

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
Series I: Ellis Arnall
OH ARN 18
Herman E. Talmadge Interviewed by Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr.
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[Continued from OH ARN 17]

HENDERSON: ... Legislative election—election because that was such an important election in the history of the state. It's reported in the 1946 general election that you receive 675 write-in votes. James Carmichael receives 669 and [D.] Talmadge Bowers receives 637. However, when the legislative tabulating committee first makes its report, it reports that you received only 617 write-in votes and there was a big to-do about where were the other 58 votes that you supposedly received. Would you talk about that episode?

TALMADGE: They finally found them. You know the people who run the elections have to send the results to the secretary of state, [Benjamin] Ben Fortson's office. So, they found those in a separate package there along with all of the others after some search. I don't know why they were in a separate package. I doubt Fortson did that—[they were] probably just misplaced in the handling in some way. Either in Telfair County [Georgia] or in the secretary of state's office, I don't know which.

HENDERSON: Once the legislature elects you governor, [Melvin Ernest] M.E. Thompson maintains that he's governor. How was it to be governor with somebody else still maintaining that he's governor? How do you govern? [laughs]

TALMADGE: Well, it was fairly difficult, but we were governing all right. We were paying the employees and paying the expenses of government. And I was appointing the department heads, and they were functioning. They were being bonded. And for six or seven days I ran the state until the [Georgia] General Assembly—until the Supreme Court of Georgia ruled otherwise.

HENDERSON: During that legislative session while you were still governor, you were pushing your legislative program through—

TALMADGE: Yes, the legislature passed them.

HENDERSON: --passing them. And one of the bills they passed was a bill—or one of the houses passed—I don't think both houses did but one of the houses passed a sales tax bill. Were you pushing a sales tax?

TALMADGE: No, I was not. I didn't support a sales tax until after the 1950 election. I think it probably passed the Senate as I recall. It did not pass the House. I knew it would be impossible to go before the people two years later—see, I was serving an unexpired term of my daddy [Eugene Talmadge]. It would be impossible to inaugurate a vast tax program and get it ratified and get results and survive politically in that short a period of time. In fact, the only governor prior to me that survived the sales tax was John W. Bricker of Ohio. All the rest of 'em were overwhelmingly defeated, so I didn't want to go into an election in nineteen

hundred and forty-eight—rather 1948—which was just about eighteen months later with a sales tax around my neck. So, I was not supporting a sales tax at that time. I did support one in 1951 and signed it into law.

HENDERSON: If I recall correctly, after you assumed the governor's office M.E. Thompson comes to the governor's office very similar to the way you did with Ellis Arnall, and he request that you move out of the office. Would you describe that episode?

TALMADGE: I'd really forgotten it. I don't remember the details of M.E. coming in. He may have. If he did, I refused to surrender the office. If he came in, I told him, I said Well, now, the legislature has acted on this, and my position is I support what the legislature's done. The matter's in the court and I'm not surrendering this office.

HENDERSON: The legislature passes a white primary bill while you're still governor before the Supreme Court says you should not be governor. And the bill is sent to M.E. Thompson, and he vetoes the white primary bill. And that becomes a big issue in the 1948 campaign. Do you think you could have defeated him if he had signed the white primary bill as some of his friends urged him to do?

TALMADGE: If I had, it would have been much more difficult.

HENDERSON: Why do you think he would—why do you think he did sign the white primary bill?

TALMADGE: I have no idea. I never discussed it with him.

HENDERSON: You run against him in '48 and in 1950, and you were victorious both occasions. What do you attribute those victories to?

TALMADGE: Well, I had, of course, signed the white primary bill and Ellis—I mean, and M.E. had vetoed it. That was a big handicap. I think I was a much more effective campaigner than M.E. was. He was not a great speechmaker, as you know, and I think I had a better organization. I've campaigned him and had the better issue.

HENDERSON: Now, during those campaigns, certainly the 1948 campaign, former governors [Eurith Dickinson (Ed)] Rivers and Arnall are supporting Thompson—

TALMADGE: That's right.

HENDERSON: --and you make several speeches against those gentlemen. Did it hit—

TALMADGE: I really ran against M.E. and Ellis, and not M.E., you know. I told about a shotgun wedding--

HENDERSON: Right.

TALMADGE: --didn't know which one was the bride. [laughs] I didn't know which one was the groom, but I knew who the offspring was. We ridiculed him. We laughed at him, you know, and that was very effective.

HENDERSON: Well, did it help your campaign because Rivers and Arnall were supporting M.E. Thompson?

TALMADGE: I think it probably did. Of course, they work both ways as all politicians do. But I told 'em two dead mules couldn't pull any more than one dead mule, things like that.

HENDERSON: Your father published a politically weekly, *The Statesman* [Hapeville, Georgia], until he died and then you continue with the publication of it until you went to the [United States] Senate. How important was *The Statesman* to your political career and to your father's political career?

TALMADGE: I think it was very important in keeping his views and my views before the people. It didn't have a great circulation but maybe we had 100 papers going into Tift County [Georgia], say, and that's pretty good nucleus for a campaign. They were really the key personnel in the battle, the sergeants and the corporals and the first lieutenants.

HENDERSON: Most of the articles in the paper--were they written by your father or you or...?

TALMADGE: My father wrote every one of them and I wrote all of mine.

HENDERSON: I think it's fair to say that your father was in constant warfare with the Atlanta papers while he was governor.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: What was your relationship with the media and, in particular, with the Atlanta papers after you became governor?

