

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
Series I: Ellis Arnall
OH ARN 05
Ford Spinks Interviewed by Harold Paulk (Hal) Henderson, Sr.
Date: April 24, 1981
CD: OH ARN 05, Tracks 1-3; 0:29:58 minutes
Cassette: OH ARN 05, 0:30:20 Minutes, Side One Only

[Cassette: Side 1]
[CD: Track 1]

HENDERSON: Let me see if I am picking up. OK. Interview with Mr. Ford Spinks 5/24/81 [May 24, 1981]. Mr. Spinks, if I could just begin, [a] starting place here... First question, Mr. [James Earl (Jimmy)] Carter [Jr.] was the last candidate to get in the campaign--the other candidates, major candidates were already announced. Why did he decide to get in the campaign?

SPINKS: I don't know the total reason for his decision. I know that there was several of us, primarily from the Senate, that was urging him to get in it. But I've never been inside his brain to know what might be a reason other than that--that he did come to realize that he would have some support and from some people that he might not have counted on originally. [Of] course you know he was first thinking of running for Congress, so he had higher aspirations than just staying in the Georgia Senate. But I suppose it was his realization as well as ours that there was not a candidate in the race at that time that appealed to the most of us. We convinced him that he would have a chance to win. So he decided to give it a try.

HENDERSON: Is it fair to say that then his candidacy was a “draft movement,” that people went to him—you and the other senators—and said Mr. Carter, we want a candidate to get in the race.

SPINKS: We want a candidate that we can feel good and support him, and there’s not one in the race at this point that I can whole-heartedly support and feel good and give him that support, too.

HENDERSON: OK. Now, who else was involved in this draft movement, besides yourself?

SPINKS: The senator from over in Bremen [Georgia], Lamar [Rich] Plunkett , Senator....

HENDERSON: Was Mr. [Robert Alvin] Rowan involved?

SPINKS: No, Rowan was not involved. The seed man, Pennington, Brooks [Maddox] Pennington [Jr.] , was in the Senate and he was there at the time. A senator from Athens, Paul [Collins] Broun [Sr.] ... These were the main—let’s see, the senator [Robert Harris Smalley, Jr.] from Griffin [Georgia] got in shortly after on the draft movement. [I] can’t recall his name at the moment. [It’s] been so long since I was in the Senate.

HENDERSON: Uh-huh.

SPINKS: But these were the main—

HENDERSON: But all state senators who were involved in this effort.

SPINKS: Yes, at this point.

HENDERSON: Was Mr. Carter your first choice or did you approach somebody else?

SPINKS: No, he was my first choice.

HENDERSON: How about the consensus of the group. Was he their first choice? As far as you know.

SPINKS: As far as I know.

HENDERSON: No. So, he was the first candidate that was approached.

SPINKS: Yes.

HENDERSON: Was he receptive as first when you broached the subject with him or was he hesitant?

SPINKS: Well, he was receptive to listening on the first go around. And at the time we had our first meeting, he had already decided then that he was interested and would accept the draft or to

run. It wasn't totally a draft, you see, because he was thinking of running for the Congress. So, he was geared up to run for something other than the Senate. I suppose the combination of his feeling about it, and ours, too, was what interested him.

HENDERSON: OK. Was there any promise of any financial support or was this just primarily political support?

SPINKS: No, we all committed some financial support at the same time. You can't run a state-wide race without the finances, and we felt that that was a measure of our determination to see him through this, was to help him financially from the beginning.

HENDERSON: About how much money back then would it take to conduct a gubernatorial campaign?

SPINKS: I believe--I don't remember exactly--but I believe that first race there was about a quarter of million dollars involved—that's the best I remember. Something like that.

HENDERSON: Back then was there any type of financial disclosure? No, OK.

SPINKS: No, no.

HENDERSON: So, there was no way that if I wanted to go back and see who contributed to [James Harrison] Gray's [Sr.] campaign or [Lester Garfield] Maddox's campaign, there's no way.

