

WILSON'S RETURN TO LITTLE BIGHORN

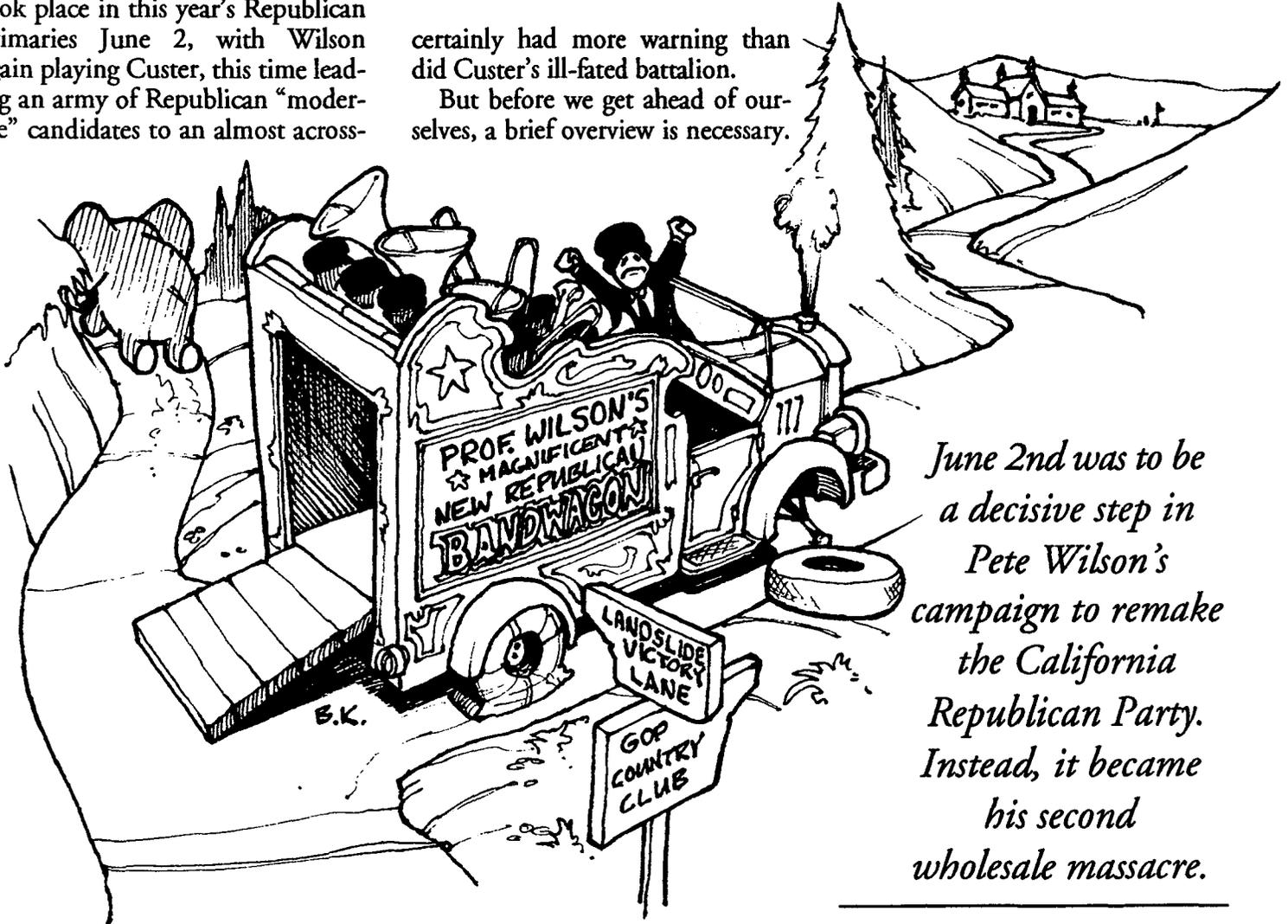
BATTLE FOR THE GOP SOUL

by Christopher Shelton

certainly had more warning than did Custer's ill-fated battalion.