TALMADGE: As I recall during the two-governor row, Ralph McGill, who was then, I believe, editor of the *Constitution* [Atlanta, Georgia], was somewhat neutral. I don't think he took a position. *The Atlanta Journal* was violently opposed to me and that continued until about the advent of television and the Chicago convention [1968 Democratic National Convention, Chicago, Illinois]. And George Biggers was running both of those papers for Cox. And after the Chicago convention George Biggers called me up one day and wanted to have lunch with me, which was a new experience for me. Of course, I readily accepted. I didn't want a war with some of the monopoly as powerful as those two newspapers. And we became pretty good friends. And after that the Atlanta papers didn't get vicious against me until about the time of the divorce between Betty [Talmadge] and me, a little before then they set out with a vendetta, night and day. They hired a fella named Seth Kantor who was a character assassin that originated from Texas. Went from there to Detroit and Detroit back to Atlanta. During the whole time, he was working for the *Constitution* I don't think I saw but

one article that carried his byline that didn't say Talmadge. They had a vendetta about three years, but as long as George Biggers was there, we got along all right.

HENDERSON: You served as governor for six years. Looking back over that period of time, what were some of your most important accomplishments?

TALMADGE: Well, we really set the pattern at that time that Georgia's been following since then—growth, industrial development—five of the six years I served as governor we led every southern state including Florida in industrial development. We spent more money on schools during the six years and two months [that] I served as governor than every previous administration in the history of the state. We built more new classrooms for schools in Georgia during that period than any states in the union except New York and California and both of those states had a much higher per capita income than we had and about three times our population. We paved roads and built bridges all over the state. We built over 100 hospitals and health centers throughout the state. We inaugurated the greatest forestry program in the nation at that time. When I took office as governor the total income from forest products--end-use and otherwise—was only \$300 million. Today it's \$8 billion. Assuming a lot of that is inflation, which it is, that's still an unbelievable increase due to the growth of a renewable resource that we're burning up every year right at that time. Those were the major accomplishments of my administration. There are many others, but those are the major ones.

HENDERSON: I'm sure during that period of time you had some disappointments. What were some of the major disappointments that you had as governor?

TALMADGE: Well, those were very happy days for me. I could see progress everywhere I went. And I was probably the most popular governor and certainly, in the modern history of the state. And I could realize that. The major disappointments were having to tell people "no" all the time. A governor, to do his job, you know, everybody comes in there wanting something. Nine times out of ten for some reason you can't do it, and you have to tell 'em "no" day after day after day after day. Those were the major disappointments.

HENDERSON: How would you describe your style of leadership as governor?

TALMADGE: I was very aggressive. I had a direct telephone line to the lieutenant governor and the speaker of the House [of Representatives], and I was usually on that line daily. I'd send for members of the General Assembly individually and in groups. When the legislature was in session that was priority number one. Everything else went by the board. Any issue I decided to support or oppose I did so vigorously. I stumped effectively over the state for or against 'em. I was a leader, leading governor. I led the state when I was governor and ran the state. Whatever I wanted from the General Assembly, almost without exception, they did. Whatever I wanted killed, they killed.

HENDERSON: State government in Georgia back then and certainly, today, is fragmented. There's several major state constitutional officers. What was your relationship with some of

these gentlemen such as the comptroller general, the attorney general, commissioner of agriculture and so forth? Did you—

TALMADGE: I didn't get along well with the attorney general until late in my administration. [Eugene] Gene Cook had been appointed by Ellis Arnall. He had strongly supported M.E. Thompson's position. Our relationship was cool. We afterwards got to be good friends, and I never did get along well with George [B.] Hamilton, the state treasurer. My father had appointed him, and he had differed with my father and got to be a violent anti-Talmadge man in the '30s [1930s]. I didn't get along well with him at all. The other state house officers I got along well with.

HENDERSON: I think somebody once characterized your father as having a style of leadership of "confrontation."

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: Was yours of a similar nature or was it more behind the scenes...?

TALMADGE: The main difference--my father didn't know anything but a frontal attack and he despised peace and harmony. I liked peace and harmony, and if I had to attack, I'd try to flank instead of frontal assault, that was the main difference.

HENDERSON: While you were governor, I believe Marvin Griffin was presiding over the Senate and [Frederick Barrow] Fred Hand was presiding over the House.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: What was your relationship with those two gentlemen?

TALMADGE: Very good. I had supported Fred Hand from the speakership and the two-governor row, that's when he became speaker and was reelected when I was. And Marvin Griffin and I ran as a team, governor and lieutenant governor, in '48 and '50.

HENDERSON: How would you describe your relationship with the legislature while you were governor?

TALMADGE: Ninety-five percent of it was very good and very cordial. There were few die-hards, bitter anti-Talmadge people that weren't cooperative. We beat most of those in 1950.

HENDERSON: Would you be one of those governors that would favor an independent legislator legislature?

TALMADGE: Not when I was governor, no. [HENDERSON chuckles] I wanted people to see my side of the question.

HENDERSON: What are some of the things that you could use to convince a lawmaker that he should support your legislative program?

TALMADGE: Most of 'em had been elected by the same people that elected me, so we were representing similar philosophies of government and representing the same people. They were my natural allies.

HENDERSON: But to encourage those people to stay your natural allies, did you have promises of roads or promises of jobs, encouraged—

TALMADGE: They got first priority on eating at the table, yes.

HENDERSON: I like to run through several different policy areas—

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: --and like for you to comment on those as you would like. For example, agriculture. What was your policy or did you have a policy dealing with agriculture?

