

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 11
Garland Turk Byrd Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: I'm Dr. Hal Henderson interviewing former Lieutenant Governor Garland [Turk] Byrd in his law office in Butler, Georgia. The date is December 6, 1993. Good afternoon, Governor Byrd.

Byrd: Howdy, Dr. Henderson. How are you today?

Henderson: Very good. Let's begin by letting me ask you the question, what was your relationship with [Samuel] Ernest Vandiver [Jr.] prior to his becoming governor?

Byrd: Both of us had gained what recognition or prominence we had as a result of being affiliated with the Talmadge element of political life in Georgia. Ernie had served as a Governor [Herman Eugene] Talmadge's executive secretary [*sic*]. I had served in some lesser administrative functions with respect to the Talmadge office while he was governor. We knew one another that way, and we got to know one another as a result of our affiliation with Herman Talmadge and with the old Eugene Talmadge administration.

Henderson: Did you play a role in his campaign for the lieutenant governorship in 1954?

Byrd: No, no, I didn't. As I recall, I was an active candidate for commissioner of agriculture, and my opponent was Phil [James Philander] Campbell [Jr.] in that race, and, as you might recall the election was on Tuesday, and it was on Saturday that following weekend until we found out who had won. But I was involved in my own business.

Henderson: Okay. During Vandiver's tenure as lieutenant governor, what was your position with state government?

Byrd: I don't think that I was in state government at that time. I was the president of a holding company that was involved in the forming of an insurance company in Georgia at that time. And Governor Talmadge was the chairman of the board of that company, and the name of it was American Family Life Insurance Company. Well, I don't know if it was American Family or not. I've forgotten exactly the right name, but I was involved in the operation of that holding company and that insurance company, getting it organized.

Henderson: While he is lieutenant governor, [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] is governor. What is your perception of the Griffin administration?

Byrd: Well, Griffin personally was a great individual. He caused a great many good things to be done in this state, particularly about education. Griffin did so much for Georgia Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] in getting it off the ground, bringing it to the forefront as a competitor with MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and other engineering schools by funding, by letting them have money, by making money available to them. Griffin had a rural roads program that was of tremendous benefit to people in this area where we're sitting right now talking about it.

The Griffin administration had some people in it that either knowingly or unknowingly got some bad raps or bad reputations, got a lot of bad publicity anyway, several of them being indicted. And I think Marvin was probably guilty by association more than anything else. Marvin picked up to a great extent where Talmadge picked up from, and everything in my public life has been just a higher pronouncement and expanding of the administration of a

governor--I don't know whether you remember him or not--Ed [Eurith Dickinson] Rivers. Ed Rivers started all the programs we've all talked about since that time and we've tried to expand on his programs. Marvin was an active member of that administration and had a lot of firsthand personal knowledge about politics from those days back then, and he just simply tried to expand on the programs that Rivers had started.

Henderson: In 1958 Vandiver runs for the governorship. Did you play a role in his campaign in that year?

Byrd: No, no.

Henderson: In the 1958 legislative session there is a major fight between Governor Griffin and Lieutenant Governor Vandiver over the expansion of Rural Roads Authority.

Byrd: Correct.

Henderson: Were you involved in that election in any way?

Byrd: No, I was not in government at that time. I was actually campaigning for lieutenant governor myself. I say I didn't play any role in Vandiver's campaign. We were identified together, both of us having come forward from the Talmadge era, Talmadge administration. And so I guess to the extent that we had about the same supporters, I played that role. And we were compatible. We set out trying to achieve the same goal, him elected governor and me as lieutenant governor, utilizing about the same people.

Henderson: Did he ever call upon you during that fight to assist his efforts?

Byrd: No, no, he didn't.

Henderson: In that campaign he carries all but three counties. What do you attribute that overwhelming victory to?

Byrd: To the position that the Griffin administration had gotten itself [into] in the eyes and ideas and ideals of Georgia people. The press had pretty well whipped them to death, and Vandiver was able to take advantage of that hysteria, you might call it, at the time.

Henderson: Bill [William Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.] eventually comes forth to challenge Vandiver in that campaign. And he's not a very serious candidate. Why do you think the Griffin people were not able to put up a serious candidate to run against Vandiver?