SPINKS: No, absolutely no way.

HENDERSON: OK. From your standpoint--and I am assuming that you talked with Mr. Carter a great deal about the campaign--let me just go through the candidates and talking about from your standpoint and Mr. Carter's standpoint what were their political liabilities? Why do you think that, I'm not using the word "weak," but what was something that you could use against them, political liabilities? Their weaknesses, maybe that's the word I'm looking for.

SPINKS: OK.

HENDERSON: How about Mr. [Ellis Gibbs] Arnall? Where did you think he was weak?

SPINKS: Well, I thought that Arnall was too liberal. He was too far to the left and the age was a disadvantage for him. Those were the two primary reasons that I wouldn't have voted for Mr. Arnall.

HENDERSON: Now when you say "liberal," what do you mean?

SPINKS: Well,--

HENDERSON: Was it liberal on the race issue?

SPINKS: Liberal on the race issue, liberal on finances. You know, the exact things that cause me to come to that conclusion, I don't remember at this point. I just know that at that time I had that feeling that this fellow is too far out in left field, and I can't whole-heartedly support him. So I--

HENDERSON: OK. How about Mr. Maddox?

SPINKS: Well, of course, Mr. Maddox was at that point an unknown factor. He was too far to the right. Very decidedly too far to the right and not having been involved in politics, of course, I just didn't feel that he had any qualifications at all for being governor.

HENDERSON: OK. Mr. Gray.

SPINKS: Mr. Gray was thought of by many as being a political opportunist. He was not a native Georgian. He was thought of as being in with the element that we didn't particularly want to support.

HENDERSON: OK. Now, Mr. [Garland Turk] Byrd entered the race--the election results gave him only five percent of the vote--he was not a major candidate. What do you think were his

problems? He'd been lieutenant governor once. [He] had won that office with a substantial majority. He just didn't have the backing, or how do you assess his weaknesses?

SPINKS: Well, there's a story [chuckles] involved with that with Byrd that I don't know that you would want to include. In fact, I am sure you would not want to include, but I'll go ahead and just skip it. Back when he, four years earlier, he had been involved with--[telephone rings; tape stops and starts]. There were some talk earlier, in another race, about him being blackmailed and all that situation. So, it was not too favorably—the circumstances. So, there was just too many gray areas pertaining to Byrd that too many people didn't want to associate with him, so that's the reason he never got up to bat at all. He was--I hate to use the term "political prostitute," but that is sort of the feeling that people had.

HENDERSON: What then was there a general feeling throughout the state or with some political leaders that he got out not because of the heart attack that he suggested, but that was just the cover up story.

SPINKS: That was assumed.

HENDERSON: OK. How about Mr. [Howard Hollis (Bo)] Callaway?

SPINKS: Mr. Callaway was all right in every way except at that point in Georgia's time Democrats were not supposed to vote for Republicans. Other than that, Bo would have been fine.

[CD: Track 2]

SPINKS: I was really surprised that they gave--“they,” the Democratic hierarchy--decided to go with Lester instead of Bo. I felt like at that point that the Democratic power to be could have worked with Bo in any fashion that they needed to. And the legislature could have elected Bo and we would have been much better off. But they didn’t choose to do that, so we wound up with Lester.

HENDERSON: Are you saying that if Callaway had remained a Democrat and entered the Democratic primary, then the group of you senators who were looking for a more moderate candidate could have supported Mr. Callaway?

SPINKS: Well, could have but, yeah could have, but I don’t say we would have—

HENDERSON: Yes.

SPINKS: --because I still would have supported Carter.

HENDERSON: But assuming that Mr. Carter was not in the race, you could have felt comfortable supporting Bo Callaway.

SPINKS: Sure, sure.

HENDERSON: Now—

SPINKS: Had Jimmy not been in the race, then I would have supported Bo even though he were a Republican. I mean, had Jimmy not been in, because he was obviously my second choice.

