

Harold Paulk (Hal) Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH ARN 04 Gray
James H. Gray, Sr., Interviewed by Harold Paulk (Hal) Henderson
Date: May 14, 1981
Cassette: OH ARN 04, 0:26:30 minutes, Side One Only

[Cassette: Side 1]

HENDERSON: Mr. Gray, I would like to ask you first of all when did you decide to enter the race?

GRAY: I decided to enter the race after, well, let me preface that by saying that former Governor [Samuel Ernest] Vandiver [Jr.] was going to run.

HENDERSON: Right.

GRAY: And he had a heart condition. And at the last minute the general party establishment, the Vandiver group, more or less searched around for a substitute candidate. I was functioning as [Democratic] Party chairman at the time, chairman of the party. And they asked me to run...

HENDERSON: I see.

GRAY: ...on the Vandiver ticket and as a substitute for him. It was very late in the game, and it posed a lot of problems, for me, because I was well known in southern part of the state, but nothing above the Macon line. And, of course, Georgia is a tremendously big state...

HENDERSON: Yes.

GRAY: ...and naturally I didn't have time enough to--in my opinion--to run the kind of campaign that it would take to win.

HENDERSON: May I continue with that line of questioning?

GRAY: Uh-huh.

HENDERSON: Did either Mr. [Herman Eugene] Talmadge or Mr. Vandiver personally approach you as far as entering the campaign?

GRAY: Yes, they did, on the basis that they felt that it would preserve the party structure.

HENDERSON: I see. Is it fair to say then that you were running as a candidate of the Talmadge organization or at least with their tacit support?

GRAY: With their tacit support.

HENDERSON: Right.

GRAY: Yes. In other words, let me say that the senator [Herman Eugene Talmadge] was my friend, and he was interested in preserving the party structure. That doesn't mean that the entire Talmadge organization was brought in on my side, because it was so late in the game--

HENDERSON: Right.

GRAY: --that commitments had been made in other directions or maybe no commitments had been made. And naturally, I wasn't that widely known, particularly in the northern part of the state, to gather all the Talmadge support.

HENDERSON: Now, if I remember correctly, Mr. [James Philander] Phil Campbell [Jr.] was approached by Mr. Vandiver, I believe, on May the nineteenth, which was the day after Mr. Vandiver withdrew from the campaign. Does that mean that you were not the first candidate that was approached to run with the support of the Talmadge organization?

GRAY: I have no knowledge of that.

HENDERSON: I see. I assume, then, that if Mr. Vandiver had stayed in the election, in the campaign—

GRAY: I would have supported him.

HENDERSON: You would have supported him.

GRAY: Oh yes, very definitely.

HENDERSON: Even against Mr. [Howard Hollis (Bo)] Callaway, who had the Republican nomination?

GRAY: Oh yes, very definitely. I was a Vandiver man; I had been his chairman. We had gone to the [Democratic] National Convention together in '60, and we were close friends. I was very much in his corner.

HENDERSON: OK. There is a lot of dispute, now, about when Mr. Talmadge came out on May the eighteenth and said that he--he made a statement--that he would enter the race as a gubernatorial candidate. Then five days later, he said that, the people of Georgia desired that he stay in the Senate. Now, there is a lot of speculation why he made the statement on May the eighteenth saying [that] he would get in. Then on May the twenty-third, that he got out. Do you just this as a "holding pattern" to keep more candidates from coming into the campaign, until the organization could find a candidate like yourself?

GRAY: This is correct.

HENDERSON: OK. So is it fair to say that, to the best of your knowledge, he really did not intend to enter the campaign.

GRAY: He did not.

HENDERSON: He did not. One of the candidates in that campaign, as you recall, was Mr. [Lester Garfield] Maddox.

GRAY: Yes.

HENDERSON: And you made a statement, during the campaign, and I realize a lot of things are said during the campaign—

GRAY: Oh, sure. Yes.

HENDERSON: --that sometimes you may not want to repeat or whatever. But you called his conservatism “purely negative and rash.” Could you amplify that or would you amplify that for me?

GRAY: Well, I think that his racial posture, for one thing, was negative. I felt that he didn't have sufficient business experience. I felt that his campaign was flamboyant and in a lot of cases inflammatory. I felt that the basis of his movement into the political picture was directed to, or misdirected, to passion. That was my reasoning.

HENDERSON: Now, the charge was made against your campaign, you will probably recall some of these ads that you had in the newspapers--I forget exactly how they went--but it was

Are you afraid to walk the streets at night? Are you concerned about the high rate of crime? And that sort of thing. And the same charge was made against you. How do you respond to that?

GRAY: Well, I respond to that because the media that was against me was the Atlanta newspapers. And I simply inherited their antipathy to Talmadge.

HENDERSON: I see.

