

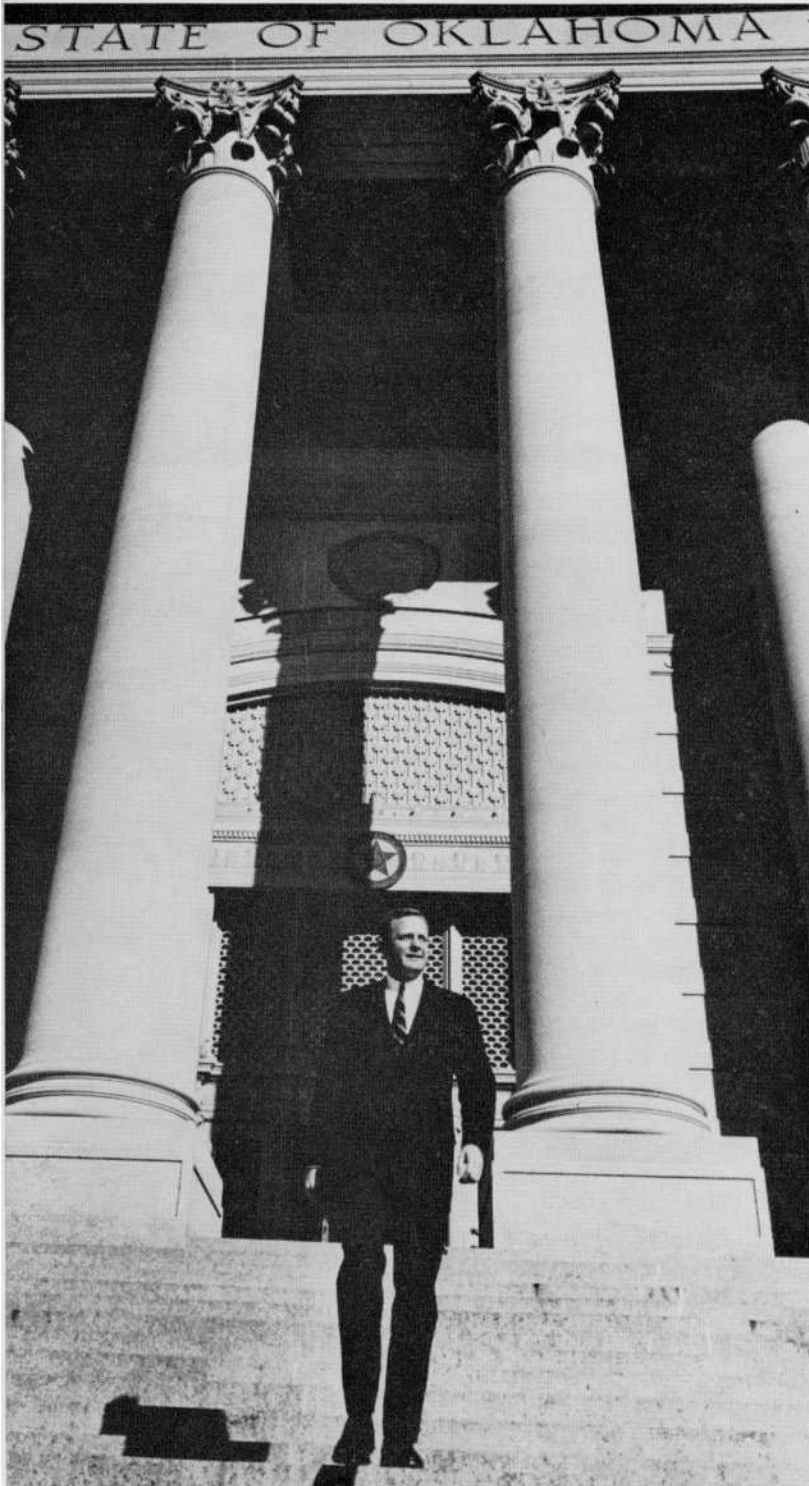
# A Rookie, an Old Pro, a New Season

With the inauguration of Dewey Bartlett as Oklahoma's 19th governor and the convening of the 31st Legislature in early January, a new season of state government is under way. The focal point, of course, is the Capitol in Oklahoma City, where the laws, budgets, and policies that will guide the state are decided upon. Prominent among the 99 members of the House, the 48 state senators, the administrative officers of the executive branch, and the eternally vigilant men of the Fourth Estate are many alumni of the University of Oklahoma. One is 32-year-old Ralph Thompson, '56ba, '61Law (below left), a freshman Republican representative from District 83 of Oklahoma City, which en-