TALMADGE: We tried to build farm-to-market roads throughout the state and we did. And the Griffin administration kept up what I had started, and by the time Marvin went out of office we'd paved most of the rural roads in the state. That was priority number one.

Priority number two was the farm markets. We had, as I recall, maybe one in the state when I was elected governor; we had maybe twenty-five when I went out of office as governor.

HENDERSON: Did you—

TALMADGE: Those two things were our major emphasis in agriculture and then, too, I put several farmers on the Board of Regents. I wanted them to emphasize agriculture more at the University of Georgia. I went over there once and I got the president of the university—I had to make a speech and I had maybe an hour to spare. I says, “Let’s go over there on Ag Hill. How many cows you got?” I said. “I don’t know.” “How many hogs you got?” “I don’t know.” I found they were trying to teach an animal husbandry over there without animals, and I used emergency money out of the funds I had available to buy a herd of cattle, things of that nature. [Of] course we started the—my father had pledged it in his ’46 campaign. M.E. had started it and we started the veterinary school over there at the college to provide veterinarians throughout the state. And, but it was roads, farm markets, and education primarily.

HENDERSON: Did you have any type of labor policy for labor unions or was that a big issue?

TALMADGE: I don’t know that you could call it a policy except fair treatment and enforce the laws.

HENDERSON: How about your—

TALMADGE: When getting back to agriculture, now, we put in this forestry program which was enormously beneficial to farmers.

HENDERSON: How about your policy relative to health and human services welfare?

TALMADGE: Well, we made tremendous improvements. We started a hospital and health center program throughout the state. Built a lot of new buildings down at—one of the big problems then was the Milledgeville State Hospital for the Insane [Milledgeville, Georgia] and the tubercular hospital [Battey State Hospital, Rome, Georgia] in Battey. We spent a lot of money there, building programs there, and then we had a retarded children's program over at Augusta, Georgia. We spent a lot of money on that. So, we put--probably second only to education, our major emphasis was probably on health.

HENDERSON: How about your education policy? You've already talked about some of the accomplishments, but there was one program, the Minimum Foundation Program [1949]—

TALMADGE: That became law during my administration.

HENDERSON: And what was that, Governor?

TALMADGE: Well, it was something the educators worked out and primarily more money but it had a lot of other fancy stuff tied up in with it. We raised teachers' salaries when I was elected governor. The teachers' salary was state money and state funds alone and the public schools was \$1,260. I increased that 125 percent. Wasn't much money, but it was the biggest increase in the history of the state at the time. And that was the principal emphasis on education was teachers' salaries and new buildings, Minimum Foundation Program, I've forgotten what all it involved but it primarily money and lots of federal wrapped up in it.

HENDERSON: Georgia passes its first sales tax law during your administration.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: What was your role in getting that passed? Were you in support of the sales tax bill?

TALMADGE: I didn't emphasize it during my campaign in '50. I had pledged no new taxes in '48 without a referendum. I had to waltz on that somewhat; we ran out of money and had to do something about it. So, I had an emergency session. We raised \$30 million in excise taxes temporarily. I made no pledges of any kind in 1950, and I passed the word to members of the General Assembly that I'd sign sales tax bill and it passed.

HENDERSON: Looking back over the history of Georgia, there seems to be one executive department that governors conflict with periodically and that was the highway department.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: Did you ever have any difficulties with the highway department?

TALMADGE: No. I appointed the highway board when I went into office as governor and they were very cooperative. And we changed that. I originally started with a ten-member highway board, and we changed that after the '50 election to a three-member highway board and I appointed [James Lester] Jim Gillis and John [Edward] Quillian and [Curtis Dixon] Dick Oxford. They were all of my appointees, and they were very cooperative.

HENDERSON: How much power did you have as governor over the budgetary process?

TALMADGE: Probably as much as any governor in the history of the state. In those days budgetary authority of the governor was immense. I don't know whether they've changed the law since then or not. The legislature was highly cooperative with me, and they passed the state budget almost exactly like I sent it to them.

HENDERSON: Looking back over your life, I'm sure you've had some political idols that have influenced your political career. Who were some of these people?

TALMADGE: Undoubtedly my father was number one. And I admired the way Huey [Pierce] Long could govern Louisiana. I didn't agree with his philosophy, but he was the only

man in the history of the nation that ever totally subverted all three branches of government into his will. When I was a student at the university I used to subscribe to his *American Progress*. And I would read it. The man fascinated me, the character of the man, the personality of the man, where one man could take on the whole United States Senate and give them better than they sent, things of that nature.

HENDERSON: Did you see any similarity between his personality, his magnetism and that of your father?

TALMADGE: Yes, a great deal. And, but even more than that, I recently read a three-volume book about Andrew Jackson, I've forgotten who the author was [*Andrew Jackson* by Robert V. Remini]. Those two men were more alike than any two men I ever read about in my life. Both of them [had a] fiery temper, short fuse, both of them extremely loyal to their friends, both of them not wanting any quarter for the enemies, both of them hated by some people and loved by others. The two men both could tell folks who to vote for and they'd do it. We haven't had a vice president elected in the United States since Martin Van Buren, and Andy Jackson elected him. And my father could tell people who to vote for in counties all over the state. Leave Joe Smith at home next election, they'd leave Joe Smith at home. Send me Henry Johnson, and they'd send him Henry Johnson. Jackson could do that. Jackson had two duels, you know, killed one man. I don't think my father ever had a duel. But they reminded [me]--their personalities are almost totally alike.

HENDERSON: During your governorship did you have some people who you considered your close advisors who you constantly turned to to give you advice and guidance?

