









**Charlie Wilson:
More Than A War**

WHO WAS CHARLIE WILSON?

Charlie Wilson's Life: A Short Timeline

	Born June 1, 1933	Charles Hazard's Reelection 1946
	Graduated Trinity High School 1951	 Charlie in the Navy, circa mid-1950s
	Graduated Naval Academy 1956	Gunnery Sergeant: U.S.S. John W. Weeks 1956
	Pentagon Naval Intelligence 1959	Texas House Representative 1961
	Married Jerri 1965	Texas Senator 1967
	U.S. Senator 1973	Divorced Jerri 1974
	Designation of Big Thicket May 27, 1974	Soviet Army Invades Afghanistan December 24, 1979
	Charlie's First Trip to Pakistan 1982	Stinger Missiles Introduced into Soviet-Afghanistan War 1986
	Soviet Army Leaves Afghanistan February 15, 1989	Veterans Affairs Clinic Opens in Lufkin, TX March 23, 1991
	Charlie Retires from Congress 1996	Marries Barbara Zavacky February 2, 1999
	Charlie Passes Away February 10, 2010	

Charles Wilson served as United States Representative for the Second Congressional District of Texas, which stretched from Nacogdoches to Beaumont, from 1973-1996. Today, many people only link Charlie to the Soviet-Afghanistan War because he appropriated American government funding to the Afghanistan Mujahedeen's (freedom fighters) fight against the Soviet Army in the 1980s. Charlie, however, had a much longer list of successes than this war, many of which greatly improved the lives of East Texans.

Charlie's connections to East Texas ran deep. He was born and raised in the small East Texas town of Trinity. After graduation from Trinity High School, he briefly attended Sam Houston State University before going to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland in 1952. While he worked as a weapons specialist at the Pentagon, Charlie ran for and won his home district's State Representative race in 1961. While representing East Texas as a State Representative from 1961 to 1966 and as a State Senator from 1966 to 1972, Charlie befriended Arthur Temple, Jr., the East Texas timber baron, moved to Lufkin, and managed the Big Tin Barn retail outlet for Temple Industries. In 1972, running on a platform of utility regulation and economic development for East Texas, he became the Second Congressional District's representative in Washington. In Washington, Charlie served on the House Defense and Foreign Affairs Appropriations Subcommittees, and used this position to assign monetary aid to his constituents and Cold War Warriors around the globe.

Charlie did much more than help fund the Soviet-Afghanistan War however. He tirelessly labored to improve the lives of his constituents and "underdogs" all over the world.

This exhibit is the product of a graduate Public History Collections Management course in connection with Stephen F. Austin State University's Charlie Wilson Oral History Project. Special thanks to SFASU's History Department, East Texas Research Center, Information Technology Services, and Dr. Jerry Williams and the Center for Applied Social Research. All images, unless noted otherwise, are courtesy of the East Texas Research Center's Charlie Wilson collection.

At the bottom of each exhibit panel is a phone number that visitors are encouraged to call to hear short segments of oral histories by Charlie's friends and family. Visitors can also make use of their mobile devices if they have a barcode scanner application to scan QR codes to learn more.

>>> To hear a 2:38-minute oral history clip of Ray Henson, Charlie's long-time friend, supporter, and neighbor, describing Charlie's early political activity following the killing of his dog Teddy, call 936-468-1822 and press 1 when prompted.



Charlie posing with gun in his D.C. office



Charlie and his cat posing in his D.C. office

WAR: BEYOND WEAPONS



1983 Map of Afghanistan.
Courtesy of the Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection,
The University of Texas at Austin

Most of what people know of Charlie Wilson and his role in the Soviet-Afghanistan War (1979-1989) is what they have learned from George Crile's book *Charlie Wilson's War*, first published in 2003 and the subsequent film version released in 2007 starring Tom Hanks. Charlie was instrumental in getting the Afghanis weapons, the most notable being the Stinger missile, necessary to shoot down lethal Soviet helicopters and to defeat the Soviets. All of his efforts to defeat the Soviet communists often overshadowed the compassion Charlie had for the Afghani people and the medical aid he helped supply the wounded.