HENDERSON: Mr. Callaway.

SPINKS: Callaway.

HENDERSON: Now, you don't see any difference in the political stance of Mr. Carter and Mr. Callaway?

SPINKS: Yes.

HENDERSON: But, you could have gone with either one.

SPINKS: I could have gone with either one.

HENDERSON: All right.

SPINKS: Yes. Callaway cast a little more conservative shadow than Jimmy and that was very appealing to me. But having worked with Jimmy for four years in the Senate, I knew what kind of fellow he was, and I knew that he was as smart a politician as I had ever met. And as intelligent a politician as I had ever met. So, I knew that I could comfortably support him, and I felt like that Bo was along in that league and I would have felt comfortable supporting him.

HENDERSON: What do you think, looking at Mr. Carter--first of all, were his strong points—

SPINKS: Wait, wait a minute. You do remember that the legislature elected Lester.

HENDERSON: Yes, I've got a lot of questions about that.

SPINKS: Oh, OK.

HENDERSON: Yes, I want to continue that later on, yes. But, I mean, if there is anything else you want to say about it now.

SPINKS: No, no we'll cover that later.

HENDERSON: There are so many interesting things about this election.

SPINKS: Yes.

HENDERSON: I mean, it's just unbelievable. Of course, Mr. [Samuel Ernest] Vandiver [Jr.] running and then dropping out and that sort of thing. But what do you think about Mr. Carter's, what were his strong political points? You've talked about some: he was intelligent; he was a shrewd politician...

SPINKS: Well, to me, those were the main things that caused me to want to support him. Of course, he had a winning way with people. [In a] one-on-one situation, it just couldn't be beat. He was good at conveying his thoughts to others. But primarily his intellect and his ability to communicate and break things down.

HENDERSON: OK. Was he dedicated campaigner? Did he like to put in twenty hours a day campaigning? [telephone rings, tape stops and starts]

SPINKS: ...Georgia campaigning and worked as hard at it as anyone I'd ever seen. During the campaign, of course, I was not with him much the first four years. I don't know how you have this broken down, but for the first campaign, I was not with him much on the campaign trail until the last few months when I was in his office. I'd say about the last three months constantly. But he would come in very late at night and leave very early in the morning, so I didn't get to see him a lot except in just passing through.

HENDERSON: Let me come back just a minute to money. I talked with Mr. Gray the other day and he told me that he raised an astronomical amount of money out of his own pocket to

finance his campaign. Mr. Arnall, according to the press reports, he spent a great deal of money. Did Mr. Carter have problems raising money? Was that a factor in his campaign?

SPINKS: Sure thing.

HENDERSON: Do you think it's one of the factors that led that him to come in, say, third? If he had more money he could have come in second.

SPINKS: Sure, if he had more money, he would have been in the runoff.

HENDERSON: Did the fact that he entered late, did that have any impact?

SPINKS: Yes, sure. Getting in the race early and getting your commitment--. It's a funny thing people like to commit early and a lot of people when they commit, they won't change. They'll say like You know I would like to support you, but I've already committed to ol' so and so, and I'm sorry. [HENDERSON chuckles] Everybody--most people want to be on a bandwagon and when they see one that looks to suit them, they jump on not thinking Hey, there may be a better one along the way.

HENDERSON: There were some press reports that there was some maneuvering by supporters of Mr. Gray and of Mr. Carter. Trying to get those two candidates together where one or the other would drop out. The understanding is that they were pulling votes from the same source. Was there any efforts on the Carter people to talk with the Gray people about dropping out?

SPINKS: We--like everybody else--we had heard some rumors about that and they might have been some conversation, I don't know. But I didn't have any conversations about that I can talk about.

HENDERSON: OK. All right. Looking back at that election, how would you classify Mr. Carter? Would you call him a liberal, a conservative, or a moderate or could you put him in one of those categories?

SPINKS: You would have to call him a moderate.