TALMADGE: I don't know that...I listened to everybody. Some of the best advice I ever got was from people with corns in their hand that wasn't looking for anything. And if they came through the office just paying a visit and didn't want anything, I'd talk to them about various issues, and they'd give me their ideas. I listened to anyone that had advice to give--sometimes solicited--and ultimately made up my own mind on all issues.

HENDERSON: Did Roy Harris play any significant role in your governorship?

TALMADGE: Yes. He was one of my strongest and closest supporters and principal advisor.

HENDERSON: You never served in the state legislature prior to assuming the governorship?

TALMADGE: Never held any public office until I won the governor.

HENDERSON: Was that a disadvantage to you?

TALMADGE: No, I think not. You see, I had grown up with my daddy in politics and I had learned from his problems, I hope. And I've always been [able to] make up my mind on

listening to the issues. Making a decision was easy for me; it wasn't difficult. Some people if they start go to town and if there's two roads to go, they spend a half a day trying to figure out which one. I could make a decision on an important issue in a matter of minutes when I got the facts.

HENDERSON: In 1942, Ellis Arnall campaigns on the fact that state boards and agencies should be made, or many of them should be made constitutional boards—

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: --to remove them from politics and the possibility of gubernatorial influence. Do you agree with that concept?

TALMADGE: It has some good features and bad features. Actually, you need some official in government to hold responsible for decisions. And when you've got the governor to hold responsible, the people know who to act. But if the, generally, if the Board of Regents makes a decision now, who's responsible? Nobody knows. Board of Education makes a decision. Who's responsible? Nobody knows. Now we know the present situation that Joe Frank Harris appointed a majority of them in both instances. We know he normally would have vast influence with them. But suppose Joe Frank had appointed five out of fifteen, and they make a very unpopular decision. They can't be removed from office; they're not responsible to the people; they've been confirmed by the Senate for the term of seven years... So, it has some good features and bad features about it. I got along extremely well with the Board of

Regents. I appointed [Hughes] Hugh Spalding as chairman of the Board of Regents and during the time I served as governor every decision of the Board of Regents was unanimous. I've often thought Hugh Spalding should have been ambassador to the Soviet Union [HENDERSON laughs] because anyone that could get unanimity during the time that we had the segregation battles and all of that--unbelievable.

HENDERSON: Did you have any confrontations or strong disagreements with any of these constitutional boards that had been established as a result of Ellis Arnall's administration?

TALMADGE: I didn't have any serious one. I appointed two people on the game and fish commission, and they suddenly decided that I was a politician and they were statesmen and they were going to run it. And I had to send them word: Now, if you want a showdown with me, we'll have one. I control the budget and you don't. And then that was the end of that.

HENDERSON: Well, are you saying that one way that the governor can control the constitutional board is by the budgetary process?

TALMADGE: Sure, sure. I don't know what the budget law is now. I haven't looked at it recently. But in the old days, the governor had to put his signature on a budget to pay your salary.

HENDERSON: Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller once wrote that you were the most popular governor Georgia ever had.

TALMADGE: I think that's probably true.

HENDERSON: Why do you think that was the case?

TALMADGE: Well, they could see everywhere in the county. You take Tift County; you could see new school buildings in your primary schools, your high schools, your colleges. You could see new roads all over the county. You could see a new hospital in the county. They could see those tangible results. And then I never got far from the people. I made about five speeches a week when I was governor. I'd speak somewhere nearly every afternoon. I was all over the state all the time. They could see me and they could see the results. And what I was saying to them was what they wanted to hear.

HENDERSON: During your governorship, I'm sure you had some criticism. Who were some of the people that were criticizing what you were doing?

TALMADGE: Well, of course, those people strongly in favor of integration were my principal critics and most of them have passed away now. [Charles Latimer] Charlie Gowen was one of my critics in the General Assembly. He, afterwards, became a great friend of mine. [He] supported me strongly when I was in the Senate. [Of] course, M.E. was my critic and Ellis was my critic in those days. Atlanta newspapers were my critics. Some of the other newspapers--not many, it was largely centered in Atlanta. That was the principal critic. The die-hard anti-Talmadge folks was what it boiled down to.

HENDERSON: As governor, how thick a skin did you have? If you picked up an Atlanta newspaper and there was an editorial attacking your leadership, did it get to you?

TALMADGE: If a man is going to fool with politics, he has to shed that sort of stuff just like a duck sheds water. And I did. It never did get to me.

HENDERSON: Governors—

TALMADGE: I guess I inherited my father's thick hide.

HENDERSON: Governors in recent years have actively tried to recruit industry for our state. Did you ever engage in any such endeavors?

TALMADGE: Yes. I never went overseas to do it, but I made trips all over the United States from time to time.

HENDERSON: Were you successful in those efforts?

TALMADGE: Yes, yes. In fact, we led the southeast five years out of the six that I was governor in industrial progress.

HENDERSON: I don't think I could have an interview without, with you, without discussing the county unit system because it played such a major role in politics during this period of time. How did the county unit system influence state politics?