But before we get ahead of ourselves, a brief overview is necessary.

GOVERNOR PETE WILSON as General George Custer heading for the Little Big Horn graced the cover of last summer's *California Political Review*, introducing an article on the 1991 tax and budget fiasco. (The governor had characterized himself that way in discussing the budget battle on national television.) Another wholesale massacre took place in this year's Republican primaries June 2, with Wilson again playing Custer, this time leading an army of Republican "moderate" candidates to an almost across-



June 2nd was to be a decisive step in Pete Wilson's campaign to remake the California Republican Party. Instead, it became his second wholesale massacre.

the-board defeat. Moved by presidential ambitions and the goading of staffers who see their mission as "remaking" the GOP, Wilson marched to the slaughter he *should* have known full well lay ahead. He

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Conservatives and Wilson have always had a tolerate-hate relationship. Sometimes in the past it has been kept under control. Always suspicious of the self-consciously "moderate" assemblyman (and later mayor) from San Diego, conservatives viewed his anti-Reagan hatch-

et job for Gerald Ford in the New Hampshire primary of 1976 as the last straw.

Politics being transitory, however, Wilson made amends in 1980. He "saw the light" and supported Reagan, even before it became evident that the nomination would be

his. Somehow, Reagan the terrible extremist of 1976 had become the statesman and nation's hope of 1980. Only the cynical think political opportunism had anything to do with it. At any rate, by the time Wilson became the Republican nominee for U.S. Senate in 1982 against Jerry Brown, conservatives voted for him without much hesitation. In 1986, Wilson breezed to re-election against Lieutenant Governor Leo McCarthy, and once again conservatives voted for him with little fuss.

As a senator, Wilson's voting record was good on defense matters (California did, after all, receive about 30 percent of every federal defense dollar) but weak on most other things important to traditional conservatives. Still, in Washington, Wilson avoided doing anything that would severely alienate conservatives in the California GOP. He even campaigned occasionally for conservative Republican nominees without suffering any apparent undue discomfort. As the 1990 gubernatorial election approached and Deukmejian unexpectedly announced his retirement, no groundswell of conservative opposition — and no viable conservative alternative candidate — stood in the way of a Wilson candidacy.

WHAT TIPPED the scales decisively in Wilson's favor for many conservatives was the choice that 1990, a reapportionment year, offered them: either another decade of gerrymandered legislative and congressional districts guaranteeing Democrat predominance (which

Feinstein's victory would have assured) or eight years of a potentially, but not necessarily, antagonistic Wilson in the governor's office. Conservatives calculated they could

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survive the worst Wilson *might* throw at them, if it came to that, far better than what they *knew* 10 more years of Willie Brown and David Roberti (or their cloned replacements down the line) would mean. Showing both sound political judgment and an admirable degree of political maturity in resisting the temptation to indulge old animosities, conservatives supported Wilson for governor. And it wasn't just a case of "hold your nose and vote for Pete." The conservative leadership of California went out of its way to keep the troops in line for him.

Looking back now, it appears that Wilson was making calculations of his own. He plainly thought conservative influence and power within the Republican Party and, thus, in state government, had become inflated out of all proportion with the support conservative positions actually commanded among rank and file GOP voters. He seems to have concluded that a strong, "moderate" Republican governor (himself), enjoying the devoted support of all those moder-

ate Republican voters he so confidently "knew" were out there, would be able to blow away these misguided Neanderthals, "rescuing" the party from them and making it a vehicle for his own vision of "rational," "pragmatic" Republicanism.

Danger signs surfaced almost immediately after Wilson was elected. His appointments to staff the upper levels of his administration in Sacramento were right out of the environmental extremist handbook. Conservatives had little input and even less impact on his appointments. Then, shortly after taking office, Wilson may have let his true feelings show in a moment of pique.