*Mandell Matheson*

compasses The Village, Nichols Hills, and adjoining areas. Another is 64-year-old Otis Sullivant, Class of 1924 (below right), the dean the Southwest's political writers who has been reporting on state government for the Daily Oklahoman for the past four decades. Thompson is just beginning in public office; Sullivant is ending a long, widely acclaimed career as an observer, reporter, and interpreter of state government. From different generations and in different callings, the things they hold in common typify the men who perform the duties of government and those who inform the public of those performances: they are well educated, sincerely motivated, and refreshingly realistic.

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*A substantial amount of time must be allotted to the office and calls, correspondence, research, meetings with constituents.*



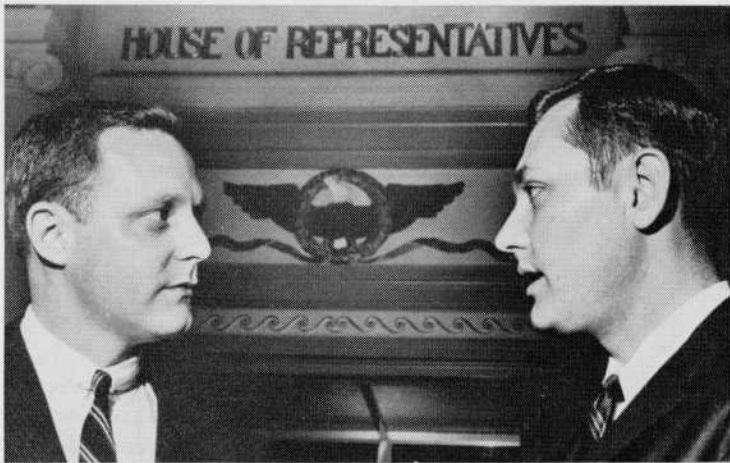
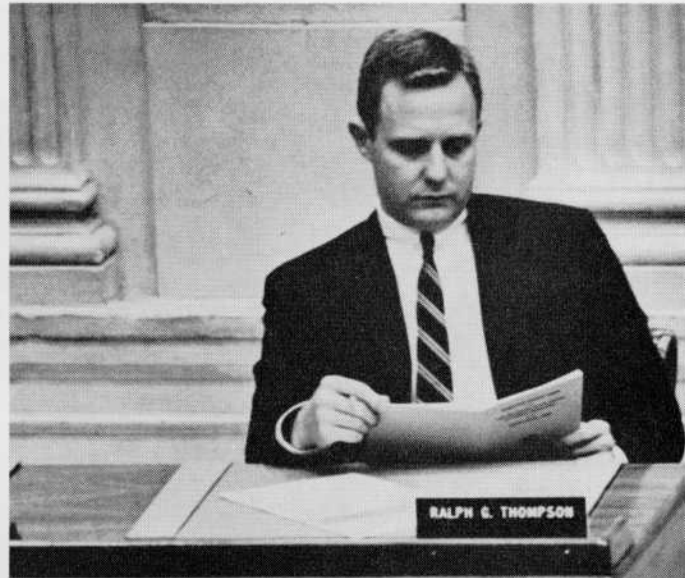
## Thompson's day at the Capitol is invariably full