Byrd: I think it was a pretty good foregone conclusion that Vandiver had been a good lieutenant governor. He was being supported by the right people, and it was just inevitable that he was going to be elected governor. I don't think they could get anybody of stature that could have put up any effort.

Henderson: Is it your perception that former Governor [Herman] Talmadge was very supportive of Ernest Vandiver in that campaign?

Byrd: Yes.

Henderson: Did you ever see any indications of that in reality?

Byrd: Well, yeah, because I knew who the Talmadge people were in the state, and I saw those people supporting me and I saw them supporting Vandiver. And I also knew enough about those people [to know that] unless the word had gotten out from Talmadge, they wouldn't have been there supporting us.

Henderson: Okay. In that campaign Vandiver makes the "No, Not One" speech. Why do you think he made that statement or that speech, and do you think he should have made it?

Byrd: Well, no, he regrets that now. And regretted it, I guess, a few minutes after he said it, but he made it and it's just something that's stuck with him. I think he could have gotten

elected, I know he could have gotten elected without saying it. And I really don't know why he said it.

Henderson: Did he ever ask you your advice about whether he should make a speech like that or not?

Byrd: No. No.

Henderson: If he had would you have told him that it would be foolish to make such a speech like that?

Byrd: Well, you know, in retrospect you could say yes, I would have told him, but at that time, you know, not having the benefit now of looking back thirty or forty years, I don't know whether I would have told him that or not.

Henderson: The year prior to Vandiver becoming governor, the surplus in the state budget was over 35 million dollars. When he becomes governor, it was less than 3 million. Is the depletion of this surplus an act on the part of the Griffin administration to cause difficulty for the new administration?

Byrd: Well, I don't think there's any doubt about that, plus there's a normal tendency for even department heads, as the end of the fiscal year comes, they 're going to spend every dime they've got. They don't want to turn it back to the treasury because the legislature will look toward cutting their budget for the following year. But if you look back at the history of everybody that's been governor, he's tried to spend what money was available to him, certainly at the twilight of his term doing favors for people and secondly doing some good things, trying to leave a monument that people could recognize and remember him by.

Henderson: When you run for the lieutenant governorship, do you do so with the support of Ernest Vandiver?

Byrd: Well, you'll have to understand that Ernie was running for governor at the same time, and there again we had a great number of the same people supporting us, and I got support from some people that wouldn't have been there if Ernie had objected to me. By the same token, I'm sure that he had the support of some people that I had that wouldn't have been there if I had had any objection to him. While we weren't actively campaigning for one another, nevertheless, we were in the same group, the same element, the same political philosophy.

Henderson: Okay. You serve as lieutenant governor during his administration. What was your relationship with him?

Byrd: Excellent. Real good.

Henderson: Did he look upon you as an ally and close advisor that he could call upon for advice?

Byrd: Yes, we had periodic meetings in his office while the legislature was going on each time. He would meet with his legislative leaders, and as a rule I met with them. And we were compatible.

Henderson: During his administration, who were his closest advisors?

Byrd: There was probably Mr. Jim [James Lester] Gillis [Sr.], who is now deceased; [Curtis] Dixon Oxford, who was on the highway board and revenue commissioner; a fellow DeNean Stafford [Jr.] down at Tifton, Georgia; Bob [Robert Henry] Jordan, who later was a [Georgia] supreme court judge, from Talbotton, Georgia; perhaps one of his better, closer

advisors was a boy named Bobby [Robert Lee] Russell [Jr.], who was his brother-in-law, who thereafter became a [federal] judge on the court of appeals.

Henderson: Could you describe for me how Governor Vandiver lobbied members of the legislature to get their votes for his legislation or his program?

Byrd: He would get on the telephone with them. He'd call them. He knew where they stayed at the hotels. He would ask them to meet with him. He would invite them to his office before the legislative session got started that morning. And if he had a real program that he was going to be interested in, he would start several months before the legislature met, talking to the legislative leaders, meeting with them, and that type [of contact]. It was a one-on-one type [of] contact.

Henderson: There have been some criticisms of governors in the past that they would trade roads or jobs in return for votes. Is that a valid criticism of Ernest Vandiver?

