

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 10
Henry Getzen Neal Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson (Follow-up)
Date: 01-07-94
Cassette #457 (15 Minutes, Side One only)

EDITED BY MR. NEAL AND DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: This is a follow-up interview with Mr. Henry G. [Getzen] Neal on January 7, 1994 in his office in Atlanta. My name is Dr. Hal Henderson. Good morning, Mr. Neal.

Neal: Good morning, Hal. How're you?

Henderson: I appreciate you granting me this follow-up interview.

Neal: Glad to do it.

Henderson: I understand that you played a major role in the legislative process during the Vandiver administration. Would you describe for me the lobbying style of Ernest Vandiver?

Neal: First of all, I discount the role that I played. Peter Zack Geer [Jr.], who was the governor's executive secretary played a much larger role than I did. If there was an administration bill in which the governor was interested, Peter Zack or some of the governor's legislative friends, the floor leaders in the Senate and House, and the president pro tem of the Senate would usually carry the burden. And the governor, if his leaders in the House and Senate were having trouble with a particular bill, then they would notify the governor, and then either Peter Zack or I or some other member of the governor's staff would contact the representatives in question, seek their support in the passage of certain legislation. Insofar as Ernie was concerned, he would have frequent conferences with legislators, both in the House and Senate, concerning pending legislation or legislation which he intended to introduce. And indeed he would have legislative meetings several times a week when the legislature was in

session to discuss administration measures.

Henderson: Some allegations have been made in the past that governors would do such things as promising roads and jobs in return for votes. Do all governors engage in that sort of activity? Is this something that Governor Vandiver did as well?

Neal: No, that's known as "pork barrel politics." I never really heard of Governor Vandiver promising anything to any legislator in return for his or her support.

Henderson: There were 54 senators and 205 representatives in the legislature at that time. During the legislative session, did Governor Vandiver personally lobby each individual legislator, or did he relegate that responsibility to other people? Did he just lobby key individuals? How did he handle that?

Neal: Well, as I said, earlier, the governor met with senators and representatives either together or separately to discuss pending legislation and to get their views on whether the legislation would likely pass. If there were problems areas, he would invite them down to his office and explain the purpose and need of the legislation so that when it came up for a vote they would be thoroughly familiar with it. He would mention legislation in which he was interested to certain people in the House and Senate, who may not have understood the intent of the legislation, and he asked for their support. He usually got it.

Henderson: Is this lobbying activity on his part something that he enjoys doing, or is this just a necessary requirement that the governor just has to do?

Neal: I couldn't answer that question. I know that he had many, many other duties as governor that he had to do, had to perform, while the legislature was in session. And his lobbying activities were in addition to those duties. I know that the stress and the strain of the

governor's office itself plus lobbying activities is a tough job on any governor.

Henderson: You mentioned stress and strain. What were some of those stresses and strains on Governor Vandiver?

Neal: Well, nearly everybody who came to see the governor had a pet project. Often, they would make a very good case for their project. The legislators would come in and ask that a certain bill be amended to include a pet project or include an amendment that would enable them to do something for their constituents. And having to say "no" so many, many times was difficult because it might sidetrack the real purpose of the legislation.

Henderson: Let me ask you to discuss just the office of governor itself. When Governor Vandiver held that office, would you perceive of it as a strong governorship, a weak governorship? How would you classify the office of governor?

Neal: A strong governorship, possibly the strongest in my service in state government. Governor [Carl Edward] Sanders had a strong influence on legislation for the governor.

Henderson: In his budget address in 1959, Governor Vandiver stated that it was time to restore control over the power of the purse to the General Assembly. In the 1961 session, there was an effort to allow the legislature to have more independence from the governor in budgetary matters. Why did Governor Vandiver oppose that effort coming from the legislature?

Neal: You'll have to ask him that question, but if I had to answer it, I'd say it was because there had been no planning for that. It was what I viewed as a grab for power by the legislature because the purse strings of the budget gave power to the General Assembly. If the governor controlled the purse strings, it made him stronger and more able to discharge what he viewed to be the will of the people reflected by his election.

Henderson: Was this effort directed at the governor or at Lieutenant Governor Garland [Turk] Byrd?

Neal: What effort is that you're talking about?

Henderson: To give the legislature more control over the budget. There was some talk that the governor may leave the governorship and go to Washington. And there was some speculation that if that happened, of course, Lieutenant Governor Byrd would become governor. And the legislative leaders did not want to allow Garland Byrd to have as much power over the budget as Ernest Vandiver and previous governors. Is that speculation, or is there any truth to that?

Neal: To my knowledge, it's mere speculation. Otherwise, I think it was a genuine effort on the part of some legislators to have more "say-so" in the budget process.

Henderson: How would you describe his relationship with Speaker George L. [Leon] Smith [III]?