CONFRONTED IN a private meeting by conservative legislators upset at his constant bowing and scraping to the legislative Democrats on budget matters, Wilson huffed that "you conservatives are f***ing irrelevant." Later that year, he tried to prove that true, first by ramming huge tax increases through the Legislature against determined conservative opposition and then by engineering a successful coup against conservative Republican Assembly leader Ross Johnson, replacing him with "moderate" Assemblyman Bill Jones. Two skirmishes to none for Wilson, on the surface anyway. But the real test of whose political calculations were correct came this June, when Wilson returned to Little Big Horn.

In 1992, the Supreme Court's new legislative districts combined with the early effects of term limits

to create an unprecedented number of open, competitive Assembly districts. A broad range of conservative interests and groups saw this opportunity and started organizing early. The Wilsonites weren't doing much organizing, instead taking great comfort from the steady stream of news and opinion columns congratulating the Republican Party for having "changed" and "grown," moving out of the shadow of the "cavemen" who ran it during the '70s and '80s. (You know the type, the backward Neanderthals who led the GOP to three straight presidential landslide victories.)

SOMEWHAT BELATEDLY, the governor got busy recruiting Assembly candidates in his own image, working closely with what he presumably considered the Republican "mainstream" — in fact, the most liberal wing of the party (those members who find Danny Ortega more appealing than Jesse Helms and think Molly Yard is a "moderate"). While he was doing this, Wilson said publicly he had "no intention" of meddling in Republican primaries.

The governor was fibbing.

What emerged was a well-

orchestrated plan involving the governor and his allies in up to a dozen contested Republican Assembly primaries around the state. Toward the end of the campaign, Wilson dropped the mask, in some cases personally and openly intervening to help favored primary candidates. In other cases — in districts where he didn't want to put himself on the line — he arranged for friendly political committees to act in his place. He spent days on the telephone with major Republican donors attempting to steer contributions to his candidates.

The result of all this effort on June 2 was Wilson's second massacre. By *any* reckoning of the results, conservative candidates won 75 to 80 percent of the races contested head-on with the governor. From Bruce Herschensohn down to local county central committees, conservative candidates — obviously with some exceptions — trounced their "moderate" opposition. The Assembly primaries best illustrate the results of battle.

Conservative interest groups and volunteer organizations worked alongside a hardy band of conservative legislators to field candidates in 13 "open" Assembly districts (dis-

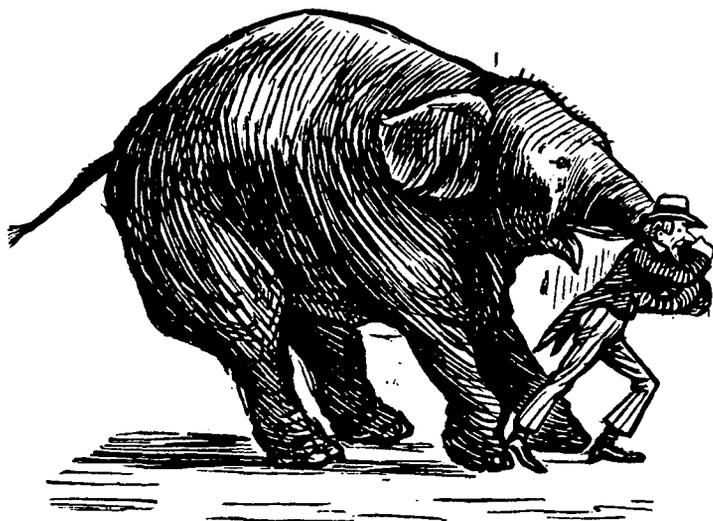
tricts likely to go Republican in the fall but without a GOP incumbent). In every case, Wilson was also involved, sometimes openly, sometimes with calls to direct money to the "non-conservative" candidate, and, in many

cases, through the Wilson-friendly political committees mentioned above. All 13 races involved a crystal-clear ideological dividing line. There could be little doubt in the voters' minds that they were given two distinct and different choices. And in 11 of these 13 races targeted by both sides, the voters chose the clearly conservative, clearly anti-tax candidate over an equally-clearly Wilson-style "moderate."