Byrd: Well, I can't put my finger on a single one particular project that he might have traded for. I'm sure that he was responsive like any of us would have been. If a legislator came in to see him with his county commissioners or with a delegation from somewhere down here in south Georgia, he would listen to them. He might have been persuaded that, you know, the road is really more needed than I thought, other than the fact that this legislative fight's coming up--that makes it more worthwhile.

Henderson: We hear a lot now about interest groups and the influence they have in state government, national government, and so forth. Back then, what were the major interest groups that governors had to contend with?

Byrd: Well, you always had the Georgia Municipal Association, which is a legitimate group, the County Commissioners Association, the educators, their group, and always the farm bloc, the farm group. Those were basically the four major groups lobbying us on legislation. The Georgia labor movement was in its infancy. They were just getting started good, and they had an ear at the capitol. They had some good people who were fronting for them. Then always had been there the medical association and people from the various professional groups, lawyers and so forth. But the first four or five I named were the primary ones that we were responsive to. And we tried to respond to them because we thought they were pretty well representative of the people all over the state. And they were governmental agencies or representatives of governmental agencies, governmental groups, combinations of cities and county groups, and so forth. We viewed them not so much as lobbyists, but really affording us an ear as to what the needs were in the state.

Henderson: Do the county commissioners carry a little bit more weight because of the county unit system?

Byrd: Well, they carried a lot of weight back then, a whole lot more, as a result of the county unit system. They carried more weight back then than they do now, purely and simply as a result of the county unit system.

Henderson: Did you ever see or hear of Governor Vandiver expressing anger or becoming angered at a legislator for any reason?

Byrd: No, I have no personal knowledge of any such event as that.

Henderson: We've heard tell of governors in the past getting rather angry at various people for not doing this, that, or the other. Is there any indication that you know of or any time that Governor Vandiver ever did get angry with anybody about anything?

Byrd: Not that I can recall. I know he got angry with some of them, but I don't know now just exactly what it was. One I do remember is the budget fight back there in '61, I believe it was, the budget fight. He got extremely angry with the leadership in the House, some of them, and rightly so because they had been his people, his leaders, but that's really the one that sticks out in my mind most that he got upset with them about.

Henderson: Now, when you say upset, did he express his feelings directly to these individuals, or is this something he just held back to himself?

Byrd: He generally would hold those things back to himself. He'd let it be known, but he wasn't the type [of] fellow that would insult somebody's character behind their back or even to their face. He'd just would let them know he'd remember it. [Laughter]

Henderson: In his inaugural address, Governor Vandiver says there are five principles that would govern his administration. I'd just like to run through these five and let you just recall anything about them that you can. The first one he said was economy. What was he talking about there, the economy in state government?

Byrd: There had been a lot of publicity about spending, wasteful spending, that type thing. And that, rightfully or wrongfully, arose during the Griffin administration toward the latter years of it. There were irregularities in the purchasing department, that type thing. And I think that Vandiver's idea was to tighten up on all the department heads on their budgets, to

look over their shoulders and see how they were spending that money. And I think that's what he had in mind.

Henderson: Another principle was reform. What reforms was he able to bring about?

Byrd: Offhand, at this moment, I can't think of any reforms that were made, but I'm sure, maybe [with] an opportunity to give it some thought, I'm sure that I could, but at the moment I don't really recall any.

Henderson: Well, let me go to another one. He talked about he wanted to restore integrity to state government.

Byrd: That meant he was going to appoint people of integrity, people that were of honor. There were about a dozen or so indictments by the Fulton County Grand Jury of people in the Griffin administration. And at that point in time, the governor himself [Griffin] was indicted and tried, but unfortunately came clear. [Editor's Note: Governor Griffin was not indicted nor tried.] The entire structure of state government, the leaders in it were suspects by the public.

Henderson: One of his major bills was a law entitled, "Honesty in Government." What was all that about?

Byrd: Just to bring about budget reform, more strict controls on spending money, how to spend the funds, that type thing.

Henderson: During the 1960 presidential campaign, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is arrested in Georgia, and eventually he is released. Do you play any role in obtaining the release of Dr. King?

Byrd: No, I didn't. I was aware of what was going on, but I didn't make any of the phone calls or do anything.

Henderson: From your perception, what was the role of Governor Vandiver in this?