From his very first visit to the Pakistan-Afghanistan region in the fall of 1982, Charlie formed an immediate affection for the Mujahedeen (Afghani freedom fighters), their courage, and their never-ending passion to defeat the Soviets at all costs. Charlie completely lost his heart to the Afghani when he visited the Red Cross hospital on the edge of Peshawar in Pakistan. He saw scores of young men laid out on cots. Charlie moved from bed to bed, listening to the fighters describe the carnage they had experienced. One young Afghani, who had stepped on a landmine, explained how proud he was of his sacrifice and regretted that his feet would not grow back "so that he could go kill Russians."



Taken April 1983, Charlie visited with this Afghani boy in the International Red Cross Hospital on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The boy received facial injuries from an exploding toy.

The Mujahedeen direly needed medical assistance beyond what was available to them in the region. So Charlie arranged for medical support and the creation of at least 33 medical clinics inside Afghanistan. Charlie tried to organize a group of retired field medics to go to Afghanistan, but Mujahedeen leaders rejected them because they were westerners. Instead, Afghani leaders trained in about six weeks how to set broken bones, insert a catheter for an internal wound, and identify the twelve most common diseases.

Along with help from the Cross Border Humanitarian Aid Program and the Agency of International Development, Charlie provided continued medical support and assistance to the injured Afghani men, women, and children in the war zone.

In May 1986, nine young Afghanis, ages 8 through 18, some of them rebel fighters against invading Soviet forces, arrived at the Houston Intercontinental Airport to receive medical treatment. Charlie Wilson was credited with initiating the arrival of the wounded Afghanis. All of the children had complicated injuries to their limbs and many had to have reconstructive surgery. They were taken to the Devereux Center in Victoria, where they recovered from physical and emotional damage from the violence and trauma they had endured.



Photograph taken in May 1986 of unidentified Afghans posing for a group picture. Two of the young children sitting on the bed are recovering from injuries; notice the crutches lying next to them on the bed.



Group photograph of unidentified Afghans taken in May 1986. Many of the small children in the photo are recovering from their injuries.



Use your mobile device to scan the QR code to the left or go to <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch?id=4556228n> to view a 60 Minutes interview with Charlie Wilson titled "Charlie Did It," which aired on CBS on October 30, 1988.

>>> To listen to a 2:38-minute clip of an interview with Charles Schnabel, Wilson's second Chief of Staff, discussing Charlie's role in getting medical aid to the Afghans, please call 936-468-1522 and press the number 2 when prompted.

GOOD TIME CHARLIE



Two Angels, including Peggy Phillips Love on the left, a caseworker for Charlie, outside of the mobile office in the 1980s.



Charlie was well-known for extravagant parties, like a 1920s-themed costume party in the 1990s (pictured above). Charlie stands in the back, right of center. To the right is a cartoon made celebrating Charlie's 60th birthday party in 1993 (this one signed to his friend Joe Christie). Note how the intention is to poke fun at Charlie's lifestyle on the one hand, and, on the other, as an inside joke with his friends, to laugh at the differences between the company Charlie kept in formal Washington social circles versus his everyday life and friends.



>>> To listen to a 1:45-minute clip of an interview with Sharon Allison, Charlie's sister, and his brother-in-law, Sam, discussing Charlie's "Good Time" reputation, call 936-468-1522 and press the number 3 when prompted.

Charlie's Angels

Charlie Wilson had a reputation for hiring the most beautiful women to work for him in his office. These ladies were known as "Charlie's Angels" (a name referencing the popular TV show [1976-1981] featuring the beautiful actresses Kate Jackson, Farrah Fawcett, and Jaclyn Smith). The women disliked the name at first, but they have since come to cherish it. Surrounding himself with women at the office certainly enhanced Charlie's "Good Time" playboy image. But the label of "Charlie's Angels" is a bit of a misnomer. The women he hired knew how to do their jobs and they did them very well. These were skilled and talented employees. Moreover, Wilson gave each "Angel" a job precisely because he was so devoted to women's rights and helping advance the careers of talented women like the Angels, helping to break the glass ceiling in Washington, D.C. along the way.