*Photography by Mandell Matheson*

*Committee meetings generally consume much of each morning.*



I was pretty unfamiliar with the Capitol when the legislature opened, and it wasn't unusual for me to become, shall we say, 'confused' about my directions at first. I lived in constant fear that some student tour leader would ask me where something was and I wouldn't know," says the freshman representative of his first days. The legislature meets Monday through Thursday. The mornings are filled with meetings and appointments; the formal house session begins at 1 p.m. Says one exhausted member of the press corps: "There ought to be a law against it." Says Thompson: "You wonder where the hours go. A typical day may begin at 7:30 with, for example, a legislative breakfast with the Governor. Then come committee meetings—a public hearing on court reform in the Judiciary Committee, consideration of money bills in Appropriations and Budget, and, if there's time, a sandwich in the office as the page summons you for House roll call and you're off to the chambers. By the time the last bill is debated, amended, and voted on, it's nearly 4 o'clock and you proceed to a meeting of the Higher Education Committee to consider a bill relating to student loans. In the meantime the ladies of the PTA, who have been waiting patiently in your office for over an hour, have to leave to get dinner started. After telephone calls are returned, you head for your law office downtown and spend the remaining hours practicing law in the calm of the evening. Finally, when day is done, you sneak a look at your new baby daughter, promise your wife you'll eat a better lunch tomorrow, and fall asleep wondering how your first bill will fare when it reaches committee in the morning."



*Just before debate on congressional redistricting Thompson talks with Gov. Bartlett (top left). Before entering the chambers, he visits with friend and member of the opposition party, alumnus Jerry Sokolosky (bottom left). On the floor (below) a brief conversation is held with a colleague about the day's agenda before retiring to his desk (right above), unostentatiously located on the last row of the house.*





*Thompson is a member of a family with close ties to the University. His father, Lee B. Thompson ('27Law), an Oklahoma City attorney; his brother Lee Jr. ('53bus), an Enid insurance man, and his sister, Carolyn Zachritz ('59ba), are all graduates of OU. His mother, Elaine Bizzell Thompson, is the daughter of the University's fifth president, Dr. William Bennett Bizzell. Thompson's wife, the former Barbara Hencke, is also an OU graduate.*

## 'When I got tired, I remembered those 150 votes'

*In an interview Thompson talked about his new job.*

● I suppose it is natural to want to be directly involved in seeking solutions to public problems. This is particularly true at this time when there are such good possibilities for meaningful and progressive reforms. Judicial and penal improvements are being proposed currently. Problems such as those arising from the urbanization of our state, the need for better education, the problems and possibilities created by our vast technological advances, all the challenges today's government presents. I cannot imagine a more vital period in which to serve.

● The biggest difficulty is digesting enough information and developing sufficient understanding to form intelligent positions on bills relating to problems on which you have no background or personal exposure. You learn to study hard and go to the expert source. Time is always at your heels. You are impressed with the impact of 99 different personalities, from every point of the state, representing widely different problems and interests, concentrated into one group. You are disappointed at times by what you consider to be pettiness and obstinance on the part of some. You are impressed by the soundness, seriousness, and thoughtfulness of many more. In general, you are impressed by the fact that state government is a highly complex business and to understand it will require a great deal of knowledge and experience. The procedures are a bit fast and mysterious at first but you learn the ways of the arena in a hurry. You are on your own.

● Since a representative is geographically closer and more directly accountable to his constituents than any other legislative official, I feel that an obvious duty is to work at maintaining the closest personal contact with the people of my district. It is practically impossible, however, to

know the position of your constituents on many issues, so you have to realize that you were elected to exercise your best, informed judgment on their behalf. If your judgment is poor or your philosophy of government is at too great a variance with a majority of the voters, then the democratic process provides a remedy. And, there is more to the duties than simply voting right. You must be alert to any proposed measures which would particularly affect the interests of your area. For instance, with two separate municipalities in my district any legislation dealing with municipal governments, urban affairs, and the like is important to us. Also, with so many young families in my area, education and public safety are of paramount interest. Your responsibilities are many faceted. You spend much of your time staying informed.

● Campaigning and serving in office is certainly a family affair. Members of my family were involved in every phase in our effort, and, for most, it was a new experience. My wife Barbara and I worked together a great deal. When we were campaigning, she was so well received that at times I was tempted to disappear just to keep from undoing the good she did. Since the election the only real adjustment we have made as a family is simply to use time more efficiently.

● I ran for the House of Representatives prior to reapportionment and lost by 150 votes in the Republican primary. When I was campaigning and I got tired or confident of winning, I remembered those 150 votes. This revived me instantly, and I kept on working. An experienced and successful politician once told me that losing once is one of the best experiences a politician can have. I believe it. There is nothing like winning. It's the only way you can serve.

*END*