

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 04F
Samuel Ernest Vandiver Jr. Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Part F)
Date: 09-15-93
Cassette #448 (87 Min.)

EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Vandiver: We flew on our National Guard plane. Jimmy [James Allen William] would hear about it and he'd want to go with us. And he was such a personable fellow and such a likable fellow that we always tried to make room for Jimmy. We went to a civil defense conference down in Puerto Rico. At that time, of course, we were concerned with the missile crisis in Cuba, and civil defense was a very important part of our government during that period. Jimmy went with us on this particular trip. We went to San Juan, Puerto Rico, which is a city of several million. It's the biggest city in Puerto Rico.

The mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico was a lady, Madame Felicia. And somebody in the conference told the mayor that we had a mayor from the United States that was at the conference. So she called and asked that the mayor from the United States come and discuss municipal problems with her. And so he was greatly pleased and put on his best suit and had a flower in his lapel and his tie. He smoked big cigars. And he went over to visit with the mayor, mayoress, of San Juan, Puerto Rico.

She invited him into the office to have a seat, and she asked him, "Mr. Mayor, do you have great problems with your city garbage and waste?" He said, "Why, no, Mayor Felicia, we don't have any great problems with it. We handle it very efficiently." She said, "Well, what about law enforcement? Do you have any great difficulty with security and law enforcement?" He said, "No, we don't have any problems." And she asked about other municipal problems,

and he didn't have any problems at all. Finally, she said, "Mr. William, just how large is your city of Darien?" He took a big puff on his cigar and leaned back and he said, "Mayor Felicia, the population of my city is something under fifty thousand." [Laughter] It was really something under five hundred or six hundred.

He was a great personable friend. He did a lot of things that were so amusing that he kept everybody laughing during the periods of great stress. I don't know what we would have done without Jimmy because he brought a lot of humor to the administration. I know on that same trip. . . . On another trip that we went to a governors' conference in San Juan. It was the practice of governors to bring some gift that is indigenous to their state.

Since Georgia was the peach state, we decided that we would get a crate of peaches for each of the forty-eight governors at that time. Really we had the governor of Puerto Rico, who was not officially a governor of a state but of a territory. So we got up a crate of peaches for each of the governors to carry and put on the plane and carry over there. So we flew to San Juan, and we got over there, and Jimmy was so excited. I put him in charge of the peaches. He was so excited at being in Puerto Rico that he forgot about the peaches. And the weather in Puerto Rico is hot. And he went right on into town and forgot about the peaches. Well, he thought about them the next day. It had been a real hot day in San Juan, and when he got out there, every one of those peaches was just spoiled.

He finally was able to get up about fifty peaches that were not spoiled 'cause they'd been in the airplane. The airplane was hot. The weather was hot. And so he carried one peach to each governor and said, "My government brought you a crate of peaches." And said, "I let them spoil in the airplane." And said, "I'm just bringing you a sample and please don't tell my

government that you didn't get your crate of peaches. [Laughter] They got a big kick out of that.

We were coming back to the United States we thought we'd stop in the Dominican Republic. It was right on the way back to the United States. And at that time [Rafael Leonidas] Trujillo [Molina] was the dictator of the Dominican Republic. And I told Jimmy as my aide, I said, "Talk with the local consul and see if we can arrange a visit. We'd like to just take a look at the country." It was much in the news at that time.

And what was also in the news was he [Trujillo] had two sons. One of them was a general of the air force, and one of them was a general of the army, the Dominican Republic Army, and they had come and studied at the War College in the United States and at our air university, so they were quite well-schooled in the military and were part of Trujillo's government there, his two sons were. In fact, I think one of the sons went with some of the movie actresses, made a lot of news in the United States. Well, Jimmy didn't know about that. He hadn't read much about the Dominican Republic, and so he talked with the consul of the Dominican Republic, and he says, "Does your governor want to talk with the presidente, or would he like to talk to his sons (who were the military chiefs of staff)?" And Jimmy reared back and said, "My governor don't want to talk to no chillun." Said, "He wants to talk to the head man." [Laughter]

Anyway, we didn't stop in the Dominican Republic. The State Department advised us against it. They thought it might be dangerous. So we didn't stop on our way back, and we didn't get to talk to those chillun either. He had, it was just one funny story after another. We went to a civil defense congress, General [George J.] Hearn and I, down in Mississippi, in

Biloxi, and after the conference was concluded one day, we decided since it was fairly close to New Orleans that we'd run down there and get a good meal in New Orleans, which is famous for its great food. And we did that. Jimmy always did the driving. He was a good driver, and we let him be our chauffeur.

So we went down and ate a good meal in New Orleans, and we were coming back. Jimmy was driving, and I was in the back seat. I was about half asleep, nearly asleep after that big meal. And General Hearn was sitting to his right, and he was asleep. Well, Jimmy got to going pretty fast, and he went through one of those little Mississippi towns so fast that he got stopped by the local police. And he said, "Boy, why are you in such a hurry? It's late at night here." He said, "Well," said, "See that fellow over there sitting by me?" Said, "He's the adjutant general of the state of Georgia. See that fellow back in the back seat? He's lieutenant governor. We're on official business, and we're heading back to Biloxi." And the officer said, "And who are you?" He said, "I am chairman of the March of Dimes of Macintosh County." So we all had our official positions. He kept everybody in stitches, really.

Henderson: Governor, let me ask you, what did you enjoy most about being governor?

Vandiver: The great opportunity to meet people from other states, the opportunity to visit with other governors. It was always a very pleasant experience to get away from the grind of the governor's office. To attend these conferences. To get to know the other governors and compare what they were doing in their state with what you were doing and try get ideas from them that might be effective in your state. It was always very pleasant, and the governors of the states that hosted the convention did everything they could to make it a pleasant experience.

Another thing I enjoyed was the fact that I had known a lot of people in the National Guard and in college and prep school, everywhere I'd been, and the opportunity to keep up with these people that other people didn't have because they didn't go into their areas. The governor travels into every part of the state, and I got to keep up with my old school friends, and my friends in the National Guard, and the friends that I had made over the years. That's one thing that I miss very much, that now that I'm seventy-five years old and don't get to travel quite as much as I used to, is the opportunity of keeping up with old friends. Frankly, at my age, a lot of my old friends are not there, that I was able to visit. You, as you get older, if you don't have some young friends, you're almost out of luck, 'cause you outlive your old ones. [Laughter] You outlive your enemies, too. That's one good thing about it.