"Good Time Charlie"

Charlie Wilson enjoyed the image as a playboy in Washington. His apartment had mirrors from floor to ceiling and a hot tub in his bedroom. He usually brought beautiful women on "junkets" (government trips to foreign countries) with him, including a trip to Egypt with a belly-dancer, and a trip to Morocco with a former Ms. World contestant. He even beat a special congressional investigation over alleged cocaine use. Unfortunately, Charlie's lifestyle cost him. He inherited congenital heart disease from his father. This combined with his heavy drinking habits almost killed him in 1985 and later led to a heart transplant in 2007.



Charlie with belly dancers at a party.

Good Time Charlie and Politics

Some of Charlie's closest friends and family believe that he often perpetuated the party-animal image so that other members of Congress might overlook him. Whatever the case, Wilson did enjoy the Good Time Charlie lifestyle, to be sure, but he also did his job very well. The "Good Time" image certainly led others to underestimate him as he accomplished many of his political goals. The Good Time image, however, may have cost him from serving in higher positions in government, such as Defense Secretary or the Senate, though Charlie never said he desired such offices. Be that as it may, Charlie so effectively served his constituency that, in connection with his honesty about it all, even the noted conservative district of East Texas forgave Good Time Charlie for many of

Use your mobile device to scan the QR code to the right to watch an interview with "Good Time Charlie" in a 1982 interview; or visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fnLzW3-yELA>.



CHARLIE WILSON AND THE HOMEFOLK



Charlie Wilson's Mobile Office in the early 1980s

His friends, employees, and family members all described Charlie as a rare politician who genuinely cared about East Texans. The legislation he supported demonstrates his unmistakable devotion to the people of East Texas and his extraordinary efforts to assist individual East Texans. Covering thirteen counties over an area larger than some states, Charlie reached many of his constituents through the use of his "mobile office" (a Recreational Vehicle). Before arriving in any East Texas town, Charlie's office ran an ad in the local newspaper telling constituents when and where his mobile office would be. Constituents who usually would not have been able to speak to Charlie in person lined up to tell their Congressman face-to-face about the issues that affected them the most.

Social Security and Medicare

Charlie believed in helping the "underdog," people who were victims of social or political injustice. This belief unquestionably guided Charlie's political career and personal life as he constantly supported legislation that worked to reform Social Security and Medicare programs. But Charlie went even further for his constituency than merely supporting legislation. He charged his regional staff to actually go out into East Texas and help his constituency in person. Numerous stories of how Charlie, or "Charlie's Angels," helped individual East Texans to get their Social Security or Medicare benefits attest to Charlie's commitment to the "home folk."

Equal and Civil Rights Advocacy

Charlie's fervor to help the underdog also propelled him to advocate civil rights legislation. Not only did Charlie champion civil rights, he also hired minorities, even participating in "Juneteenth" festivities that celebrated the 1865 end of slavery in Texas throughout his career. These celebrations and other personal meetings with African Americans throughout his district gave Charlie a chance to reach out to African-American communities, which also extended his league of loyal voters.

Charlie also feverishly advocated women's rights and hired legions of qualified women that assisted in "taking care of the home folk." "Charlie's Angels" were on the front lines of East Texas and were charged with the task of helping East Texans any way they could.

>>> To listen to a 2:05-minute clip of an interview with Charles Simpson, Wilson's first Chief of Staff, discussing Charlie and his staff's role in taking care of the home folk, please call 936-468-1522 and press the number 4 when prompted.

Charlie Wilson and the Home Folk

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Charlie Wilson with some of his older constituents in the early 1990s.



Charlie Wilson discussing problems with his constituents at a Juneteenth Festival in Crockett, 1992.



Charlie Wilson's staffers, also known as Charlie's Angels, in the mid-1980s.