HENDERSON: A moderate. Do you think Mr. Carter—well, first of all, where did Mr. Carter, where was his greatest strength? If it was with the moderate votes, was he pulling votes away from Mr. Arnall?

SPINKS: Well, at that point Jimmy cast two or three shadows. He cast a moderate shadow; he cast a conservative shadow; he cast rural shadow; he cast legislative shadow. He was a lot of things to a lot of different people. He was not perceived, at that point, as being liberal because Arnall was the liberal candidate. He had that corner completely taken care of. So, it would have been foolish for Jimmy to even have attempted to appear liberal. But he really was a lot of other things to a lot of other people.

HENDERSON: OK. That leads me to—

SPINKS: No one hat would fit him at that time.

HENDERSON: All right. Let me ask this question: Mr. Arnall in the primary got about thirty percent of the vote. Mr. Carter came in with about twenty-one percent. Do you think if Carter had not been in the race perhaps Arnall could have won the primary without a runoff?

SPINKS: No way. Arnie--it was not in the cards for him to win. He might have been in the runoff, but he wouldn't have won it on the first go around. And I don't think he was, well, you got a lot ifs there, or what-ifs. It would have depended on who else was in the race. So, that's just speculation at that point.

HENDERSON: Do you think about thirty percent was about the maximum that he could pull?

SPINKS: Yes--unless there had not been a credible candidate in the race, you see, other than Maddox. Maddox was probably the only guy that he could have beat; he might very well beaten Maddox. But any other credible person, he would not have beat. Of course, he would have beaten Byrd. But [in] a race between him and Jim Gray, Gray would have beaten him. [In] a race between he and Bo Callaway, Bo Callaway would have beat him. That's my opinion.

HENDERSON: Did Mr. Carter support anybody in the runoff election?

SPINKS: No.

HENDERSON: OK. So, in the choice between Mr. Arnall and Mr. Maddox, he could not take Mr. Arnall? Mr. Arnall made some overtures to him—

SPINKS: Yes.

HENDERSON: --trying to pull him in—

SPINKS: Yes.

HENDERSON: --and he rejected those.

SPINKS: Yes. As I remember...I don't remember that he supported anybody because our office force and his supporters broke up and some of them went one way and some...

HENDERSON: That's the image that the press portrays, that he did not support anyone.

SPINKS: Yes, yes.

[CD: Track 3]

HENDERSON: In the general election, did he support Mr. Maddox?

SPINKS: He supported the Democratic ticket.

HENDERSON: OK.

SPINKS: Jimmy was always more of a party man than I have been. I've never thought party was all that important, but he's always been more of a party man than I've been.

HENDERSON: If he had gotten the nomination, what kind of campaign do you think he would have run against Mr. Callaway? Mr. Callaway certainly being more conservative than Mr. Carter.

SPINKS: Had he gotten the nomination he would have beaten Bo sixty/forty at least. It wouldn't have been close at all.

HENDERSON: Emphasizing the loyalty of the Georgia people to the Democratic Party—[do] you think that would have been a major factor?

SPINKS: That would have been part of it. At that point in our history, all of the blacks that were registered to vote were voting Democratic [unintelligible]. But you see, that's the reason Bo got as many votes as he did--was the fact that a lot of blacks couldn't stomach Maddox so they went with the Republicans. So, when you go to shift in great numbers, you see, it throws everything out of kilter.

HENDERSON: Do you think there was any cross over by the Republicans--Calloway supporters--in to the Democratic primary, trying to set up Mr. Maddox?

SPINKS: Yes, and it backfired on them.

HENDERSON: Do you think that was one of the major factors in Mr. Maddox getting the nomination?

SPINKS: No. I'd say enough Republicans did that that caused him to be in the runoff.

HENDERSON: Thinking that they were picking a weaker candidate. That Mr. Maddox couldn't counter-weigh.

SPINKS: The weaker of the candidates.