Henderson: Did you enjoy the pomp and circumstance of being governor?

Vandiver: It was an experience that I had observed, being lieutenant governor and being adjutant general. It was an exhilarating experience. I think to have the honor given to you by the people of your state to be their governor and their number one citizen is exhilarating. Frankly, a lot of the pomp and circumstance I thought was unnecessary, but it was traditional, and we didn't have all the parades and things that some of the governors had, but we did have the twenty-one gun salute after inauguration and the exhilaration of becoming, having the honor of being your state's governor is a great experience. I appreciated the fact that the people of Georgia let me do that and to try to repay them by trying to do a good job.

Henderson: What did you find least desirable about being governor?

Vandiver: Well, you had situations probably with your legislation where people who you thought were your friends actually would go back on you on particular legislation. They'd

tell you they were going to vote for you and then they'd go into the House or the Senate and vote the other way. Those disappointments . . . in some of the friendships and associations. The fact that in a recession everybody wants a job. They seem to think that a state job is the greatest thing in the world. In actuality it isn't, but they seem to think so.

When I was trying to economize, I had to let a lot of people go, and then they would bring in delegations and would want to put them back to work and get their job back. And we were trying to, it was hard to run politically an efficient administration because of the bureaucracy. Those that are entrenched, if they lose their job, you meet delegation after delegation trying to get it back, and that's not a very pleasant experience, particularly if you don't have the money to hire them back. We had an economy administration. We were trying to run the state efficiently and economically.

Henderson: You mentioned the grind of the governor's office. What do you mean by that?

Vandiver: Well, I usually got to the office around eight or eight-thirty in the morning and I would have delegation after delegation coming in, each with a different problem. And they don't want to see the department head that handles their business. Everybody wants to see the governor. They've got to see the governor. They've got to go back home and say, "Well, I talked with the governor." And it puts a great burden on the man who's trying to run a state. And he has to spend so much time meeting delegation after delegation after delegation that have, each one with a special project, each one that thinks theirs is more important than anything else. And by the time you've spent eight hours talking to delegation after delegation, it's hard to remember your own name. You just get worn out, exhausted completely.

I had a lot of that, particularly in the first part of my administration. There were people that had supported me that thought since they had supported me they ought to continue doing the things that they'd been doing. And we just didn't have the finances to do it. We were changing the state government. We were changing the Purchasing Department, the Revenue Department, to try to make them run more efficiently and honestly. And you always had somebody, some good friend that brought another good friend in that wanted some special favor. You try to do the best you can, be as nice to them as you can, but it does get awful wearing on a person.

Henderson: Did you find being governor was an eight-hour and a five-day week, or was it more involved than that?

Vandiver: It was more a twenty-hour day because you didn't, it didn't stop when you left the office. Your work continued when you went to the mansion because you were on the phone a great deal of the time. I would say [an] eighteen- to twenty-hour a day job is what it is. It's hard to get away. You leave your office, go to the mansion, and your job is still going on. You're on duty twenty-four hours a day, and you try to do as much as you can within the hours of the day that you are physically able to work.

Henderson: Now, how large was your office staff?

Vandiver: Well, compared to the staff today, it was not very large. I had an executive secretary. I had a receptionist. I had, during the legislature, I'd have three or four aides that had to help the legislators as they came with their problems. I had an assistant attorney general that was assigned to me to handle executive matters. I had bookkeepers and secretaries, who worked in the back of the office to answer mail and keep all the correspondence. And I had

people that had to do some research. When you make speeches, you don't want to make an inaccurate statement, so you have to research everything that you do and everything that you say because you can be made to look ridiculous if you give a wrong statistic. But my office was comparatively small. We didn't have any surplus people in the executive department.

Henderson: What was your relationship to the press?

Vandiver: I had a very good relationship with the press. They were kind to me. They understood the pressure that I was under from all of these court suits. Gene [Eugene] Patterson, who was editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, had been a friend of one of my close friends here in Lavonia, George Beasley, had gone to Dahlonega [North Georgia College] together, and I had got to know Gene many years prior to that, and he later became editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Gene was a very understanding sort of person.

Jack [Johnson] Spalding, who was editor of the *Atlanta Journal*, was a friend and understanding. He knew the problems we had and what we were trying to do, and he knew that we were trying to do what was right. And they would give me a good press. When I'd make mistakes, they'd certainly point them out. It's an adversarial relationship usually between the press and the governor, chief executive, but I did try to keep the press informed on everything that we did. I, Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] and I, when I was lieutenant governor, we had an annual quail dinner that we called it, and we invited the working members of the press, and we'd come out and enjoy a big meal with quail and a lot of conversation, off-the-record conversation that you could discuss with the press. If it was off the record and would give them a lead to write a story; it was helpful to them.

And in those days the press was, if you told the press that what you were telling them was off the record, they wouldn't print it. That's not true today. Everything that's said or done or even thought about almost is wide open, and you can't talk off the record about a problem to the press because they'll tell you, "I can't take it off the record."

And I started the Open Records Law. That was another part of my administration which gave the press access to part of the state's business that they had not had before. And that was another thing that we were able to do. And I think it was because it was right that somebody needs to know what's going on in state government and they ought to have the access to the departments and the parts of state government that give them a chance to write a true story rather than making up some story, some character assassination. It has been done.

Henderson: These quail dinners that you mentioned, did that continue on while you were governor?

Vandiver: Yes, we did. We continued that on with the working press, the people who came to the Capitol every day that we'd had press conferences. We had a dinner each year, a quail dinner. We'd get some friend in south Georgia to round us up some quail, and we'd meet with them and just enjoy a very pleasant personal relationship. I know Celestine Sibley at that time was covering the Capitol. She is such a delightful person. Reg Murphey, who represented the Macon paper at that time. Charlie [Charles] Pou was an *Atlanta Journal* reporter. Bill [William M.] Bates was the political editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*. We had the Associated Press, UP [United Press], people that I dealt with.