Neal: Generally good. Speaker Smith was involved in the so-called budget fight, which later was resolved. He got along very well with Speaker Smith, who, incidentally was one of the better "speakers" I have known. He was a professional speaker of the House, in my judgment.

Henderson: How would you describe his relationship with Lieutenant Governor Garland T. Byrd?

Neal: Very good. He cooperated with the governor in securing the passage of legislation.

Henderson: Could you tell me what you think his relationship with Senate floor leader Carl

E. Sanders [was]?

Neal: Excellent. You have to remember though that George L. Smith was the speaker of the House, and Garland Byrd was the lieutenant governor, and Carl Sanders was speaker pro tem of the Senate. I think George L. got along reasonably well with both Sanders and Lieutenant Governor Byrd. There were always little things that would come up from time to time about certain legislation, but no more than that which probably exists there today.

Henderson: What was Governor Vandiver's relationship with House floor leader Frank S. [Starling] Twitty?

Neal: Very good. As you indicated, he was a very effective floor leader. He was successful in getting the governor's legislative package passed promptly in the House. He had a unique ability of being able to take a piece of legislation, review it carefully and then explain that legislation in detail on the floor of the House. Generally, he was very effective as floor leader. He got the job done for Governor Vandiver. And until the so-called budget fight, he was close to the governor. He was one of the ones who came down and regularly discussed the status of the governor's legislative package as well as what else was going on in the House which might benefit the governor or which might cause problems down the road in the future.

Henderson: You served in both the Vandiver and Sanders administrations.

Neal: That's correct.

Henderson: How would you compare their style of government or governing?

Neal: Very similar. Both of whom, I think, were outstanding governors. I'm very proud and honored to have served with both of them. Both of them were dedicated and hard working; both of them knew the legislative process; both of them were highly intelligent; both

of them knew politics very well. They knew where the soft spots were, and they knew who controlled the several committees. They were both excellent governors in my opinion.

Henderson: Let me turn to the 1962 gubernatorial election. Garland T. Byrd drops out of the race due to a heart attack. Do you think that's the reason that he dropped out of that race?

Neal: Well, there was a lot of speculation about it at the time, but I really don't know why Garland backed out. He'd been a very effective lieutenant governor, and he had always cooperated with the Vandiver administration very well. He was our friend. He worked with us. A little friction might come up now and then, but not so much between the governor and the lieutenant governor, but between the governor and some members of the Senate, which was not unusual in any administration. But as far as I'm concerned, Governor Byrd was our friend, and he always cooperated when we sought his assistance.

Henderson: Did Governor Vandiver in any way encourage Garland T. Byrd to withdraw from that race?

Neal: Not that I know of.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver contended [that] in 1962 there was a meeting that took place in the governor's office, in which he, Carl Sanders, and you were present. At that meeting according to Governor Vandiver he promised support for Carl Sanders' gubernatorial candidacy in 1962 in exchange for a promise from Sanders that he would never run against [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.]. Do you recall that meeting or that promise?

Neal: I think we discussed that at my previous interview, and I don't know that I have anything to add. I do not specifically recall the date of the meeting, but I do recall having been present at a number of meetings with both of them. There possibly may have been a meeting,

but I don't want to get drawn into that controversy because my recollection of what transpired is not sufficient for me to be able to say one way or another. I believe we discussed that in our last interview.

Henderson: I was going back and looking at the questions, and I did not see that question. That could have come up. 'Course I do not have the transcript at the present time. To the best of your knowledge, then, you do not recall that meeting. . . .

Neal: To the best of my knowledge, there was such a meeting. And to the best of my knowledge, senatorial politics was discussed but insofar as what was said with respect to who would or would not do what, I simply cannot recall. As I indicated previously, perhaps Peter Zack Geer could shed more light on it than I can. But I think you told me in our last meeting that Peter Zack Geer denied any knowledge of it. There were meetings at which politics was discussed, possibly Carl's entry into the Senate race, and Senator Russell's name may have been mentioned, but my recollection, as to specifics is faulty. Hence, I'd rather not, in something as sensitive as that, say one way or the other what was said or not said. I honestly simply cannot recall.

Henderson: Mr. Neal, I want to express to you my appreciation for this follow-up interview, and I know you have other things to do, so thank you very much.

Neal: Thank you, sir.

Henderson: Thank you, sir.

End of Side One

END OF INTERVIEW

Name Index**B**

Byrd, Garland Turk, 4, 5, 6

G

Geer, Peter Zack, Jr., 1, 7

R

Russell, Richard Brevard, Jr., 6, 7

S

Sanders, Carl Edward, 3, 5, 6

Smith, George Leon, II, 4, 5

T

Twitty, Frank Starling, 5

V

Vandiver, Samuel Ernest, Jr. (Ernest,
Ernie), 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