Byrd: Obviously he would have known about it on account of the people who were doing it. George [Daniel] Stewart was the principal who was involved in it, and Judge [James] Oscar Mitchell out in DeKalb county. I believe there was a case pending out there that had something to do with Martin Luther King. The people, I'm trying to think now, who the principals were in the state who were guiding the Kennedy campaign. Griffin [Boyette] Bell, along with me and one or two others, met with Bobby [Robert Francis] Kennedy early on in the campaign at one of the hotels in Atlanta and tried to map out and to think out, rather to set forth an agenda for them in Georgia. But that was long before the Martin Luther [King, Jr.] deal came about. I don't think Vandiver actually played any role in it; certainly he had knowledge of it, I would think, 'cause I had knowledge of it.

Henderson: What was your role in the 1960 presidential campaign?

Byrd: Other than going to the national convention, that was probably the highlight of my activities in it. I went out there as a delegate, and John [Bowden] Connally, along with other people in Georgia, two or three of them, got me and some others together and wanted to know if we would support Lyndon [Baines] Johnson to become the Kennedy running mate. They wanted somebody to call up Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] and ask him about it, and I was foolish enough to let them select me to do that. [Laughter] When I got through talking to Senator Russell, my role in the campaign was wound up.

Henderson: Senator Russell was not receptive to that suggestion?

Byrd: No, he wasn't receptive to it a bit.

Henderson: What accounts for Governor Vandiver--as I understand it, when he went out there, he was committed to Lyndon Johnson as a presidential candidate.

Byrd: That's correct. All of us were, yeah.

Henderson: What accounted for shifting over to John [Fitzgerald] Kennedy?

Byrd: Well, he didn't shift over to Kennedy and desert Johnson. Kennedy just won. And he stayed with Johnson as long as Johnson was a viable candidate, but once Johnson was eliminated, then Kennedy had the job of selecting a vice presidential running mate. And they sought out those of us who they thought [were] close to Lyndon to get us to. . . . And the fellow they wanted most now was Senator Russell. I think they were more interested in him than they were probably Lyndon Johnson. They wanted Senator Russell satisfied. [Laughter]

Henderson: How active was Governor Vandiver on behalf of John Kennedy in that campaign?

Byrd: I don't recall. I do remember that we all supported Kennedy, that Vandiver supported him, and basically the Kennedy organization, I think, probably worked through Vandiver, made Vandiver knowledgeable about, you know, activities in Georgia. And he was given an opportunity to participate in anything they did down here. Now, whether he participated in all of it or not, I don't know. You see, time sort of takes away some of your recollection and knowledge.

Henderson: I understand.

Byrd: I just don't remember.

Henderson: There is some talk that President-elect Kennedy will nominate Vandiver to the position of secretary of the army. Governor Vandiver eventually withdraws his name from consideration. Could you discuss this, because you were involved from the standpoint if the governor resigned, you would become the governor of the state of Georgia.

Byrd: Yeah, I think that Kennedy fully intended to support Vandiver . . . into that position, and I think that the racial thing ultimately prevented him from doing it. Perhaps that "no, not one" statement probably had a lot to do with it.

Henderson: Did you ever have any indication that Governor Vandiver would resign and accept that position?

Byrd: No, he never told me personally that he would. But by him not disavowing it early on when it got started, you would assume that he was willing to vacate the governorship and go to the national scene.

Henderson: At any time did he ever turn to you and say, "What do you recommend I do in a situation like this?"

Byrd: No.

Henderson: In the 1960 legislative session, the Sibley Commission was created. Why was it created?

Byrd: It was created for the purpose of going about the state preparing the minds of the people to accept the inevitable.

Henderson: Where does the impetus for the creation of this come from? Is it coming from the governor? His legislative leaders? I mean, where does the idea come from?

Byrd: I think it came basically from the leadership in Atlanta, from the governor, from his leaders; we all thought that it would be a good idea. We all concluded that our philosophy wasn't going to last and that this transition had to be made. It had to be bridged. And Mr. John [Adams] Sibley was probably one of the more outstanding men in the state, indeed in the South at that time. And he was a great spokesman for us.

Henderson: Why was he picked to head the commission?