TALMADGE: Well, I'll start from the origin. Now, you're a student of history and you probably know this. Roman law was carried to Great Britain, you know. Great Britain decided that every tribe ought to have representation and they had representation in the Parliament without reference to population. The great debate in the constitutional convention was the creation of the electoral college, representation in the Senate and representation in the House. So there was a compromise, as you know. Give each state two senators regardless of size. And the electoral college would be predicated and then the House would be based on population. And then the electoral college would be the sum total of the two—senators flushed the house so that each state would have effective representation. That was brought to Georgia with party regulation, the county unit system, and it was written into law in our state, as I recall, in 1917 by the Neil Primary Act. Originally, it was thirty counties [that] would have four unit votes, 121 would have two unit votes, and six or eight, I've forgotten which, would have six unit votes. The idea being that no matter how small a county may be or how sparse its population might be, [it] would have some effective results in the election of a governor. Well, you couldn't totally ignore Echols County [Georgia]. Now, I'll give you a result that happened in other states without that system. So, Tennessee and Georgia and Maryland had a sort of a county unit system. New York state had none. When [John Foster] Dulles ran for the United States Senate against Herbert Lehman, if I remember the statistics accurately, Dulles carried fifty-seven counties and Herbert Lehman

carried either two or three. At that time Tammany Hall was run in New York, so Tammany Hall elected the United States senator in New York state. They had had some sort of county unit system that couldn't have happened. The county unit system, in effect, broke down every political machine at the county line, whatever it may be. That was what the county unit system was designed to do and what it effectively did for many years. I saw it was getting outdated, and I suggested to them before the Supreme Court abolished it, they ought to change it somewhat to give more results to population. But they did not do so, and the Supreme Court had outlawed it. So, you see what happened now with the race between [Mack Francis] Mattingly and me, of course, the county unit system never applied to a general election, only the primaries. Mattingly, as I recall, carried nineteen or twenty, or maybe thirty counties. I carried 100 and some odd, but he got huge majorities in the Atlanta area where the Atlanta newspapers were beating my brains out, and when new voters would come in from all over the nation [who] didn't know a damn thing about Herman Talmadge except what they read in the papers. And that's the crowd that beat me and elected Mattingly, and you see the result. They elected—they defeated a qualified man and elected an unqualified man.

HENDERSON: It's been said that under the county unit system instead of having one state-wide election—

TALMADGE: You have 159. Sure, you do.

HENDERSON: Now, how did--how do you campaign?

TALMADGE: You have fifty elections for president.

HENDERSON: How do you campaign, then, in a situation like that?

TALMADGE: You campaign all over the state. You don't ignore any portion of it. That's the reason candidates for governor would go to Echols County [Georgia], which they don't do now.

HENDERSON: But does the so-called "courthouse crowd" play a more important role than, say, today?

TALMADGE: They probably did. But the courthouse crowd did not total counties. Sometimes you win counties by running against the courthouse crowd.

HENDERSON: While you were governor, you unsuccessfully sought to amend the state--or have the state constitution amended to extend the county unit system to general elections.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: Why were you in support of that?

TALMADGE: For the reason that I gave you, to break down every political machine at the county line.

HENDERSON: In 1955, you wrote a book, *You and Segregation*, in which you defended white supremacy, states rights, and so forth.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: Have you ever regretted writing that book?

TALMADGE: Well, if I were writing it today, I wouldn't do it. [laughter]

HENDERSON: Dr.—Well, let me ask one other question. Why did you write that book in 1955?

TALMADGE: Well, I was getting ready to run for the Senate, and I guess, primarily as a campaign doctrine.

HENDERSON: Dr. Roger [Nelson] Pajari and his paper presented at the Governor's Symposium [Abraham Baldwin Symposium on History and Government] at ABAC [Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Tifton, Georgia] said that you were very successful in bringing about economic modernization in the state of Georgia, but that you failed or that you opposed efforts to provide first-class citizenship for black citizens of Georgia.

TALMADGE: I guess he was correct in that, and George Washington and Abraham Lincoln made the same mistake. I was carrying out the will of the people and the will and the laws of the people at the time that I served.

HENDERSON: You've had the unique experience of serving both as governor and as a United States senator. Of the two, which one do you prefer?

TALMADGE: Oh, Governor. [The] governor can make a decision and execute it. Senator can make a decision and talk about it. [HENDERSON chuckles] There's a vast difference.

HENDERSON: Now, that leads me up to the 1966 election in Georgia. Would you discuss your feelings there? I believe you thought about the possibility of returning home from the Senate and running for the governorship.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: Would you discuss that situation?

TALMADGE: I don't think anyone who'd ever been a strong governor ever felt completely comfortable as a senator. If you were governor and a real leader and can get cooperation of the people and the General Assembly--and the key to getting the cooperation of the General Assembly is really whether you've got the people with you or not--you can do things and feel

very good about it. But when you go to Washington, [in the] first place, a senator's one out of 100, and you don't have a voice in the House and no vote. And you've got no voice and no vote in the White House. And to get something done you've got to have consensus of opinion in the Senate, the House, and the approval of the president, which is a mammoth undertaking.

And [Samuel Ernest] Ernie Vandiver [Jr.] was slated to be governor. I was supporting him and he was a lead-pipe sense to be reelected—I mean, to be elected. He'd been out for four years, and he called me one day and says, "Herman, I want to see you." [He] says, "When can I come up to Washington?" And I says, "Well, when do you want to come?" He says, "Tomorrow all right?" I says, "Yeah. Where you coming in?" He says, "Dulles." He gave me his flight number and his plane, and I met him out there about day light. We went back to my house in northwest Washington. He says, "My doctor tells me that if I run for governor that I'll probably lose my life on account of my heart." And [he] says, "I got some young children I've got to look after, and I can't afford to take that chance." [He] says, "You've got to come home and run for governor." I threw up a trial balloon, and it was the most interesting reaction I ever had in my life. We lawyers called the rank and file of the people: the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. That's the great masses of the people. In a course of about forty-eight hours, I probably had about 10,000 letters, telegrams, and telephone calls. Virtually every politician in the state, black and white, liberal, reactionary and moderate says, "Please come home and run." It was virtually unanimous among the politicians. But what we call masses of the people, the reaction was exactly the opposite. And here's the way they reasoned it: [they] says You've just been in Washington long enough to begin to render some real service. [They] says

[Richard (Dick) B.] Dick Russell's [Jr.] not getting any younger, and we don't want two rookies in the Senate at the same time. We want you to stay in Washington and look after our interests there. The governorship is just about degenerated into a federal clerkship. And they were correct. So, I decided to stay with the people and against the politicians.