CHARLIE WILSON AND THE VA



Charlie Wilson in the Navy, circa mid 1950s

Charlie's Military Record

On July 5, 2005, the VA (Veterans Affairs) Outpatient Clinic of Lufkin was renamed in honor of Charlie Wilson. Charlie, who had devoted much of his life to aiding military veterans, felt particularly proud of the honor. Charlie's dedication to American military veterans developed from his own years of service in the Navy. His military career began after his graduation from the prestigious Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1956 as a gunnery officer. After briefly working for the Pentagon as a weapon's specialist, Charlie entered the race for Texas State Representative in 1961 and won at the young age of 27. From the capital halls of Texas or Washington, D.C., Charlie never stopped trying to help America's service people.

About the VA

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers a wide range of benefits and services to American military veterans, including aiding veterans' access to healthcare services, programs to eliminate homelessness, help receiving GI Bill benefits, and providing veterans with mental health services. More than 1,400 VA health clinics throughout the United States collectively provide health services to over 8.3 million American veterans.



The Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic
Photo courtesy of the US Department of Veterans Affairs

Charlie's Role in Lufkin VA Clinic



Charlie Wilson cutting the ribbon at the VA Clinic.

Charlie's affection for military veterans prompted him to masterfully reassign a VA clinic appropriation away from Tyler, TX. When a bill to create a VA clinic in Tyler appeared in Congress in the early 1990s, Charlie had no problem crossing out Tyler's name and substituting Lufkin, which he called "a suburb of Tyler." Charlie figured out that veterans in Tyler had more immediate and convenient access to the Dallas VA system only an hour-and-a-half or so away while veterans living in Lufkin and East Texas had to travel two to three hours to get to Houston. The Charles Wilson VA Outpatient Clinic now stands in a new facility on West Frank Avenue in Lufkin and treats almost 50,000 patients each year. A 10-foot-tall statue of Charlie welcomes America's veterans at the clinic's main entrance.

>>> To listen to a 1:30-minute clip of an interview with Peyton Walters, Wilson's third and last Chief of Staff, discussing Charlie's role in getting the VA Clinic in Lufkin, please call 936-468-1522 and press the number 5 when prompted.



Statue of Charlie Wilson outside of the VA Clinic, 2010.

PRESERVING TEXAS



Charlie Wilson attends Big Thicket Day to commemorate the establishment of the Big Thicket National Preserve in 1974

Charlie's Conservation Record

Despite Charlie's close ties with the timber industry throughout East Texas, he also believed in the conservation of natural resources for the benefit of his constituents. Charlie once said that through environmental protection he was "going to take care of his rednecks." Throughout his time in Congress, he helped create one of the first National Preserves despite opposition from the timber industry. Throughout the 1960s numerous bills requesting the establishment of the Big Thicket National Preserve in Kountze, near Beaumont, were presented by members of the U.S. Senate and House. These bills all requested several hundred thousand acres of land, and despite National Park Service support, the bills could never pass both houses of congress.

Enter Charlie Wilson

When Charlie Wilson entered the U.S. Congress in 1973, he sought compromise and wasted no time introducing a bill that would dedicate a more acceptable (to lumber interests) 75,000 acres for the creation of the Big Thicket National Preserve. The following year, on October 11, 1974, President Gerald Ford signed the Big Thicket National Preserve Bill into law. This bill included 84,550 acres of land, more than Wilson's original request.

This bill still omitted an important part of the Big Thicket ecosystem known as the Village Creek Sandylands. Property owners along Village Creek opposed this acquisition and believed it violated their property rights. Nevertheless, Wilson's close friends, lumber barons, and East Texas philanthropists, the Temple family, donated 2,300 acres to the Nature Conservancy for preservation as the Roy E. Larsen Sandylands Sanctuary. 1,090 more acres of the Village Creek Sandylands became Village Creek State Park.

Wilson continued to push for larger additions to the Big Thicket National Preserve. In 1993, his Big Thicket Addition Act passed congress and added over 10,000 acres to the preserve.