Byrd: On account of who he was, his integrity, his ability, his interest in government, and he had been an advisor to a great number of governors also.

Henderson: Do you recall whether there was any opposition to the creation of the commission?

Byrd: Yeah, there was some opposition. Not noticeable, but there was some.

Henderson: Coming from members of the legislature? Or where was the opposition?

Byrd: From the diehard people like [William] Bodenhamer, for example.

Henderson: Or Roy [Vincent] Harris?

Byrd: Well, I don't recall whether Roy opposed it or not. I was trying to think as to what Roy, what his role was in that thing. I don't remember what Roy's attitude was about it.

Henderson: Among the governor's advisors, do you have any recollection whether some of them opposed the creation of the Sibley Commission, or was there unanimity among that group?

Byrd: I think it was probably unanimous. [Pause] I'll give Vandiver credit largely, more so than anybody for getting it put across.

Henderson: Now you mean the creation of the commission?

Byrd: Yeah, the creation of it.

Henderson: Okay, I see. In 1961 Governor Vandiver has to deal with the desegregation crisis. A federal judge orders the admission of two blacks to the University of Georgia. There are two very important meetings relative to this. One occurs involving the governor, the Board of Regents, some key legislators and the president of the University of Georgia. Were you at that meeting?

Byrd: No, I don't recall being at that meeting.

Henderson: Then there's another meeting at the executive mansion. I think about fifty or sixty key leaders in the state were at the mansion, and they discuss what the governor should do. Were you at that meeting?

Byrd: Most likely I was. I don't remember that meeting because we were having so many meetings back then. We were having so many of them.

Henderson: Did the governor ever turn to you and say, "Lieutenant Governor, what should I do?"

Byrd: No, not in that direct of a fashion. During our meetings during that period of time, while the legislature was in session, obviously, and seeing one another socially, yes, we would discuss them [the issues], but never did he say, "You tell me what to do. What should I do?" No.

Henderson: Could you briefly discuss how he went about making a decision? Was he someone who quickly made the decision, or he was someone who liked to analyze and look at both sides and then after a long process finally make up his mind?

Byrd: He did not make quick decisions. He would analyze and put an appropriate thought process in it. And, of course, what we had to do wasn't a decision that any of us made or he made; it was made for us by the federal courts.

Henderson: Some of the diehards are urging resistance to the courts and closing down the University of Georgia and the public schools.

Byrd: Right.

Henderson: Why do you think Ernest Vandiver refused to go along with that point of view?

Byrd: Well, he would quickly recognize that it would cause our school systems to be knocked off the accredited list. It would just put into disarray the benefits that previous students had gotten. Diplomas may become worthless. You know, we'd spend ten more years getting back on the accredited list. It would have just destroyed the integrity of the university system. [That's] what it would have done.

Henderson: He goes before the legislature in a night session, a very historic occasion. Describe the scene for us that January night when he is telling the legislature and the people of Georgia what he is going to do.

Byrd: Well, the galleries were packed. The walls [sic] all the way around were full. The halls were full. I was presiding. I do recall it. There was a lot of tension in the gallery and the hall. He got through making his remarks, and you could see that he was visibly concerned. Ernie had a way of the blood vessels in his neck making an expression, so that's about the atmosphere that was there. He had a lot of concern.

Henderson: Now you say tension in the gallery. What do you mean by that?

Byrd: By that, people up there of all persuasions, and they were just right ready to get at one another's throats.

Henderson: Was the speech well received by the legislature?

Byrd: Yes, it was. It was well received.

Henderson: From the standpoint did he get a standing ovation or just polite applause or . . . ?

Byrd: You couldn't ever tell because as a matter of practice when the governor entered and when he left he got a standing ovation, but everybody knew that it was a difficult speech, it was a difficult decision for him to make, and certainly all of his friends recognized that. Yeah, he got a number of standing ovations, as I recall. I'm now remembering, you know, some of the things.

Henderson: What does he recommend in that speech?

Byrd: He recommends that we keep the public school system going, the university open, and that we do what's necessary to meet the requirements of the federal courts.

Henderson: Do you see that speech ending his political career? Do you think he has that perception of it?

Byrd: No, I don't think so. I don't think so.