GRAY: And what they knew was that I was very close to the senator, and I think what they didn't want to have happen was to have Senator Talmadge in Washington and the governor of the state who was generally subscribed to Talmadge policies.

HENDERSON: I see. Could we leave Mr. Maddox? I'd like to come back to him later on. But could I ask you: how would characterize Mr. [Ellis Gibbs] Arnall? He was considered a major candidate in the campaign. Why were so opposed to Mr. Arnall receiving the nomination?

GRAY: Well, Mr. Arnall... Of course, I'm a conservative—

HENDERSON: Right.

GRAY: --and always have been—

HENDERSON: Yes.

GRAY: --Mr. Arnall is a liberal. And it would generally, the divisions on that line, that made me against Mr. Arnall.

HENDERSON: How do you describe a “liberal” in Georgia politics, or at least back then in the ‘60s? Committed to big government?

GRAY: Yes, committed to big government, to fiscal improvements. To a--I don't know how I would express it--a scatter shot approach to a progressive civil rights program. I was not opposed to civil rights, but I was opposed to the restrictions that were placed upon... the additional promises that were made to minorities that would restrict the rights of the majority--which we now still have in our national civil rights law, whereby the voting rights law, for example, which was passed, which was not a civil right but was an indictment of the southern states. Which I did not feel should have been put into legislation. That is, I think that the civil rights program, for the most part, depends on community attitudes and those attitudes have to be changed by the community itself and not by law.

HENDERSON: OK. So, your major opposition to Mr. Arnall was that he was too liberal for the Georgia people at that time.

GRAY: I thought that he was, and I felt that most of the social changes that he advocated, he wanted to do by law.

HENDERSON: OK.

GRAY: And I don't think it can be done by law, and I think that subsequent events have proved that.

HENDERSON: OK. Now there were some charges made--as you realize, a lot of charges are made in political campaigns--that the Talmadge organization, in particular some of the people holding high office in Atlanta, were concerned that Arnall, who was a very anti-Talmadge opponent, would come in and try to, I think as William [Berry] Hartsfield said, "Mess up their playhouse in Atlanta." Did you see any of that?

GRAY: No, other than the fact that Ellis Arnall had run against Herman's father [Eugene Talmadge].

HENDERSON: Right.

GRAY: It was a very heated campaign, and Ellis beat him. And a lot of political divisions developed on that basis. And I think it's one of those...I think a lot of the feeling was personal. When Ellis got mixed up in that three-governor charade up there, and they were changing locks on the door and all that...people got pretty excited.

HENDERSON: I did my master's thesis on that. That's an interesting period in our history. Let me talk about another native of this area of the state, Mr. [James Earl (Jimmy)] Carter [Jr.].

GRAY: Yes.

HENDERSON: How did you view Mr. Carter's candidacy in '66? This was the first time he ran for governor. He got in late; I believe he was the last one to enter.

GRAY: Yes. Well, he had good solid support and, of course, he had a better knowledge of the state that I did. First of all he was a native, which I was not. He had been in this [Georgia] House [of Representatives], he had been in the [Georgia] Senate; he had a lot of friends in the Senate that believed in him. And we more or less ran along on the same channels. We were generally where I was going I was finding I was inviting support for him. We were more moderate, let's say, than Mr. Maddox. So that we, more or less, in a good many areas divided votes.

HENDERSON: Of the two candidates, Mr. Maddox and Mr. Carter, which one do you think did you the most harm as far as pulling votes away from you?

GRAY: That's hard to say. I would say Mr. Carter, if I had to make an evaluation.

HENDERSON: OK. Mr. [Garland Turk] Byrd got only five percent of the vote, so he was not a major candidate, but the potential was always there. Did you have any fear of him being a major candidate?

GRAY: No, I didn't have any fear. I knew Garland real well, and Garland, I don't know the reasons why he got into the race. I feel as though that the Byrd votes would probably been mine.

HENDERSON: Been yours. OK. Do you think that your campaign was damaged, first of all, by you being a non-native Georgian? Do you think that hurt you?

GRAY: I think it did to a degree.

HENDERSON: To a degree.

GRAY: To a degree, I think so.

HENDERSON: Do you think it hurt you being a divorced man?

GRAY: Yes, at the time I do. I don't think today it would. I think back then it did.

HENDERSON: And there was also the charge that you were too good [of] a speaker, you were too polished. And when you got out in the rural countryside, it didn't go over with the voters as well as, say, Lester Maddox. Who had, as you well know, a speaking "tongue"—

GRAY: --Some of the rural areas it probably did. Although I ran exceedingly well, strangely enough, in south Georgia.

HENDERSON: Yes, you did quite well in southwest Georgia.

GRAY: Very, very well.

HENDERSON: Why do you think you did so poorly in north Georgia? I think you just carried six counties above Macon, if I remember right.