NOW, IN fairness it must be admitted that conservatives also challenged two incumbent Republican Assembly members — B. T. Collins and Tricia Hunter — who can only be described accurately as mindless Wilson automatons, and both incumbents won. In the Sacramento area, Assemblyman Collins defeated conservative Barbara Alby 51 to 49 percent. Collins — elected last summer with Wilson's direct intervention — this time stayed as far away from the governor as possible. Nowhere in Collins's literature was Wilson's name mentioned.

In fact, Collins, who opposed Proposition 13 and opposed the term limits in Proposition 140, campaigned as a "conservative tax fighter." He even managed to finagle the endorsement of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, which apparently doesn't hold it against a candidate that he actively opposed Howard Jarvis's most important political initiative. At any rate, after outspending Alby by about three-to-one, Collins eked out a 1,300-vote victory.

The other incumbent with serious conservative opposition was Tricia Hunter. Hunter turned in a performance even more lackluster than Collins's. Running against a



field of three little-known opponents, she managed to win while receiving only 45 percent of the vote.

These two races differed from the 13 discussed above in that the group of conservative legislators, not wanting to oppose their colleagues, did not participate. Also, not all conservative groups opposed Hunter and, in any case, incumbents enjoy all sorts of built-in advantages over challengers. But even adding these two incumbents to the tally of the liberals and the governor still leaves conservatives winning 11 of 15, instead of only 11 of 13. So Wilson prevailed, depending upon which races are counted, either 15 or 27 percent of the time — a disastrous showing, particularly for the governor of a party whose rank-and-file voters traditionally accord their elected leaders, especially chief executives, unshakeable loyalty.

But to read the papers in the days after the primary, you'd have thought that election day had been an unbroken stream of triumphs for Wilsonites and moderates of all stripes. This anti-math logic is accomplished by counting the races where the governor endorsed unopposed or lightly opposed incumbents and "consensus" candidates supported by all factions. The governor's folks can't really be blamed for trying to distort the election results. After all, when you go two for 13 or four for 15, you need to be imaginative with the results.

BUT THE media *can* be blamed for swallowing this pabulum. These are the same reporters and pundits, of course, who almost unanimously predicted a Tom Campbell defeat of Bruce Herschensohn in the Senate race. Combining wishful thinking and a lazy acceptance of con-

Thirteen Assembly Races

DISTRICT 3 — Conservative Bernie Richter defeated a large field. The governor actively directed money to *sixth* place finisher Steve Dilg.

DISTRICT 10 — Conservative Larry Bowler defeated a field of five. The candidate of the "non-conservatives," Tony Pescetti, finished *fourth*.

DISTRICT 25 — Conservative Barbara Keating-Edh defeated five other candidates. The CMA gave at least \$7,500 to second place finisher Bill Mattos.

DISTRICT 34 — Conservative Kathleen Honeycutt defeated a large field.

DISTRICT 37 — Wilson-endorsed Nao Takasugi defeated conservative Alan Guggenheim.

DISTRICT 44 — Conservative Bill Hoge defeated Wilson "must win" candidate Barbara Pieper.

DISTRICT 53 — Conservative Brad Parton de-

feated three other candidates. The choice of the organized "non-conservatives" was Dan Walker.

DISTRICT 66 — Conservative Ray Haynes easily finished first in a field of seven.

DISTRICT 68 — Conservative Curt Pringle defeated two other candidates. "Non-conservative" Rhonda McCune finished third.

DISTRICT 73 — Conservative Bill Morrow won and conservative Pat Bates finished a close second in this district.

DISTRICT 75 — Wilson "must-win" candidate Goldsmith defeated conservative Connie Youngkin.

DISTRICT 76 — Conservative Dick Daleke defeated Wilson "must win" choice Ronnie Delaney.

DISTRICT 77 — Conservative Steve Baldwin defeated Wilson "must-win" candidate Greg Cox.

ventional wisdom, press bias against all things conservative unmistakably showed itself again.