I held a press conference almost every day. I didn't just have one every once in a while. If there was something important, we let the press know and gave them the opportunity to write

their story, and we did have an open association with the press, and I think our relationships were on the whole very pleasant. They didn't hesitate if I did something wrong or made some mistake to point it out in the paper, but I understood that. That was part of their job. So we got along very well

Editorially they generally were helpful to me in my administration, which was a big change from what it had been before. The relationship that [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] had with the press and Herman [Eugene] Talmadge had with the press made their job much more difficult than if there had been a friendly association and a one-on-one discussion of problems that maybe they could get a story out of. I would give them an opportunity to do that or try to give the whole press corps that covered the Capitol an opportunity. And so I would have to say that they gave me, they were good to me. I tried to give them every opportunity to pursue their profession, and to give them all the information they needed or wanted. And it was a two-way street. It had not been that way before.

Henderson: If you happened to come across an article, an editorial that was very critical of you or you thought was not justified, did you ever call that reporter up and talk with him?

Vandiver: Yes, I did. I didn't hesitate if somebody had made a mistake or had unjustly criticized me and I thought it was unjust, I would tell them. And they would say, "Okay, you're right." or maybe, "You're wrong, and I still think you're wrong." But we did have a relationship that made my job a whole lot easier.

And, I know, on my seventieth birthday we invited everybody who had worked in the governor's office to come to Lavonia for a barbecue and a little birthday party. We also invited all the members of the press who were at that time covering the Capitol, Charlie Pou, Celestine

Sibley, Bill Bates, and all of them, Reg Murphey--Reg Murphey was not able to come but all the rest of them came, including Bill Shipp came by. He was very late coming in, he came in the very tail end of my administration. I didn't get to know Bill very good, very well, but we invited him and all of them who had covered the Capitol during my eight years as lieutenant governor and governor.

And all the people who were working press, who were there, we had a big birthday party right here in Lavonia and had a great time rehashing old times. Some of them brought some articles that they had written years and years ago. I think I gave you some of those articles that had been written. We talked about maybe having another one on the seventy-fifth anniversary, but we didn't get started quite soon enough, so we delayed that until the eightieth birthday. So we're going to have another one on the eightieth birthday.

Henderson: Well, good.

Vandiver: I hope they're all living.

Henderson: As a politician, would you classify yourself as thin-skinned or thick-skinned? Did you get upset at criticism? Or did you just slough it off?

Vandiver: Nobody likes to hear critical things about themselves or their actions or what they do. I would say I wasn't exactly thin-skinned, and I wasn't exactly thick-skinned. I knew what the situation was when I got into politics, and I expected it, but I would be sort of in the middle. Certain things I would resent particularly when they were at variance with the truth, or what I thought to be the truth, and I'd always try to correct it. And you didn't like it if you thought you were being treated unfairly.

Henderson: Let me change subjects just a little bit. While you were governor, there was an effort to put Phil [James Philander] Campbell [Jr.] on the Board of Regents, create a position on the Board of Regents to put him on. Do you recall that controversy and your stand on that?

Vandiver: Frankly, I do not. Phil was a great friend of mine, has been over the years. I don't recall any great controversy about putting him on the Board of Regents. He had been a very able member, I'll say that. He was a fine commissioner of agriculture and a very able person, but I don't recall that we had any great battle over that.

Henderson: Okay.

Vandiver: A lot of things I don't recall. It's been . . . my memory is not as good as it used to be.

Henderson: This has been several years, sir. Let me ask you then about another bill that you mentioned, the honesty in government act. Why was that necessary?

Vandiver: That was necessary because over the years it had grown up that [if] a man was in the legislature then the executive department would see that he got a job with some either highway department or the agriculture department or some other department. We had men who had conflicts of interest. I remember Ivan Allen [Jr.] supported me, and we had this honesty in government bill which provided that anybody that did business with the state, that was part of their profession and did business and sold things to the state was not eligible to serve on a board or commission that did business with his business.

And Ivan wanted to be on the Board of Regents and asked me if he could be appointed to the Board of Regents, and I gave it consideration, but this honesty in government bill, Bill

Number One, that we introduced prohibited Ivan from serving as a member of the Board of Regents because his company was doing business with almost every department of the state. And I told Ivan that if he would resign his position as president and get out of the business with the state, I'd appoint him, but otherwise I couldn't do it. And he was very disappointed of course. He would have been a good member of the Board of Regents. I realize that. But you have to draw the line somewhere. There are conflicts of interest.

I know members of the state Board of Education. There were people who were members who were doing business with the Board of Education, printing business or some other kind of business. And that's definitely a conflict of interest. And if you've got a conflict of interest, you ought not to hold a position with the state that allows you to have a conflict of interest. That was what that honesty in government bill did, and it cut out a lot of the shenanigans that had been going on in the past.

I know one member of one of the boards who was a contributor to my campaign, a very sizeable contributor to my campaign, came to me after the election and told me what he thought that board ought to do, and he at that time was doing business with the Board of Education. And what I did [is that] I went down to the bank and borrowed the amount of money he had contributed to my campaign and gave him a check and told him that I would appreciate his resignation. And he gave me his resignation. And I could tell you confidentially who he was, but I'm not going to say publicly who he was.

Henderson: Speaking of shenanigans, during your administration, there was a special division set up in the state's law department to investigate alleged improper conduct of officials in the Griffin administration.

Vandiver: Yes, we set up for the first time a criminal section in the department of the attorney general. We picked out two men to head that, joint heads. One of them was Robert [Howell] Hall, who is now a federal judge, is still on the bench in Atlanta. The other one was [Ernest] Freeman Leverett, who is a well-experienced man of high character and ability. I got those two men to head up this division. And we investigated some of these shenanigans that had gone on during the past administration. And they did what I thought was an excellent job. Unfortunately, some of those people went to jail. They committed crimes against the state, and there were more than thirty that served time in jail because of things that they had done that were in violation of the law.

And it put everybody on cue. They knew that if they did something that was in violation of the law that they'd be investigated in a hurry. And I think we, I told you yesterday and I'll repeat again today, I am proud that the purchasing department has not been a department that caused great controversy since my term in office because we changed it. We changed it completely. And we changed it so that everybody had an equal chance to bid on business for the state if they were reliable businessmen, if they didn't just get into a business for the purpose of doing business with the state but had been in business. They had a chance to bid. And we did business with the lowest bidder, whoever it was, whether they supported me or whether they didn't. That made a lot of enemies, which I was glad to make those enemies because they had no business doing business with the state anyway.