GRAY: Yes, the reason was, because I didn't have a chance to—it was a time element. I think the time element hurt me badly. To run for the governor of Georgia, you've actually got to sit down and take a whole year to do nothing but travel around. I found out that you can't visit one place one time and make a speech, let's say, to a local civic club and put out your reason[?]. They've got to know more about you. Georgia folks want to rub elbows with you. And I didn't have a chance to do it. Georgia is a tremendous state, and I never realized it until I ran for governor.

[HENDERSON and GRAY laugh]

HENDERSON: Yes, it is.

GRAY: That's why. I don't think it was the...most of my speeches that I made in rural communities, here and elsewhere, went over very well. But, see down here they knew me.

HENDERSON: Yes.

GRAY: Up there they did not. And it was a...it hurt.

HENDERSON: Shortly before the primary, Mr. Maddox revealed that an offer of \$100,000 had been made to him to get him out of the office--or get him out of the campaign. And he said that "agents of yours," now I quoted that, make sure I was quoting him right, he said agents of yours had offered him this money. Did you know anything of that?

GRAY: Not a thing, and if any of my agents had had a hundred thousand dollars, I wish to hell that they'd put it in my campaign.

[GRAY and HENDERSON laugh]

HENDERSON: Go ahead. I'm sorry.

GRAY: But I was just going to say that's typical Maddox. Even though Lester and I are good friends. Of course, I became chairman of the [Democratic] Party, you know, after Maddox---

HENDERSON: Well, that was another one of my questions. Here was a man that asked you to get out of the campaign--I believe I read somewhere--thirteen times, who said that you told him on one of the main streets in Atlanta during the campaign that you didn't want to be in the campaign--

GRAY: Well, that's right, I did.

HENDERSON: And yet, you turned around and became chairman of the party.

GRAY: That's right.

HENDERSON: And why? That's my question.

GRAY: Because he and I had been, well, not close friends, but we had been on a friendly basis. And generally, in some of his attitudes, his conservatism--and he was a conservative--were very close to my ideas. After he won, he was in the runoff, he came to me and he said Jimmy, I'm new at this, and I'm going to need all the help I can get. And you have always been a strong party man. And he says I want to have the party established behind me, and I think you can bring that party establishment on my side. I thought about it. But then other

prominent Democrats came to me and said Look you've had a tough row and all that, but would you do one more thing. Because Mr. Maddox is not familiar with the political machine, would you step in and serve as the party chairman for four years and keep us all together. And I did.

HENDERSON: So, are you saying it's more out of loyalty to the party and also to help out this friend that just called upon you to say, "I need help"---

GRAY: Well, that's right, that and the party structure because the representation that Georgia had in Washington was most important to the welfare of this state. We're a small state as far as representation goes. We were on the lower end of the ladder as opposed to the Democratic philosophy of handouts and give-aways and that sort of thing. And the only clout that we really had in the national picture depended upon our congressional representation in the Senate and in the House. And it was necessary, to my way of thinking and to my political philosophy, that leaves most of these men up there, were conservatives, and I felt it was necessary to keep them in power.

HENDERSON: Let's suppose that you had won the nomination, and you're facing Bo Callaway, who was also very conservative in his philosophy.

GRAY: Right.

HENDERSON: How would you have campaigned against Bo Callaway? What would you have emphasized? The Democratic Party? Or ---

GRAY: I would have emphasized the principles that we generally agreed upon, but then I would have emphasized the party. I would have emphasized the fact that the majority of the citizens in this state were Democrats and that we wouldn't want to have our strength divided in Washington. We could do more good staying within the orbit of the Democratic Party than we could by dividing our strength and going Republican.

HENDERSON: In that election, Mr. Callaway got a plurality. He did not get the majority--

GRAY: Right.

HENDERSON: --as required by the Georgia constitution. And, of course, it was thrown into the House. Do you think the people of Georgia would have been better served if there had been some type of special runoff election between the two candidates? Instead of letting the General Assembly do the electing.

GRAY: Well, that's a debatable question. I wouldn't know how to answer that positively. From my own point of view, being a party man, for the reasons of being a party man, I was satisfied with the result. I felt that keeping a Democratic governor and a strong party structure was more beneficial, generally, to the welfare of the state than if we had broken off and gone in another direction. I realize that's a debatable point, but that was my feeling.

HENDERSON: Now Mr. Arnall, after he lost the runoff, did not give his public blessing to the write-in movement, but yet he did not condemn it. Do you think he did the state a disservice by not coming out and saying, "I do not want the support of these fifty thousand people writing in"--that sort of thing, and--

GRAY: I think so, but that once again is a debatable point. I think once you're beaten in a political campaign, I think that you're beaten and forget it. I think he was personally disappointed and a lot of his personal feelings, I think, entered into it rather than his interest in public benefit or public welfare. Ellis has always been a very aggressive man, as you know, and he had a lot of pride. This last hurrah kind of hurt him a little bit, and I think that he condoned the write-in. And obviously it was such a strong one that I think that obviously there had to be some calculation involved. You don't get that turnout unless somebody's out there drumming up some heat for you. Because the public...as you know, you have difficulty getting [the] public to go the polls and vote anyway.