Several interesting side notes to the Assembly elections further illuminate the extent of the shellacking absorbed by the moderates. For instance, Wilson personally designated four Assembly races as "must win" contests for him. His candidates lost three of them. For three to four weeks before the primary, Wilson personally called members of "Team 100," the group of \$100,000 per year GOP donors established to help elect George Bush in 1988 — George's version of populism.

In at least one case I know of, the governor spent a full hour on the phone with one of these "Team 100" donors trying to get contributions. His pitch to these money folks was the critical importance of his four "must win" Assembly races — one in Pasadena, where Bill Hoge beat Wilson's candidate in the 44th Assembly district, and three in San Diego. The "must win" races in Wilson's home county went to Dick Daleke (76th

A.D.), Steve Baldwin (77th A.D.), both opposed by the governor, and Jan Goldsmith (75th A.D.), Wilson's sole "must win" victor.

THE CONSERVATIVE, anti-tax legislators sent out campaign mail in six districts specifically making the point that "we voted against last summer's tax increase, we stood up to the tax raisers and said 'no,' but there just aren't enough of us. Please vote for _____." All six of these candidates won, Hoge, Daleke, and Baldwin among them.

In the 67th Assembly District, many of these same legislators signed a letter for Doris Allen on the tax issue, attacking Tom Mays for supporting last summer's tax increases. Mays was the heavy favorite on election day, but Doris Allen won in one of the day's least expected upsets.

Altogether, conservatives won seven of seven contests where voting against Wilson's '91 tax increase was specifically an issue while Wilson candidates lost three

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An Obligation to Educate

Schools exist to teach. You'd never know it, though, looking at public education, a system run by-and-large for the sake of the people who run it. The kids are often the last people considered.

by William J. Bennett

WHEN I BECAME secretary of education, my wife, who is a teacher, said to me: you're a teacher. You're a professor. As secretary of education, you should go into classrooms and teach the kids. If people actually see you doing it, it will give you much more credibility to comment. And I said rather huffily to Elaine: I am secretary of education. I do not do retail. I do wholesale. And she, as a wise girl and daughter of a businessman, said: *do* retail and you'll do better wholesale. Find out what is going on in there.

So I went to schools. I was on the road every week and ended up visiting about 115 schools: third-grade classes, seventh-grade classes, eleventh-grade classes. I saw all sorts of schools. We tilted toward schools in poor communities, places where not much was supposed to be happening. Sometimes we went to average schools in those communities. Sometimes we went to miraculous places where people were turning things around, like Garfield High School in Los Angeles where Jaime Escalante was teaching. He's gone from Garfield now. This great teacher — the greatest teacher in America, maybe the greatest teacher in the world — is now in Sacramento because the unions couldn't deal with his methods. He had 75 students in his class and some of his colleagues said union rules say you

William J. Bennett served as U.S. Secretary of Education from 1985 until 1988. He delivered these remarks at a meeting of the American Forum in Los Angeles April 9.

can have only 22.3 students in your class. He said fine, you take some of them and teach them calculus. They said we don't know calculus. He said then get out of my way and let me teach. He was turning these kids out of the East L.A. barrio, sending them to UCLA and Southern Cal and MIT and Cal Tech in record numbers, getting not one cent more than anybody else, and actually getting a lot of heat from the system.

It is encouraging to go to a school like that, where kids who come in with almost nothing leave blessed by their schools, by their teachers, by their principals. They can read. They are interested and want to go on. When you see it actually happening, you are encouraged. You know it's possible. When people say you cannot educate these kids, you know they are wrong. It is being done in American schools, but it is not being done in most American schools.



IT IS *discouraging* to go then into schools with essentially the same kids, in the same kind of neighborhoods, and see lousy education going on — to see class after class of kids on their way out of school with a diploma — or without one — on their way into crime, drugs, teen-age pregnancy, and wasted lives. If you thought this was a matter of pre-determined reality, that if you were born a certain way or a certain color or a certain class that that's just the way it has to be, you might have a sort of stoic resignation about it. But when you see that