But there were about thirty who were convicted of felonies, and I think it's made a better state government since that time. They've been more careful about what they do, although sometimes you run into situations where they don't, there still are miscreants in the state

government, people who, if they get a chance, will do the wrong thing. Just like in any other governmental body. Atlanta's been sorely hit with problems with the airport and bribery and the people who were on the council who were doing business with the city. That's what we were trying to prohibit in the state government, and it's still the law. It's still in business.

Henderson: Governor Griffin accused you of not prosecution but persecuting him for political reasons.

Vandiver: I did not persecute Governor Griffin. Governor Griffin had some people around him who had committed crimes and they were prosecuted. They investigated Governor Griffin in some of the things that he had done, and he came very close to being indicted. He was not indicted, however. The grand jury did not indict him. I think they felt like the governor ought not to be indicted, although there have been some [governors] indicted since then. Most of them were not, no matter what they did. But there were people that committed crimes against the state, and we tried to find out who they were and see that they were tried. And we did. And we don't have the same problems that some of the cities have now. I think it's a result of those statutes that we passed at that time.

Henderson: Now, after leaving the governor's office, what did you do? Did you practice law?

Vandiver: Yes, I practiced law with a firm in Atlanta, old friends. [M.] Cook Barwick and I were in school together, and he asked me to come and join his firm, and I practiced with that firm for about four years, and then after I got sick I had to leave the practice. But later Cook and I formed another firm and practiced together several years. Up until about 1970, I practiced law.

Actually, I've been in public service so much and so long that I haven't had a chance to practice law as most lawyers have. And when you've been in public service a lot of the practice that you get are people that want you to represent them against some department of the state, and that's difficult to do. It's difficult to lobby for a client after you have been on the other side and you have been the chief executive of the state. It's really, to me it represented a conflict of interest in the way I felt. And so I didn't enjoy that sort of practice very much. It was embarrassing lots of times to have a client that had some problem with the state and to have to go to somebody I had appointed years before to try to help them resolve that problem. So I stopped practicing with [anything to do with the state], I wouldn't take any practice with the state. I just didn't feel right. I'd been on the other side too long.

Henderson: Seems like many of the governors who've been lawyers, they stay in Atlanta they become corporate lawyers. That did not appeal to you?

Vandiver: No, it did not appeal to me for several reasons. I was born and raised in the country. I did practice law in Atlanta for several years. I commuted back and forth. It got awfully difficult to drive several times a week back and forth to Atlanta. I wanted to live here. I wanted to raise my family in my hometown with the same hometown virtues and values that I had grown up with, so finally I just gave it up. I decided I didn't want to commute anymore, and I terminated my practice in Atlanta. Did a little practice locally but not very much. I had enough to do without practicing law.

My father had been a farmer and had accumulated some land and cattle and forestlands and real estate, and I really had enough to keep me busy without practicing law. And so I haven't practiced in many years now. My son does and I am emeritus in the firm. My name is

on the stationery, but I'm not actually practicing. And I'm not actively practicing law. I'm inactive.

Henderson: After leaving the governor's office, you get involved with rapid transit in Atlanta to some degree. Would you discuss that?

Vandiver: Yes, Carl [Edward] Sanders asked me to head what was called the Committee of One Hundred. And I did at his request. And we met and talked about rapid transit and tried to, we knew that Atlanta was going to grow and that the streets were going to become so congested that there had to be some method of transportation other than the automobile. You had at that time, and still have to a great extent, one man driving an automobile down into the center of Atlanta. Multiply that by thousands and you've got a constant traffic jam, so it had to be, we had to work out some way if Atlanta was to grow, to build a rapid transit system.

And we did work on it, and I was instrumental in helping Governor Sanders pass that rapid transit law. I did lobby to pass it. We had some resistance. We had resistance out in Cobb County. They didn't want rapid transit coming into Cobb County. They had their reasons for it. It was not always a popular thing to do. But I think the fact that we did work on it and got the laws passed and implemented the system has made those people who have to go to the inner city, it's given them an opportunity to have a way to get there without finding a parking place, which is almost impossible in Atlanta.

And it gave a chance to the people who live in the inner city to go out and work in the suburbs. It worked both ways, but we did have resistance in Cobb County and we had resistance in Gwinnett County. We had less resistance in Clayton County. But I think that the

rapid transit system we got has been workable, although it's not perfect. It has helped the traffic situation in Atlanta, and I was glad to be a part of it. They invited me to make the first [ride], when they made the first rapid transit train trip, and I wanted to go, but at that time I had a conflict and I couldn't go. But I headed that Committee of a Hundred for over a year until we could get the bill passed through the legislature, setting it up. That's a public service. I wasn't paid anything for it. I did it as a volunteer.

Henderson: Since you left the governor's office, could you be a little bit more specific as far as your business interests [are concerned]? Were you a bank directorship, or . . . ?

Vandiver: Yes, I have, my father was a director in the local bank here in Lavonia, I guess for forty years of his life. And after I got elected governor, the president of the bank invited me to serve on the board of directors of this bank, and I did, but because of my busy schedule, I was not able to make the directors' meetings. And then we did something that infuriated a lot of the bankers, but it was for the benefit of the state, and that was when the state [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Vandiver: Deposited money in the various banks around the state, and the banks were not paying any interest. It was just state money and it'd stay there and be used to pay bills and so forth, but the state was not receiving one penny of interest, so we introduced a statute which provided that they would pay the regular rate of interest on any funds that were deposited in those various banks around the state, which made the bankers pretty mad.

It was one of the things that they, one of the ways they could make money was if they had two hundred thousand dollars deposited there [and] no interest had to be paid. And my local banker got so mad at me because of that bill that made him pay interest along with all the other banks in Georgia that he kicked me off the board, and I didn't serve on the board while I was governor after that bill was passed. But when I came back this gentleman had retired, and since I had a great interest in the bank and my father owned stock in it, and I bought some more stock in it and served as chairman of the board of the bank for seventeen years before I retired and sold my stock to one of the other directors.

