The crisis of the campaign came when George L. Record, Progressive leader in the ranks of the Republican party in Hudson County, uttered a ringing challenge to the Democratic candidate to debate the issues of the campaign with him. The challenge contained an alternative proposition that the Democratic candidate either meet Mr. Record in joint debate in various parts of the state or that he answer certain questions with reference to the control of the Democratic party by what Mr. Record called the "Old Guard." Mr. Record's letter and challenge created a profound sensation throughout the state and brought hope and comfort to the ranks of the Republican party.

Record emphasized the Old Guard's control of the convention at which Wilson was nominated, basing most of his questions upon this character of political control, and openly challenging Wilson, the Democratic candidate, to say whether the elements that were dominant at Trenton in the Convention would be permitted by him, in case of his election, to influence his action as governor.

For several days after the letter containing the challenge reached the Democratic candidate, there was a great deal of apprehension in the ranks of the Democratic party lest the candidate should decide to ignore the Record challenge, thus giving aid and comfort to the enemies of progressivism in the state, or, on the other hand, that he would accept it and thus give Mr. Record, who was a most resourceful public speaker and a leading exponent of liberalism in the state, a chance to outwit him in public debate. The latter practically demanded of the Democratic candidate that he repudiate not only the Old Guard but the active management of his campaign which had been taken over by James R. Nugent, one of the leaders of Essex County, who daily accompanied the Democratic candidate on his tour of the state. For a time it looked as if Doctor Wilson would ignore entirely the Record challenge. It was plainly evident from all sides that what appeared to be his reluctance to take a stand in the matter had turned support away at a time when the sentiment of the state was rapidly flowing his way.

I accompanied the candidate on an automobile tour of the state and in our little talks I sought to find out, in a diplomatic way, just how his mind was running on the Record challenge and how he intended to meet it. In the automobile with us on this tour was James R. Nugent, then the state chairman of the Democratic
Committee. I ascertained that even he knew nothing about the Princetonian's attitude toward the Record challenge. A significant remark which the candidate dropped "between meetings" gave me the first intimation that the Democratic candidate was, to use a baseball expression, "on to the Record curve" and that he would answer him in so emphatic and overwhelming a fashion that the Republican campaign would never entirely recover from the blow.

One day while we were . . . discussing the Record challenge, Mr. Wilson pointed his finger at Jim Nugent and said, very significantly: "I intend to reply to Mr. Record, but I am sure that it will hurt the feelings of this fine fellow."

A few days later, without consulting any one, Mr. Wilson replied to Record's challenge. It was a definite, clean-cut, unequivocal repudiation of the Old Guard's control of the Democratic party, and a convincing answer to every question that had been put to him. It rang true. Old-line Republicans, after reading this conclusive reply, shook their heads and said, regretfully, "Damn Record; the campaign's over."

It was plainly evident that the crisis of the campaign had been safely passed and that Mr. Wilson was on his way to the governorship.

In his challenge Mr. Record had addressed to Doctor Wilson nineteen questions. Mr. Wilson's reply was in part as follows: "You wish to know what my relations would be with the Democrats whose power and influence you fear should I be elected governor, particularly in such important matters as appointments and the signing of bills, and I am very glad to tell you. If elected I shall not either in the matter of appointments to office, or assent to legislation, or in shaping any part of the policy of my administration, submit to the dictation of any person, or persons, 'special interests,' or organizations. I will always welcome advice and suggestions from any citizens, whether boss, leader, organization man, or plain citizen, and I shall confidently seek the advice of influential and disinterested men representative of the communities and disconnected from political organizations entirely; but all suggestions and all advice will be considered on its merits and no additional weight will be given to any man's advice because of his exercising, or supposing that he exercises, some sort of political influence or control. I should deem myself for ever disgraced should I, in even the slightest degree, cooperate in any such system. I regard myself as pledged to the regeneration of the Democratic party."

Mr. Record also inquired: "Do you admit that the boss system exists as I have described it? If so, how do you propose to abolish it?"

Mr. Wilson said: "Of course I admit it. Its existence is notorious. I have made it my business for many years to observe and understand that system, and I hate it as thoroughly as I understand it. You are quite right in saying that the system is bipartisan; that it constitutes 'the most dangerous condition in the public life of
our state and nation today'; and that it has virtually, for the time being, 'destroyed representative government and in its place set up a government of privilege.' I would propose to abolish it by the reforms suggested in the Democratic platform, by the election to office of men who will refuse to submit to it, and who will lend all their energies to break it up, and by pitiless publicity. . . . "

In reply to Mr. Record's question: "Will you join me in denouncing the Democratic 'overlords' as parties to a political boss system?" Doctor Wilson replied: "Certainly I will join you in denouncing them--or any one of either party who attempts any outrages against the Government and public morality."

At this time I was in close touch with the managers of the Wilson campaign, including Smith, Nugent, and Davis. While they admired the fine strategy that lay back of the Democratic candidate's reply to Mr. Record, they looked upon it as a mere gesture upon the part of Mr. Wilson and scorned to believe that his reply to Mr. Record constituted a challenge to their leadership. They did not show any evidences of dismay or chagrin at the courageous attitude taken by Doctor Wilson. They simply smiled and shrugged their shoulders and said: "This is a great campaign play."

Source: Joseph Tumulty, *Woodrow Wilson as I Know Him* (Boston, 1921), chapter 7; available online courtesy of Project Gutenberg, [http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/8124](http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/8124).