HENDERSON: You received a good bit of press comment, especially when you went to the Senate about your rising early in the morning.

TALMADGE: Yes.

HENDERSON: Where did that come from?

TALMADGE: The press comment?

HENDERSON: No. Where did the idea of you getting up at four o'clock in the morning...?

TALMADGE: Well, I was born and reared on a farm and lived there until my senior year in high school. And living on a farm in south Georgia in those days meant working from daylight to dark. I don't ever remember eating breakfast except by lamplight. We had no REA [Rural Electrification Administration, Washington, D.C.] in those days. And I formed that early getting up habit as a child. And when I got to the University of Georgia, I lived in a fraternity house which was quite noisy at night, and I liked to do a lot of the things college boys did in those days, and I found that my mind functioned best in the morning and always

had quiet in the morning. So, I could get up and study in absolute quietness in the morning. That was particularly true when I got in law school. We didn't have near as many law books in the library in those days as we have now. Sometimes there'd be several names on a waiting list for one book. The law library would open in those days at seven [o'clock] a.m. And I'd always be at the law library at seven a.m., the librarian and me. That's when I did my studying in law school. Then I went off into the navy. [On] my first ship, I was a division officer. I had to stand watches seven days a week, twelve hours a day, plus run a division. [On] my second ship, I was executive officer of an attack transport. [It] took about eighteen hours a day to run that ship. When I got back, my daddy was running for governor again. [It] took about eighteen hours a day to get him elected. Then I got in politics on my own accord. [It] took about eighteen hours a day for me to get elected. Then I got in the governor's office, and I found the only time I had a chance to think and make decisions and prepare remarks for speeches was before other people got up. Otherwise, my time was taken up with people doing business with the state. So, when I got to the Senate, that habit was too firmly engrained to break.

HENDERSON: I think I've got this—

[Cassette: Side 2]

HENDERSON: Senator, since you've been governor, campaigning for state office in Georgia has changed a good bit. I wonder if you'd compare the differences campaigning when you were governor and modern day campaigning practices.

TALMADGE: Well, it's certainly hadn't improved the quality of the people that have been elected. Back in the old days you would go out from court house to court house, face the people, look 'em in the eye. They'd look you in the eye. Hecklers would get after you. You could size up the man and separate 'em from the boys. But this new method of campaigning really came with the advent of television. And it originated out in California. They hire a media man now, and he takes charge of the total campaign. He raises the money; he writes the little short slogans that you post on an idiot board that anyone with a fifth-grade education can read; and he tells you how to fix your hair, what color ties to wear, what color shirts to wear, what sort of suit to wear. And the whole thing is an advertising event, sort of like selling chewing gum or soap.

Now, I read a book that was written by one of these pioneers out in the California area about this new method of campaigning. And he had--this book I read about twenty-five years ago--he had some candidate, he was either running for the city commission or the county commission of Los Angeles County [California]. [He] came in and wanted him to take charge of his campaign. He sized the man up as a complete fool immediately, but evidently he needed money very badly, so he took over his campaign. The man's name was Mulligan. He sent Mulligan out of town for the duration of the campaign. Mulligan never shook a hand, he never made a speech, never wrote a letter, never held a press conference. Mulligan was hid during the whole duration of the campaign and the theme of the whole campaign was "three cheers for Mulligan." Mulligan led the ticket. He got more votes than any man on the ballot. That's your new method of politics.

HENDERSON: Governor, if you had to pick out the most difficult problem of your governorship to deal with, what would it be?

TALMADGE: Well, of course, the segregation issue. We had the overwhelming views of the people of Georgia that wanted to retain segregation, probably ninety percent of the white people. Probably none of the negroes, maybe a very small percentage, but ninety percent of the whites wanted to maintain our pattern of segregation. Dual schools is what I'm talking about when I mean segregation. And it was the law of the land. It had been the custom for 200 years, historically, all the time. And then suddenly we were faced with the power and force of the federal government on the other hand, and it was just as explosive an issue as our forefathers faced in 1861. Fortunately, we came through it with much better results. That was far and away the most difficult problem.

HENDERSON: If you had to pick out one experience that you think would be the most rewarding experience that you've had as governor, what would that be?

TALMADGE: Gosh, there were so many rewarding experiences. I don't know that I could pick out one to the exclusion of the other. Probably the most rewarding thing that occurred during my administration was the industrial development that occurred in our state from '48 to '55 when we led--virtually, when we led every southern state in that development five years out of six. Almost daily I would go out and dedicate a new factory somewhere. And that was almost a daily occurrence. And that gave job opportunities to thousands and thousands of people that could no longer find jobs elsewhere because the tractors had

changed the agricultural economy of our state. One man with a tractor could do the work of probably fifteen men with mules.

HENDERSON: During your governorship, what was your relationship with the federal government?

TALMADGE: I got along very well with the federal government except in that one area of confrontation on our laws. I got along well with federal officials. I don't know that we ever had a difficulty in any issue except the dual system of schools.