And during that time I became interested in the Independent Bankers Association. We felt like that the little banks were not getting their fair share of the business and that the big Atlanta banks were getting all the business. We tried . . . and they were gobbling up these little banks, merging with these little banks, and everything seemed to be centered toward the metropolitan area. So I served as vice-president and president of the Independent Bankers Association of Georgia, and we were able to hold off some of this legislation which allowed them to merge with these little banks for a long period of time. But eventually they prevailed and got the laws passed so they could move from county to county and buy up these little banks.

We felt like that these little banks were community banks and that they served the people of the local community and that when they merged with one of the larger banks, they didn't have the same interest in that community that the local bank did. And that was our fight in the legislature. And there again I was active in lobbying against those bills and my salary was zero. Another volunteer effort. I didn't get paid for anything that I did, didn't expect to. I

did it because I thought it was right for these little banks to be preserved, and we still have an independent banking system in Georgia.

I own a bank here. Instead of merging, I sold my stock to the other director, and we still have an independent bank. All the banks in this area are independent. A great many of the banks in Atlanta have been swallowed up by Wachovia, First Union, and Nations Banks, and they've lost that touch with the local people that we felt was helpful to the local communities. Sometimes I felt like I was a leader against lost causes. I lost the battles against the federal court. Finally, we lost the battle against the big banks. They got the legislation through. But we still have a good community banking system in Georgia, which serves the people very well.

Henderson: Governor, who did you support in the 1970 governors race?

Vandiver: Well, the candidates in that race were Carl Sanders and Jimmy [James Earl] Carter [Jr.]. And as I had stated to you previously, I was disappointed in the fact that Carl Sanders, after telling me that he would never run against Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.], became a candidate to the extent that Senator Russell had to get out and start raising campaign funds. So, I still had that in my craw, and Jimmy Carter, I had met four years before, when he'd come over and I'd talked with him about his campaign, giving him some advice on how to run a campaign in Georgia, statewide campaign, and he was a likeable sort of fellow, very friendly, and he came and asked me to support him. And I didn't give him an answer at first.

He had two other friends here in Lavonia. One of them was Bob [Robert] Meredith, who was the automobile dealer that had loaned him cars to use in his campaign, was a good friend of his. Also had an airplane that he flew him around with. And the other was Andy

[Andrew] Hill, who was an attorney here and didn't, wasn't too happy with Sanders either, and so he was supporting Carter. So, I said well, I'm not going to make a decision until I talk with him. And so Bob Meredith sent his plane down to Americus, landed in Americus and picked up Jimmy Carter and brought him over here to Lavonia. It was understood between Bob Meredith and Andy Hill, Andrew Hill, as they brought him over here that he would appoint me to the Senate in the event that Senator Russell died. He [Senator Russell] was in ill health, and that was part of the understanding that I had and they had. I was hoping that the senator would live a long time but in the event that he did die, I had had experience as governor and lieutenant governor. The senator had told me at one time that he would like for me to succeed him. So I thought Carter understood that. So I told him that I would support him and come out and endorse him at what I thought would be the proper time, which would be toward the, about three weeks before the end of the campaign, which, I think, would have more effect. In the meantime, Carl was trying to get me to support him and told some friends of mine if he were elected, he would appoint me to the Senate. But Carl had misled me one time before so I elected to support Carter to my later regret.

I helped him. I went down to his campaign headquarters and made telephone calls to friends all over the state. He had absolutely no idea how to raise campaign funds, and I helped him raise approximately three hundred thousand dollars during the campaign and the runoff. And so when Carter was elected, it was my understanding that in the event that Senator Russell died, he would appoint me. About two or three weeks, by the way, Carter went to Winder with a boy by the name of Bobby Smith who was later in the agriculture department in Washington. Carter got him a job over there as undersecretary, I think, of agriculture. Carter went to Winder

and talked with Senator Russell about the campaign. And Senator Russell understood that he was supposed to appoint me, and he had never come out in his life and publicly supported any other candidate, but he did Carter in this instance.

So after the campaign was over, Cook Barwick, my law partner, old law partner and friend, and Jimmy Carter and I went fishing down in the Everglades together and had a wonderful time fishing. Coming back, the subject was brought up about [me serving as] adjutant general. I'd served as adjutant general before. And I said to Carter, I said, "Well, if I'm going to be in politics, it would suit me all right to get my hand back in politics by serving as adjutant general." I had a lot of old friends that I wanted to renew friendship with. So he said, "I'll appoint you adjutant general." And I said, "Fine." And he did.

And then about three or four weeks into his administration, Senator Russell died. A whole lot of people had heard him say that he was going to appoint me--in the papers it [had] indicated that he was. Things rocked along. I never did hear anything from him. Finally, I went out to the executive mansion and talked with him about it. And told Carter that . . . indicated my renewed interest in the appointment. Several days later . . . he didn't say anything. He didn't give any commitment at that time, but several days later I hear that he's appointed David [Henry] Gambrell. David Gambrell had never run for any office, never held any political office. He was just, he was an Atlanta lawyer that was the son of [Enoch] Smythe Gambrell who had contributed heavily to Jimmy's campaign.

Frankly, a lot of my friends were shocked about it and told me. I had the fellow that flew Carter around; he had told. . . in the airplane during the campaign he had told him that he was going to appoint me. So, I held steady in the boat. I said, "Well, I'll wait and make my

determination what I'm going to do later." I stayed on as adjutant general, although there was a very cool relationship between him [and me] until the following November. I figured it was time for me to make my move. Cook Barwick and I went to his office, and I had my letter of resignation as adjutant general, and I told him I was going to run for the United States Senate against his appointee. So he said good luck.

The campaign began. It ended up there were seventeen people in that race from every part of Georgia. Gambrell had gotten two or three of them in there to try to muddy the water. One of them was Don Wheeler, who had served in Congress. He was from down in South Georgia. He'd gotten two or three candidates in there, and then a lot of them had gotten in on their own motion. Hosea Williams was in there. And the fellow who was sent to jail for the Birmingham bombing, he was a candidate. It just got to be a circus. I think Sam [Samuel Augustus] Nunn [Jr.] and I had been friends. Sam's family had always supported me in every campaign I had run, and so we agreed after it got into such a mess that we knew that Gambrell as the incumbent had the advantage in the first race. But we figured that if you get him in the runoff that we would, we could beat him.