Wilson is also responsible for five wilderness areas in Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Angelina, and Sabine National Forests, which put him in direct opposition with his timber industry friends and colleagues. Wilson originally supported the construction of the Rockland Reservoir on the Neches River, but switched his stance following opposition from constituents and environmentalists and saved over 100,000 acres from inundation.



Canoeing Village Creek



Wilson speaks about the new wilderness area at the Davy Crockett National Forest

>>> To listen to a 1:18-minute clip of an interview with Bill Marshall, one of Wilson's early staff members, discussing the significance of the Big Thicket, please call 936-468-1522 and press the number 6 when prompted.

CHARLIE'S LEGACY



Wilson with his wife Barbara during his last days in office.

Charlie retired from Congress in 1996 after twenty-two years of service. He retired because of his declining health and because of the changing political landscape of the United States. In 1994, the Republican Party gained strength all across the nation with Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich as the figurehead. Wilson worked for a while as a lobbyist before returning to Lufkin with his wife Barbara. Wilson's Good Time Charlie days finally caught up to him and he underwent a heart transplant in 2007. This new heart did not function properly and, on February 10, 2010, Charlie died in Lufkin at the age of seventy-seven. Charlie left many substantial legacies for East Texans and the world, including the Soviet-Afghanistan War, the Big Thicket, and his renowned ability to take care of the home folk.

Perhaps the Afghanistan War is Charlie's most widely known legacy today. He doggedly pursued a vast amount of money to get the Mujahedeen whatever they needed to beat the Soviets, from mules to antelopes, weapons, and medical supplies. With Charlie's aid, the Mujahedeen forced the Soviet Army out of Afghanistan by early 1989. Unfortunately, Charlie could not convince Congress to provide further aid to Afghanistan to help build schools, hospitals, and other valuable services following the war. A mistake that he and many others have said cost the United States ever since.

The Big Thicket became one of the first land preserves in the United States. Charlie's efforts and ability to work with other members of Congress got the bill passed. Before Wilson, Senator Ralph Yarborough from Texas fought hard to establish the preserve, but could not succeed because of his unwillingness to compromise, particularly over acreage. Charlie managed to get the Big Thicket established with more than 80,000 acres of land. The fact that Charlie got the preserve established in his first term in Congress demonstrated his ability to garner the necessary votes to get things for his constituents and his home state.

Any mention of Charlie Wilson's legacy must include his incredible ability to take care of the home folk of East Texas. Wilson cared for his constituents deeply, and he went to any length to fulfill their needs. Wilson and his staff made sure elderly citizens received their Social Security benefits and gave the people of Lufkin a Veterans Affairs Clinic. Charlie's ability to help his constituents got him elected year after year, and as some have put it, "there was not a better-served constituency in all of the House of Representatives."

Charlie Wilson was more than a war in many ways. Charlie was a fighter. He fought not just for the people of Afghanistan, but also for his constituents in East Texas. He provided the people of his district with any assistance, be it addressing personal letters or helping elderly citizens get their benefits. Charlie did it all. Charlie's personality, charisma, and his passionate fight for the underdog won him the respect and love of all the people he met and worked with.

Research, text, and exhibit design and production for "Charlie Wilson: More than a War" by Kendall Gay, Michael Haven, Misty Hurley, Jake McAdams, Mark Musquiz, Joyce Pitts, Paul J. P. Sandul, Samuel Tadlock, and Pamela Temple (Charlie Wilson Oral History Project, Stephen F. Austin State University, May 2012).

>>> To listen to a 2:08-minute clip of an interview with Charles Schnabel, Charlie's second Chief of Staff, discussing how well Charlie took care of his constituency, please call 936-468-1522 and press the number 7 when prompted.



Tom Hanks played Charlie Wilson in the 2007 movie *Charlie Wilson's War*, which was based on the book by George Crile, forever immortalizing the Congressman's role in the Soviet-Afghanistan War, and his reputation as Good Time Charlie.

Use your mobile device to scan the barcode to the left to view the video "Charlie Wilson Remembered in Texas Memorial"; or visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-6PirAGH0>.