HENDERSON: What were some of the privileges and benefits such as salaries, etcetera, that one had as governor while you were in the governor's office?

TALMADGE: Well, of course, the salary when I was governor was \$12,000 a year. And I was elected with a \$12,000 salary. The legislature tried to raise my salary in the '50s. I declined to accept it. I figured it was at least if it wasn't embedded in the constitution, it was certainly the spirit of the constitution that your salary couldn't be increased for the term for which you were elected. There's \$10,000 or \$12,000 in the state treasury right now to my credit.

I also had to pay for all of the food. There was only \$500 a month allotted for the maintenance of the mansion, servant hire. And that was all: \$6,000 a year. That wouldn't even maintain a modest home in Tifton today, and yet that was only emolument that I received outside the \$12,000 a year salary. And on the other hand, I had the National Guard

at my command and I flew in National Guard planes. I didn't buy any planes. All these governors now who have got a whole fleet of planes. People fly all over Georgia every day, even members of the state legislature and all state House officials have an airplane at their beck and call. I didn't have that. I flew in a National Guard plane because the National Guard officers have to fly a certain number of hours a month to maintain their proficiency. And that's what I used. I had a state patrolman driving me and I had a car. I believe it was loaned to me by one of the automotive companies, and I guess you'd get in the chain gang for that offense now. I didn't consider it a bribe. I believe that Ford Motor Company made a car available and about every six months they'd pick up a new one. I didn't consider anything wrong with it. I guess they thought it was good advertising to have a governor riding in a Ford, and it was. [HENDERSON chuckles] And that was the emoluments that went with the office.

HENDERSON: In recent months—

TALMADGE: [Of] course everywhere I went, people wouldn't let me pay for food. They wouldn't let me pay for hotel rooms. That's one of the things the Ethics Committee got after me about. I'd stay at the [Best Western] American Motel [Atlanta, Georgia] and Atlantan Hotel [Atlanta, Georgia]. My friend Marvin Goldstein operated it, and he never would let me pay for my room. Ethics Committee got after me about it and thought I was a criminal because of his generosity.

HENDERSON: In recent weeks there's been a controversy about the governor's emergency fund. Did you have an emergency fund while you were in office?

TALMADGE: Yes, I had an emergency fund, but I don't remember using it for any purpose except true emergencies. It wasn't just an ordinary event like outfitting a baseball team. I never spent any of that. [laughs]

HENDERSON: The budget of the state of Georgia today is rather large. What kind of money are we talking back during your period of time?

TALMADGE: When I took office as governor, the total budget of the state was \$125 million a year. When I left office as governor, even after putting in the sales tax, the budget was \$225 million a year, and I left a greater surplus in the treasury than I found when I went in office. The budget for the state now is \$3 or 4 billion a year. It's increased about thirty-fold. [It has] really increased more than the federal budget.

HENDERSON: How about the size of the state bureaucracy. Was there a leap in—

TALMADGE: It was increased to . . . many fold. I don't know how much.

HENDERSON: But during your administration, was there a significant increase or...?

TALMADGE: I don't believe it was significant, but of course there was some increase because we were doing so many more things. We were building more roads and bridges. We were building hospitals and health centers and we had more prison camps and things of that nature. There was some increase, but I don't know how significant it was.

HENDERSON: I would imagine that every politician, every governor, has some amusing instant to happen while they're in office. Can you think of the most amusing instant that happened to you as governor?

TALMADGE: I can give you one of the most amusing instances that happened. Benton Odom, my executive secretary, brought me a letter in there about I guess around '51, '52 written pen and ink, reasonably tasteful blue stationary. [He] says, "Governor," he says, "I don't know how to answer this letter. You'll have to answer it yourself." [Zachary Daniel] Zach Cravey, the comptroller general, was sitting in my office at the time. I read the letter; I didn't crack a smile. I handed it over to Zach. Here's what the letter said: "Dear Governor, As I was born and reared on a farm in Hancock County [Georgia]. And like all farm girls, I had to work hard to help support my family. Several months ago I started going with my present husband. It soon became serious. He asked me if I was a virgin and I told him I was. Now that we're married, he doesn't believe I was a virgin at the time of marriage. I wonder if you'd permit me to use the state's lie detection equipment to prove to him that I was a virgin at the time of marriage." I handed it to Zach. I says, "Zach, read this." I looked at him real stern-like. I didn't crack a smile. I says, "I'm going to appointment you chairman of the commission to look into this thing." "Oh good God, Governor, don't do that," he said.

[laughs] So, I teased Zach about it. [HENDERSON chuckles] And then I rang for my secretary and I dictated the reply. I says, "If you, in company with your husband, will present this letter to Lieutenant [Bernard Greenleaf] Bonnie Ragsdale who's in charge of the states polygraphic equipment, we'll be happy to comply with your request." I sent Ragsdale a copy of my letter and her original over there. I didn't hear anymore about it until two, three, four weeks later. George [Woodrow] Wilson who was director of state patrol was in the office, and I asked him about it. He started laughing. [He] said, "A real pretty girl came in there with this big double-jointed fellow in a brand new Cadillac." [He] said, "Ragsdale strapped her up in the polygraphic equipment." He was asking the questions. The husband butted in at about that point, and he took charge. [He] started naming names and dates and places. [He] said the needle flicked pretty hard at the mention of one name. Ragsdale pronounced the test negative. They left arm-in-arm, very happy. [HENDERSON laughs] I had many things similar to that happen to me when I was governor.