So I told Sam, I said, "If you are number two and get in the runoff with Gambrell, I'll support you, and if I'm the number two man and get in the runoff, then you'll support me." And we both shook hands on that and agreed that that's what we'd do because we both wanted to get Gambrell out. And so the campaign went on, and there wasn't a lot of money being spent by anybody in that initial campaign, although any campaign is expensive. But I spent a lot of my own money in that one, too, figuring that there was going to be a runoff. And I thought, with my experience and record, that I should come in second anyway.

Anyway, Sam Nunn, because Marvin Griffin was against me. . . . He did everything he could to beat me. Lester [Garfield] Maddox, who had told me he wasn't going to take any interest in the race, he told, stopped Sam Nunn in the Capitol, no, stopped Marvin Griffin in the Capitol and said, "I hear you're supporting Sam Nunn." And he said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, you're on the right track." That was after he told me he wasn't going to take any interest in it [the campaign].

And, of course, Carter was doing everything to get Gambrell elected because he had appointed him. And I had everybody, every former governor in Georgia, against me except Herman [Talmadge], and Herman told me, said, "You're going to be in the runoff, and I'll support you after the Democratic primary." I said, "Well, fine." But Sam and I ran neck and neck. It was less than one percent difference in the total vote.

With all the obstacles I had to overcome, I didn't quite make the second spot. But I carried out my promise and obligation to Sam, and I wrote twenty thousand letters to the people that I had worked with, and they indicated their support to me as to the initial primary and they got in the runoff with Nunn and Gambrell. So Nunn beat him very badly in the runoff. And I believe Fletcher Thompson, who had served in the legislature and had served as a Republican congressman, ran for the Senate as the Republican nominee that year. And, of course, Sam just swamped him. That's the way Sam got to the Senate, a very narrow victory, but I think Sam's done a good job.

And I'm proud that he was elected rather than Gambrell because Gambrell didn't have any experience at all except [as] as a big corporate Atlanta bond lawyer, and that's not very good experience to try to represent the people. But always the incumbent has the advantage.

You put David Gambrell, incumbent, and people that don't take an active interest in politics will say well, he's there, must be doing a good job, I think I'll just vote for him. And then the real conservative and radical votes voted for that screwball that blew up the church in Birmingham. Because we had seventeen candidates in there and it got so messed up, I didn't make the second spot.

But I did support Sam, and I'm glad it turned out that way because Sam has made a fine Senator. I've agreed with him most of the time. I haven't agreed with him all of the time. But I think all in all he has represented the state of Georgia very well, and I'm glad I supported him and would support him again.

Henderson: Okay. Now, let me go back to 1970. I want to make sure I understand this. Did Jimmy Carter personally tell you that in the event of Senator Russell's death he would appoint you to that position if he were elected governor?

Vandiver: He didn't use those words. Andy Hill and Bob Meredith brought him over here. They told me before I talked to Carter that he said he was going to appoint me. I didn't ask him to appoint me. That wouldn't have been the right thing to do, to just out and out say, "Well, I'll support you if you'll appoint me." I never did politics that way in my life. But certain things are understood, and if you tell a lot of people you're going to do something and they tell you, you think that that's what is going to happen. But to say that he said, "I will appoint you if Senator Russell dies," that wasn't the way it happened. The way it happened was just like I told you.

Henderson: Now, while he was here in your home, did he at any time discuss the possibility that if Senator Russell dies what may happen, if he were elected governor? Did that ever come up?

Vandiver: That didn't come up. But he [Carter] did go to see Senator Russell, and he knew Senator Russell was in bad health and wouldn't, couldn't live very long. He [Russell] had terrible emphysema. He had smoked all of his life, and he had a horrible cough and had gotten weak from the flu and pneumonia, and he [Carter] could tell he wasn't going to live long anyway. He [Carter] knew he was going to get the appointment, and that Senator Russell indicated to him and told me that he [Carter] indicated to him that he was going to appoint me. He [Carter] didn't say outright he was going to appoint me to Senator Russell's [seat], but that was the basis of Senator Russell coming out and supporting him.

Henderson: Now, you say that Carl Sanders made some overtures to you for support in 1970. Did he personally contact you about support, or is this through intermediaries?

Vandiver: This was through an intermediary who was a very good friend of mine. It was Jim [James Anderson] Dunlap who I had appointed to the Board of Regents. And Jim Dunlap later was elected chairman of the Board of Regents. He served well and long as chairman of the Board of Regents. Jim and I had been to school together; we had been fraternity brothers; we'd been close friends for many many years. And then when I left office, Carl helped promote Jim, but Jim was my friend originally. And he had supported Carl at my request. And so Carl told Jim to tell me--we were close friends--that if I would support him that he would appoint me to the Senate.

Henderson: Why do you think Carter was able to defeat Sanders in 1970?

Vandiver: Sanders had gotten the métier of a big city lawyer. Carl is a fine person. He's got a lot of character. He and I over the years most of the time have gotten along real well and I like Carl. But he had a little sense of, a lot of confidence, maybe overconfidence that rubbed people the wrong way. Jimmy Carter came on a humble little country fellow that had just beaten an old poll down in southwest Georgia there for the state Senate, and although Carl had much more money to run, I think, than Jimmy Carter did, people were just determined not to let him have another term.

Henderson: How critical was your support to Carter's election.

Vandiver: I don't think he would have been elected if I hadn't worked with him and for him, I really don't. I advised him how to run his campaign. He ran it that way. I advised him to run it as a conservative. He ran it as a conservative. Carl Sanders had refused to invite George [Corley] Wallace [Sr.] over to speak to the General Assembly. Carter made the statement during the campaign that he was going to invite George Wallace to come over and speak, if you can imagine that, and gave the opinion to everybody that he was a conservative.

I had some friends in South Georgia who told me that he was not a conservative, but that was not the opinion that I got when I was with him, and I was with him a good bit during the campaign. But when he made his inaugural address, he shocked everybody in Georgia with the kind of inaugural address that he made. They thought he was a conservative; he sounded more liberal than Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall did.

