moment. "I guess I need some," Van Dalsem replied sheepishly. Reid, suddenly feeling sorry for Van Dalsem, forgave him for the infamous barefoot-and-pregnant remark, and the two became friends. Eventually, some legislators began to complain about Van

⁹⁰*Arkansas Democrat*, January 8, 1967, A1; *Arkansas Gazette*, November 9, 1966, A2. Rule received 36,431 votes, while Burton received 31,133. Ibid.

⁹¹Rule, interview.

⁹²*Arkansas Democrat*, January 9, 1967, 2.

Dalsem's activities, and the legislators passed a rule that kept former members off the House floor. Once again, Van Dalsem was thrown out of the House of Representatives, this time by his former colleagues.⁹³

After the 1970 census, the Board of Apportionment reapportioned the legislature, and Perry County was put in House District Thirty, which included all of Perry and parts of Conway and Faulkner Counties. In 1972 Van Dalsem ran for the District Thirty seat against Arch Troxell, an incumbent legislator from Greenbrier in Faulkner County. The *Arkansas Gazette* described Troxell, a progressive, seventy-two-year-old representative, as "the oldest and gentlest man in the legislature."⁹⁴ During the campaign in the spring of 1972, Troxell claimed that the Board of Apportionment had carved out District Thirty to appease "the last vestige of the Old Guard" and intended to provide Van Dalsem with a seat he could win. The former Perry County legislator did indeed beat Troxell in the Democratic primary, though by less than two hundred votes. He went on to win in November.⁹⁵

Van Dalsem was back in the House of Representatives, but it was a very different House than the one he left in 1966. Court-ordered reapportionment had brought 52 new lawmakers to the 135-member legislature after the 1966 elections, with familiar Old Guard faces like J. H. Cottrell and Glenn Walther not returning.⁹⁶ More new members were elected in the 1968 and 1970 elections. The legislature was now full of younger legislators who were willing to follow the lead of Dale Bumpers, a progressive and popular governor. In the 1971 legislative session, the legislature had approved Bumpers's sweeping new tax program, which made Arkansas's tax structure more dependent on the income tax than it had been before. The legislature had also appropriated more money for higher education and had authorized an extensive reorganization of state government.⁹⁷ Van Dalsem would likely

⁹³*Arkansas Gazette*, January 15, 1967, A16; Rule, interview; Reid, interview.

⁹⁴*Arkansas Gazette*, October 22, 1972, E3.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, April 5, June 7, 1972, B1, A8. See Institute for Politics in Arkansas, *Arkansas Votes: 1972* (Conway: Hendrix College, 1972), 62.

⁹⁶*Arkansas Gazette*, January 8, 1967, A1.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, January 12, 13, 1975, A1, A1; See "Dale Leon Bumpers, 1971-1975." in Timothy P. Donovan, Willard B. Gatewood Jr., and Jeannie M. Whyne, eds., *The Governors of Arkansas: Essays in Political Biography*, 2nd ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 248-252.

have approved of none of these reforms had he been in the legislature when they were enacted.

The legislature's makeup was not the only thing that changed during Van Dalsem's six-year hiatus from elected office. When Van Dalsem returned to the legislature in 1972, he was friendly with women's groups and did not publicly attack them the way he had in the early 1960s. And, in the 1975 legislative session, Van Dalsem actually supported the federal Equal Rights Amendment and cosponsored a resolution proposing that the legislature ratify it.⁹⁸ While some have questioned the sincerity of Van Dalsem's conversion to feminism, Reid did not. In 1976, in a public statement from the AAUW, she wrote that Van Dalsem "offered to pass the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1975 legislative session and we believe that he could have done so had he not been frustrated by another committee member who held up the Amendment long enough for opposition to get organized."⁹⁹

Van Dalsem ran his last legislative race and suffered his last political defeat when he sought reelection in 1976. Larry Mahan, the young superintendent of the Vilonia school system in Faulkner County, used his own money to run a strong race against Van Dalsem. In a final burst of controversy, it was revealed that the president of the First National Bank of Conway in Faulkner County offered Mahan money to drop out of the race and allow Van Dalsem two more years in the House. Mahan refused and ran an aggressive campaign, calling the sixty-nine-year-old Perry County lawmaker a "laughing stock" and claiming that Van Dalsem had not been effective in the legislature since Governor Faubus left office. Mahan went on to defeat Van Dalsem by a wide margin.¹⁰⁰

After his last race Van Dalsem returned to Perryville and lived quietly. In April 1983, after several months of poor health, Van Dalsem died. He was buried near Aplin in Perry County.

⁹⁸*Arkansas Democrat*, January 15, 1973, A1.