HENDERSON: Governor, there's some politicians that seem like when they're in office, they really don't enjoy the office. Did you enjoy being governor?

TALMADGE: Oh, I did, yes. Many politicians are lazy, physically. And that doesn't fit the job. You can't be lazy physically and work 100 hours a week under stressful conditions. Many people don't even like to make decisions on minor trivialities, let alone major things. Making a major decision just tears the guts out of 'em. They don't like that. Many politicians really don't like people. They mix and mingle with them because they have to. I enjoyed it all. That's what made me, I think, much more successful than most of them.

HENDERSON: When your term expires in '54, you, not in the governor's office for—or you leave the governor's office—did you ever consider waiting out four years and then running for the governorship later on?

TALMADGE: I gave it a little thought. I toyed with the idea once of running for commissioner of agriculture and staying home during that interim, because you know I was very interested in farming. I was farming and I flirted with that idea some, but I gave it up pretty soon.

HENDERSON: Why did you make the decision to become a senatorial candidate in 1956?

TALMADGE: Well, during my early studies of history, I'd read about Daniel Webster and Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun all the giants that'd served in the Senate and how they'd influenced our history. And I thought if I ever wanted to hold public office, I wanted to be a United States senator. And then when we went to Chicago in 1952 to try to nominate Dick Russell for governor [*sic*] I appointed all the delegates as governor of the state and I appointed every member of the congressional delegation. And I think as I recall Senator [Walter Franklin] George was—I know he was on the delegation. He and I were sitting around one day in Chicago talking, just the two of us. And he told me, I've forgotten whether he said Herman or governor, says, "I have no idea that I'll seek reelection." [He] says, "Of course, some unforeseeable circumstance could cause me to change my mind, but I have no idea that that will occur." [He] says, "I hope you'll run to succeed me and if you do,

I'll be happy to take the stump for you if you wish me to do so." [He] says, "I presume that Ellis Arnall will be your opponent." And I thanked him. And then when I got back I started thinking about that and the more I thought about it the more it appealed to me. So I get up and run for the Senate. And of course, Senator George changed his mind which he had a perfect right to do. In fact, he told me that he might change his mind. But he switched from chairman in the finance committee to chairman of foreign relations. Dulles was secretary of state. George got the idea that he was carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders as chairman of the foreign relations committee. So, he changed his mind but fortunately changed it again before qualifying time. And I'm glad he did because it would have been a bitter campaign. It would have divided brothers and fathers and sons and everything else. The way it finally wound up, I went to the Senate with about a three to one majority carrying every county in the state. I wouldn't have done that against Senator George. I would have won, and won strongly, but it wouldn't have been anything like that majority.

HENDERSON: Now here is a senator that defeated your father back in 1938. Did it ever cross your mind that you would like to take home the man that defeated your father, perhaps to redeem the Talmadge name?

TALMADGE: No, that never occurred to me with Senator George. It did occur to me about one other state House official. My father had picked up [Thomas Mercer] Tom Linder, made him first his executive secretary, made him commissioner of agriculture in 1934, and then Tom Linder got beaten in '36 along with Russell and the New Deal landslide. And my father picked up Tom Linder again and made him commissioner of agriculture in 1940. And then

Tom Linder deserted my daddy in 1942. I paid him back in '46. That's the only public official I ever intended to pay back if I could and I did.

HENDERSON: After you leave the governorship did you ever play a role in any subsequent gubernatorial campaigns?

TALMADGE: Oh, yes. I was responsible to a very strong degree for the election of Marvin Griffin and Ernie Vandiver. That was the last gubernatorial campaign I got involved in.

HENDERSON: Now when you say "getting involved," how would you get involved?

TALMADGE: Pass the word to key leaders throughout the state and they'd pass the word to others. We had, in those days, a very powerful organization that considered themselves Talmadge folks in Georgia. In fact, it was invention at that time.

HENDERSON: I think it's fair to say that your strongest support was in the rural areas of the state.

TALMADGE: Yes, it was stronger than the urban areas.

HENDERSON: And because of the way the county unit system was set up that worked to your benefit.

TALMADGE: It was an advantage, but I never did lose the popular vote either.

HENDERSON: Well, that was my next question. Do you think there would have been a Herman Talmadge in the governorship if there had not been a county unit system?

TALMADGE: Oh, yes. Yes.

HENDERSON: Did the county unit system make it much easier for you to obtain the governorship?

TALMADGE: I would say that I was stronger in the rural areas than I was in the urban areas, but I got enough votes in the rural areas to offset whatever losses I had in the urban areas. And when I went to the Senate, I carried every county in the state, urban and rural, and repeated that for several terms in the Senate. And I always got my share of the urban votes, even in '48 and '50.

HENDERSON: You certainly are going to be remembered as one of Georgia's great governors. How do you think historians and Georgians in future years will remember Herman Talmadge, the governor?

TALMADGE: Depends on whether they read my interview with you or the Atlanta press. And if they believe mine, they will think I was one of the great governors of all time. And if

they read the Atlanta newspaper files, they'll think I'm one of the great scoundrels of all time. History's based by the sources of the material, as you know.

HENDERSON: Governor, this has been fascinating.

TALMADGE: The pleasure's been mine [chuckles].

HENDERSON: We have gone through all my questions.

TALMADGE: I think you have.

HENDERSON: And I appreciate it very much.

TALMADGE: You're welcome. That took a little over two and half hours. Well, you want to head back or ride around the farm a little?

HENDERSON: Listen, I want to ride around your farm.

[End of Interview]

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