He ran on the basis of reorganization. I don't think there was any real reorganization in the government during his tenure any more than had been done before. He just shifted departments around; he didn't do away with any of them or didn't try to. He just shifted them

around. He claimed that he had reorganized government. He and the legislature were at odds constantly. He was not able to work with the legislature very well. He had some friends in the legislature, particularly in the Senate. He was not, he didn't get along at all with the House membership.

And then, too, Lester Maddox was a thorn in his side. Lester was after him from the very beginning. And Jimmy called him down--Lester said that Jimmy called him down to the office and told him that he was governor and he'd better follow his leadership. And Lester took umbrage at that. He said I'm not going to follow anybody's leadership if I don't believe in it. And so he made it. . . I think one reason he got elected president is because he and Lester fussed so much that they figured that, nationally, that Lester Maddox was such a Ku Klux Klan mentality and Carter was such a liberal that he represented the New South. He claims that one reason he was so successful was he got Martin Luther King's picture on the wall in the Capitol. I'm sure that helped him nationally. . . .

But I don't think he would have been elected, I really don't, without my help, because I got a lot of good friends supporting him that would not have supported him. I had more influence then, a lot more, than I've got now. I don't have much now. But I had not been out of politics long enough to . . . I still had a lot of good friends that I was able to talk with.

Henderson: Why do you think Governor Carter did not appoint you to Senator Russell's vacancy?

Vandiver: I think he had it in his mind to run for the presidency. And if he had appointed somebody who had been associated with segregation, that that would have hurt his chance to be president. I think he had it in his mind from the day that he was elected governor.

I thought, would have thought it was silly, really, because we've had great statesmen from the South, people like Russell, who've had the experience and the ability to be president, but didn't have a chance.

But what he did was he sent this Hamilton Jordan up to the Democratic committee, and his advice, and this was done early in his administration, his advice was to find out the method to use to run for the United States presidency. And Ham Jordan drew up a plan, and had him spend a lot of time in Iowa, where they had the first poll, and Carter makes a good impression. He's a nice, friendly, nice sort of fellow. Angelic face. So, he went up there and campaigned and won the Iowa poll. Delegate poll.

Well, that gave him national attention. And then when he got that attention, he won some other states and eventually sort of log rolled, and he was able to win the nomination. But I do not believe, had he run for reelection as governor, and could have run for reelection as governor, [that] he could have been reelected governor of Georgia, when he ran for the presidency.

Henderson: Why do you think he picked David Gambrell?

Vandiver: Well, I think there were several reasons. I think his father was a great contributor to his campaign. Carter, right after he got elected, claimed that he was in debt from his campaign and wanted to have a big dinner to raise money to pay off his debt. Well, after he appointed Gambrell, he decided he didn't need to have that dinner. Never did have it. So I, a lot of people said that he was paid off by Gambrell to, that he paid off his campaign debt. I don't know whether that's true or not. I have no proof of that. Some of my friends told me that

they, that was what they believed. He never did have a fund-raising dinner after he appointed Gambrell, we'll put it that way.

Henderson: Did you have a campaign manager for your senatorial race?

Vandiver: Really, I didn't have a manager as such. I made some mistakes by not having somebody. What I probably should have done was, Chip was in law school, a senior in law school. I probably should have put him in there as my manager. But I had sort of a group that managed my campaign, and there were some mistakes made when I was out over the state that shouldn't have been made.

And if I had put Chip in there . . . I didn't want to take him out of school; he was in school, but it would have been important enough to take him out and let him go back the next year, really. If I had brought him in there, like Gene [Eugene] Talmadge did with Herman. . . . And when he did get out of school and came up and was working in the headquarters, he was, he made some real good contacts and helped make some decisions up there that were good. But they were not quite good enough to get me nominated, get me in the runoff.

Henderson: Could you tell us who these group of people were, these advisors?

Vandiver: Yes, I had Homer [T.] Flynn who had been my assistant when I was adjutant general. He was a retired National Guard general. I had Wallace [Lawson] Jernigan was there part of the time. I had some volunteers, folks like my friend Shell Hartley who you know from Valdosta. He was there. It was a group of people that really . . . I didn't have one man that could make decisions. And that's what you've got to have. You've got to have one fellow that says, well, this is it after you discuss your problems and what you ought to do and make that

decision. And Betty and I were out over the state. I made a fundamental wrong decision, but I thought it would get me in the runoff.

I spent all, I spent my time, and I went into every county in Georgia, Betty and I did. I made the statement in the beginning that I was not going to ignore any county in Georgia, and I was going into every county. And it was hard to do. But what I should have done was spend my time around the metropolitan areas and then I think I could have been in the runoff. But I spent my time visiting old friends that I had in these little counties.

I'll tell you this, when you're young and you've got young people that are willing to work and ambitious, they can help you. But when your friends get old and you're running for office, not in office but running for office, they sit home and watch the ball game and watch television--it's just too much trouble to get out. "Now, Ernie, he'll make it all right, so I won't get out and work like I ought to. Like I should." So I made some fundamental wrong decisions. I should've . . . but I thought at the time that if I ran it and renewed the old friendships in these little counties that would give me enough votes to get in the runoff. And it didn't quite do it. It was close, but it didn't quite make it.

Henderson: How much money did you raise and spend in that campaign?

Vandiver: We raised about a hundred thousand dollars, was what we spent in the first campaign--maybe a hundred and twenty-five. Made some television commercials, which was the most expensive thing we did, and, of course, running the headquarters was expensive, paying secretaries and mailing and posters and keeping people on the road putting up posters. I didn't spend a lot of money, and I didn't borrow any money.

If I had it to do over again, I'd borrow some money. I would put more money into television than I did. Television has become the all-important thing in politics today. The days of the old rallies are over. You can't get many people together to listen to anybody. Back in the old days, you could get thirty, forty, fifty thousand people to come to a barbecue and political rally. And when we opened up in Dublin for governor, we had that many, one of the biggest crowds I ever saw. And I had a good campaign manager, too. Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.] managed my campaign. Jim had gotten old and tired. He was for me, but he wasn't able at that time physically to come and manage my campaign. I asked him to, and he just said, "I just can't do it. I'm too old. Not physically able to do it." I think that's another thing--if I had gotten Jim up there, if he had been a little younger and able to organize my headquarters and organize my campaign, I think that we would've had a chance, we would've gotten in the runoff.