HENDERSON: Was there any effort at any time, to your knowledge, where the Arnall supporters or Mr. Arnall, himself, tried to get Mr. Carter to withdraw from the campaign?

SPINKS: I don't remember. I'm sure there might have been, but it all gets a little fuzzy at this point. I don't remember any specific details about it. You always have people talking, it would be nice if thus and so happened, and if no one nibbles at the bait, then that's the end of it. There was no nibbling on our part, when that came around.

HENDERSON: After Mr. Vandiver withdrew from the campaign, did anybody from the Talmadge organization get in touch with Mr. Carter and say, “We would like to support you. You have our support”?

SPINKS: I remember that it came that way. I remember when me and Jimmy visited Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.]. We went to Winder [Georgia] and visited him, asking for and receiving his support. I didn't go with him when he visited [Herman Eugene] Talmadge. Yes, I did--I went to Washington [DC]. But it's very unusual for a big fish to offer support to a little fish. It usually comes the other way around. The little fish asks for and hopefully, he receives some support from the bigger fish.

HENDERSON: Let me make sure I have this correctly now--Senator Russell endorsed or gave his support to Jimmy Carter.

SPINKS: Uh-huh.

HENDERSON: Now, was it an open thing or was this “I'll vote for you and that's the extent of my involvement”?

SPINKS: He told us that he was inclined to support Jimmy and would. That he wanted to do it in his own way and in his own fashion. So, that's—now, exactly what he did I don't know, but I do remember that there was some favorable comments in the news media at that time.

HENDERSON: And you say you and Mr. Carter went to Washington to talk with Mr. Talmadge?

SPINKS: Yes, as I remember, we were there making some other visits also.

HENDERSON: What was the extent of his support?

SPINKS: He was about the same. He was inclined to support Jimmy, but he was a little more, as I remember, a little more reserved in his comments at that point. As if to say I would like to sit down and say that and so forth—as if to say that I'd like to sit down with both of you[?].

HENDERSON: Uh-huh. Now was this before Mr. Gray got in the campaign or after Mr. Gray? Because Gray had the image of being the candidate of the Talmadge organization.

SPINKS: Yes, this was after because.... Well, it's been so long I don't remember any dates or times.

HENDERSON: Mr. Gray was going around the state saying that Talmadge was going to vote for him personally.

SPINKS: Yes, that's one of the things that politicians like to do. They like for everybody to know that the big boys are going to vote for them. But I've never thought that that was worth

anything. I think the bigger political figure has to say it himself if it's going to be worth anything.

HENDERSON: Uh-huh. Why do think—excuse me.

SPINKS: Mostly Carter folks didn't put much stock in his saying that because it was not being said by Talmadge[?].

HENDERSON: Do you think that Mr. Talmadge ever intended to get in the governor's race or was that a "holding action" until a Talmadge candidate could be rounded up?

SPINKS: I don't think he did. I think he made the statement as others have made it after they've left the governor's office. That I wish I were back—that there you can make a decision, have it carried out. And here, I am just one of a number.

HENDERSON: If Talmadge—excuse me, yes.

SPINKS: Now, let me say this, my thoughts and recollections on Talmadge are not as clear as they are on some of the other things. So, that's my [unintelligible].

HENDERSON: Right. After fifteen years, the memory begins to fade.

SPINKS: Yes, it does.

HENDERSON: Yes. It surely does, I understand that. Looking back at the write-in movement, do you think Mr. Arnall was actively behind that? Publicly, he said I will not have anything to do with it.

SPINKS: I think he had to be for it to be given the credibility. For it to have had the meaning and for him to have gotten as many votes as he did.

HENDERSON: Now, let's get to the election by the General Assembly. You made some comments about it a while ago. What do you think should have happened instead of the election by Mr. Maddox? I believe you said a while ago that you think the state would have been better off if Calloway had been elected.

SPINKS: Oh yes, I think we suffered greatly by electing Maddox, there's no...

[End of Interview]

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