HENDERSON: Yes.

GRAY: So, that if you get fifty thousand people to come in and put in a write-in, you can't say that it's not a campaign, [unintelligible].

HENDERSON: If a candidate is running, well, say back then, how much money, generally speaking, does it take to run a campaign for governor? Roughly speaking.

GRAY: Well, I would say at that time, I would say, between \$700,000 to a million dollars, somewhere in there.

HENDERSON: Were you raising most of that money on your account or did you have some backers?

GRAY: I had some backers, but most of it came out of my own pocket.

HENDERSON: I see. And I have seen several reports, and again you read all sorts of things about what goes on in elections, that you spent more than any other candidate. Of course, you wouldn't have any way of knowing that, but...

GRAY: I wouldn't know whether I did or did not, really. I don't know what, of course, Mr. Carter was very well financed when he was running. He had very strong support in Atlanta, and of course, Atlanta is a money temple. Let's face it. So, I imagine a lot of the big industries up there--Coca-Cola [Company] who'd supported him for the presidency, for example, were all on his card. And I imagine the contributions he got were sizable. How much I don't know, but I know that he did have to. Because he waged a strong media campaign for the same reason that I did, because he got in late. Not being able to make all the stops, you had to go to television. Of course it's more pronounced today than it was then, because the day of the old rally, this can't [get] people out anymore. They're going to sit at home and look at you. I'm not saying that leads to better judgment, but that's the way it is.

HENDERSON: Do you think that hurt Arnall? Coming across on TV? On the stump, he was a tremendous speaker. But on TV it came across too strong. And he was not willing to change that at all. Do you think that hurt him?

GRAY: Yes, I do, I do. I think that TV has a tremendous impact and not always good. It's how you look, it's how your speeches are geared. You can't really discuss issues on TV; you have to be just glib. You've got to give out, you know, the one-liners. And so it's entirely impressionistic and emotional. And unfortunately we have enough emotional politics.

HENDERSON: [chuckles] If we had a situation like this, if it was an one-to-one race, with Arnall on one side and you on the other, do you think you could have beaten Ellis Arnall?

GRAY: Yes, I do.

HENDERSON: Decisively?

GRAY: Decisively.

HENDERSON: Where do you think Mr. Arnall's support was coming from?

GRAY: I think Mr. Arnall's support was coming from, largely, a number of liberals, a number of people who were against the Talmadge regime, the minority. I think that was his prime support.

HENDERSON: And where do you think---

GRAY: And I think that my support would have been in the, generally, the rural areas and in the smaller cities. Such as Macon, Albany, Columbus, I think those places. But of course, back in those days, once again, Ellis would have had the Atlanta vote which has been constant, really, over of a period a time. Just like in this last race when Talmadge got beaten by [Mack Francis] Mattingly. You had a number of Democrats obviously in these counties that no one ever figured, for example, in the last race of Talmadge's that you get up into DeKalb [County] and Cobb [County] and those areas would go--how much?--seventy or seventy-five percent against Talmadge. You would have figured that he would have lost some because of his family troubles and because of the Senate censor and that sort of thing. But even then, you couldn't figure that there would be that much of a switch over. But, the senator had been there a long time and you know, you get friends but you also get enemies.

HENDERSON: Let me ask you two more questions; I know you're busy and you have other things to do. You said earlier during the interview that Mr. Talmadge had no intentions whatever, to your knowledge, of running for the governorship.

GRAY: To my knowledge he did not.

HENDERSON: OK. Number two, looking back, on it would you have done anything differently in your campaign?

GRAY: No, but I would surely have started earlier. It was a switch over, and I knew that I was taking a long shot, but I did it because I had friends in the party structure, I felt that the party structure was important to the political and economic development of our state. And that is why I went with it, and that's why I took the chairmanship when Governor Maddox offered it to me.

HENDERSON: OK.



[End of Interview]

Name Index**A**

Arnall, Ellis Gibbs, 6, 7, 8, 16, 18, 19

B

Byrd, Garland Turk, 10

C

Callaway, Howard Hollis (Bo), 4, 14, 15

Campbell, James Philander, Jr. (Phil), 3

Carter, James Earl, Jr. (Jimmy), 9, 17

H

Hartsfield, William Berry, 8

M

Maddox, Lester Garfield, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12,
13, 14, 20

Mattingly, Mack Francis, 19

T

Talmadge, Eugene, 8

Talmadge, Herman Eugene, 2, 3, 4, 6, 19

V

Vandiver, Samuel Ernest, Jr., 1, 2, 3, 4

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