A lot of fundamental mistakes were made that you can see after it's over, what you should have done, but you just didn't do it. If I had borrowed a hundred thousand dollars and covered the state with television, I think that would have helped me. If Reg Murphey had done what he said he was going to do. . . Reg had been my friend, always supported me. He'd been the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and he was the editor at the time that I ran. I had lunch with Reg and asked him to support me and he said he would. Three days before the election, I picked up the *Atlanta Constitution*, and they selected their candidates for United States Senate, and they named Sam Nunn.

I picked up the telephone and called Reg Murphey right away. I said, "Reg, what the hell's going on?" I said, "You said you were going to support me." He said, "I am, I'm going to support you in the runoff." I said, "But you might've knocked me out of the runoff." I said, "All

these people who have moved into Georgia, they didn't know what kind of governor I was, they didn't know anything about me. They look at the paper and the paper says Sam Nunn. They'll vote for Sam Nunn." He said, "Naw, I don't think so." Said, "We're going to support you in the runoff." And the run-off wasn't between me and Gambrell. It was between Sam Nunn and Gambrell. That was another reason I lost the race. They did that right at the last minute. He said, "We wanted to support, to name Sam Nunn because we thought he was an up and coming politician and might be a good candidate for governor next time." I said, "Well, you might have just knocked me out." That was one thing that knocked me out, one of the many mistakes, things that happened. That wasn't a mistake. They knew what they were doing. And they did endorse him.

Henderson: Now was this the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* or just one of them?

Vandiver: That was the *Constitution*.

Henderson: How about the *Journal*?

Vandiver: The *Journal* never did come out and say who they were going to support. I think Smythe Gambrell's brother was the lawyer for the *Atlanta Journal* for fifty years. And I think behind the scenes they probably were supporting Gambrell. I don't believe they came out and supported him openly in the editorial pages.

Henderson: So you did not employ any kind of professional consulting group to help you with your campaign?

Vandiver: I did [have] an advertising group, but not a consulting group. No, I had old friends up there and people who volunteered. And really I thought I was going to get in the runoff. I figured in the runoff I could take him on because I knew that he was not a popular

appointment; he was not a person that was even known in Georgia. Maybe I was too well known. [Laughter] Maybe that was my problem. And, of course, I had a lot of people that never did get over the segregation decision, but they didn't get any relief with Gambrell on that, or Sam Nunn for that matter. But it was just a different era.

Henderson: How actively did you support Sam Nunn in the runoff?

Vandiver: As I stated to you before, I wrote twenty thousand letters for him to people that were on my campaign list, and I called and asked friends to support him all over the state, got on the telephone. And I felt we made an agreement, we shook hands on it. And I told him I was going to do everything I could to help him if he was in the runoff, and I did. And Sam will tell you the same thing. He'll tell you that we had a bargain that the one that was in the . . . number two man, the other was going to support him.

Henderson: What were your feelings after you failed to get in the runoff?

Vandiver: It was a pretty crushing, depressing sort of situation. I thought I would get more votes than I did. After they had the seventeen candidates and it was so, got into such a mess, it was just sort of a dog eat dog campaign. I know that Gambrell put in Don Wheeler, and he was from Alamo, Georgia, down in South Georgia. And he had a circle of friends in his congressional district that had supported him, and a lot of them supported [him] for the Senate, and they were people who normally, I think, would have been in my area. 'Course all these may be excuses; I don't know. That's the way you handle that. You see the mistakes you made. It wouldn't do running the same kind of campaign again. If I had to run a campaign today, I wouldn't hesitate to borrow a hundred thousand dollars or whatever it took to cover the state

with television at the last minute if I thought it was going to be that close. If I had known it was going to be that close.

End of Side Two

Richard D. Pinner
Library for Political Research and Studies

Name Index

A

Allen, Ivan, Jr., 12
 Arnall, Ellis Gibbs, 27

B

Barwick, M. Cook, 15, 22, 23
 Bates, William M. (Bill), 9, 11
 Beasley, George, 8

C

Campbell, James Philander, Jr. (Phil), 12
 Carter, James Earl, Jr. (Jimmy), 20, 21, 22,
 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29

D

Dunlap, James Anderson (Jim), 26

F

Felicia, Madame (mayor of San Juan,
 Puerto Rico), 1, 2
 Flynn, Homer T., 30

G

Gambrell, David Henry, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29,
 30, 33, 34
 Gambrell, Enoch Smythe, 22, 33
 Gillis, James Lester, Sr. (Jim), 32
 Griffin, Samuel Marvin, Sr., 10, 13, 15, 24

H

Hall, Robert Howell (Bob), 14
 Hartley, Shell, 30
 Hearn, George J., 3, 4
 Hill, Andrew (Andy), 21, 25

J

Jernigan, Wallace Lawson, 30
 Jordan, Hamilton (Ham), 29

L

Leverett, Ernest Freeman, 14

M

Maddox, Lester Garfield, 24, 28
 Meredith, Robert (Bob), 20, 21, 25
 Molina, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, 3
 Murphey, Reg, 9, 11, 32

N

Nunn, Samuel Augustus, Jr. (Sam), 23, 24,
 32, 33, 34

P

Patterson, Eugene (Gene), 8
 Pou, Charles (Charlie), 9, 10

R

Russell, Richard Brevard, Jr., 20, 21, 22,
 25, 26, 28, 29

S

Sanders, Carl Edward, 17, 20, 21, 26, 27
 Sibley, Celestine, 9, 11
 Smith, Bobby, 21
 Spalding, Jack Johnson, 8

T

Talmadge, Eugene, 30
 Talmadge, Herman Eugene, 10, 24
 Thompson, Fletcher, 24

V

Vandiver, Samuel Ernest III, (Chip), 30
 Vandiver, Sybil Elizabeth Russell (Betty),
 8, 31

W

Wallace, George Corley, Sr., 27

Wheeler, Don, 23, 34
William, James Allen (Jimmy), 1, 2
Williams, Hosea, 23

Richard B. Powell
Library for Political Research and Studies