⁹⁹*Arkansas Gazette*, February 6, 1976, B1. See also Reid, interview, 7. Diane D. Blair has questioned whether Van Dalsem truly supported the ERA: "Especially since Van Dalsem's senator, Guy ('Mutt') Jones, led the successful opposition to ERA ratification, there is reason to doubt his genuine conversion to feminism." Blair, *Arkansas Politics*, 300.

¹⁰⁰*Arkansas Gazette*, May 23, 27, 1976, A5, A4.

Historians and journalists have pointed to Van Dalsem's defeat in 1966 as evidence of the influence of court-ordered redistricting on the Arkansas legislature and evidence of the emergence of a new progressive political influence in Arkansas.¹⁰¹ Though these assessments are essentially correct—without redistricting, Van Dalsem would likely have been elected by Perry County voters for as long as he wanted—they overlook the fact that Van Dalsem himself saw redistricting as a political opportunity as much as an obstacle. Van Dalsem was placed in a multimember district with Pulaski County because he wanted to be; he thought he could win in Little Rock and extend his sphere of influence. Likewise, if Van Dalsem had wanted Perry County to be placed in a rural district, such as the one created after the 1970 census which included Perry County and parts of Conway and Faulkner Counties, it probably would have been. While Van Dalsem's defeat by Rule in 1966 was a sign of the times, it was also the sign of a political miscalculation by the Perry County politician.

Ironically, Van Dalsem's biggest political mistake—the 1963 remarks to the Little Rock Optimist Club—ensured him a kind of immortality outside of Arkansas as well as within. For many people Van Dalsem's phrase, "barefoot and pregnant," has become a catchphrase for the desire of some men to keep women out of public life.¹⁰² The National Organization for Women presents a Barefoot and Pregnant Award for advertising in the media it considers degrading to women.¹⁰³ In 1985 the Planned Parenthood organization in Sacramento Valley in California began selling posters that

¹⁰¹See David M. Tucker, *Arkansas: A People and Their Reputation* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1985), 101; Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 100; Yates, "Arkansas: Independent and Unpredictable," 241. Van Dalsem has even appeared in a biography of President Bill Clinton. See Martin Walker, *The President We Deserve: Bill Clinton, His Rise, Falls, and Comebacks* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1996), 44. Walker, a British journalist, mistakenly writes that the disparaging comment about women "ended Van Dalsem's political career."

¹⁰²This author has spent a great deal of time attempting to determine whether Van Dalsem invented the phrase barefoot and pregnant or whether he borrowed it. If he did not originate the phrase, he at least popularized it. Some sources credit Van Dalsem with coining barefoot and pregnant. See *Calgary (Alberta) Herald*, August 30, 1989, C1; *Los Angeles Times*, November 6, 1992, A1. No references were found to the phrase in print before 1963, when Van Dalsem spoke to the Little Rock Optimist Club.

¹⁰³Cheris Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, *Amazons, Bluestockings and Crones: A Feminist Dictionary* (New York: Pandora Press, 1992), 65.

illustrated Van Dalsem's remarks about women using a series of nine pictures that included a cow, a dead rabbit, and bare feet. The proceeds from the sales of the posters were used for family-planning activities.¹⁰⁴ Van Dalsem's phrase continues to resonate in Arkansas as well. In the early 1980s the Arkansas Women's Political Caucus took Van Dalsem's phrase and made it their own when they began presenting the Keep 'Em Barefoot and Pregnant Awards to politicians they believed hindered women's rights.¹⁰⁵ In 1989 the news director for a Little Rock television station remarked that one way to keep talented female news anchors from leaving Little Rock for larger markets was to "get them married and pregnant." After facing intense criticism for his remarks, the news director apologized and complained that "it was a 'Paul Van Dalsem comment' that will haunt me for the rest of my life."¹⁰⁶ And in 1990 the *Arkansas Gazette*, after citing Van Dalsem's 1963 remarks, noted that the Arkansas legislature, with ten female legislators in a 135-member General Assembly, was still a male-dominated institution.¹⁰⁷

Though Van Dalsem later regretted his comments of August 1963, they continued to be associated with him for far longer than the nine days Reid hoped to keep them in the newspapers. In the changing times of the 1960s, in a world of reapportioned legislatures and women's advocacy groups, it was perhaps Paul Van Dalsem, and not the American Association of University Women, who was ill-suited for public life.

¹⁰⁴*Calgary Herald*, August 30, 1989, C1; *Arkansas Gazette*, November 17, 1985, C6.

¹⁰⁵See *Arkansas Gazette*, April 3, 1985, A12, April 5, 1991, E1.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, November 3, 1989, B4.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, April 2, 1990, A1.