Henderson: Do you think a Marvin Griffin would have or could have made a speech like Governor Vandiver did?

Byrd: Well, Marvin would have, yeah. Marvin was a realist. Marvin came in on the edge of a political philosophy that was [unintelligible] that we had the county unit system. And Marvin could have rolled with the times, changed with the times.

Henderson: In the 1961 session there is a major battle between the governor and the legislature over the budgetary powers of the governor. You have already alluded to this. What was this fight about, and what was your position?

Byrd: The governor's budget over in the House of Representatives was defeated by a tremendous margin. I believe he got some forty or fifty votes, as I recall. And the budget itself, the way it was drafted by the House leaders, there was a tendency for it to take away a greater amount of the governor's authority toward the preparation of the budget and then thereafter spending that money. A bill of that type has to originate in the House of Representatives. It was defeated in the House of Representatives. It came to the Senate. I took over the leadership of it. And we thereafter had. . . . The Senate passed a version that I sponsored.

A fellow named Bee [Walter Odum] Brooks [Jr.], who was Vandiver's speechwriter and probably prepared that original budget, we made some changes in it and came back with it, substituted it in the Senate, and adopted it. It passed the Senate. We appointed a conference committee, and on that conference committee were seven senators and probably twelve members from the House. And so they went to the conference committee meeting, and they came up with another version of it. And it thereafter came back to the House and to the Senate. The Senate adopted my version, my original version, and defeated the compromise that had come forth from the conference committee. Then we went back, sent it back to the House, and got over there and got to work, Governor Vandiver did and I did and our leadership, the people we depended upon. I've forgotten what the final vote was. It passed in the House, but it passed then by a substantial majority. We only lost seven votes in the Senate, and I excused each one of those seven senators from voting for it because they had, unfortunately for them, unwisely,

rather, they had entered into an agreement that those on the conference committee would stick to their version of it and they would do it unanimously. I told them if that was a promise they made, indeed keep that promise then, and they did.

Henderson: Why in 1961 is there this challenge to the governor's budgetary power?

Byrd: Well, I don't know why the House leadership at that time, why they decided they would challenge the governor and try to remove his authority. I often wondered about it. I've never known myself.

Henderson: In the Senate were there any critics of the governor whom you could count on to oppose the governor no matter what he proposed?

Byrd: No. No. We had, more often than not, any bill that the governor and I were both supporting usually got a unanimous vote in the Senate. He didn't have any critics there and I didn't either. It was a harmonious group.

Henderson: How much power did the governor back then have over the legislature? Was he appointing the committee chairmen?

Byrd: No, the governor didn't make any appointments in the legislature. The speaker of the House would appoint his committees and the chairmen of those committees. And the lieutenant governor would appoint his committees and chairmen of those committees in the Senate, but the governor had some power and influence in the House because he could normally control who was going to be speaker. And so it would be one of his allies who would be elected as the speaker of the House. And then surely the speaker, whoever he was, then would cooperate with the governor toward looking after the governor's leaders, being sure that they were put in positions of authority to assist with the program.

Henderson: In 1962 the county unit system is challenged in the federal courts. Governor Vandiver calls a special session to try to save the county unit system. He proposes a plan, and you also propose a plan. Now, why on this occasion do you disagree with the governor?

Byrd: Well, I thought that my plan was better. The lawyer who was handling the lawsuit for those who were attacking the county unit system, I had had a number of conferences with him, and I about had him to agree, he was about ready to agree that my plan was one that he could sell to his people, that he could influence the courts to accept, and before we could do anything, though, the court knocked it out completely. I'm trying to think of who that lawyer was. He became president of Brandeis University later. [He was from?] New York.

Henderson: Is it Morris [Berthold] Abram?

Byrd: Morris Abram. Yeah. Morris saw my plan. He said, well, in his mind maybe this is one that we can live with; it's the best thing that has come along. And let me get with Byrd and see what we can do. And I haven't read the book. I don't know, but I'm told that in Jimmy [James Earl] Carter's [Jr.] last book, that he makes a reference to my plan. I'm anxious to get that book and look at it and see what he had to say about it.

Henderson: What is the governor's attitude toward you challenging him on this?

Byrd: I don't think he developed any animosity toward me about it. I don't think so. He never indicated it.

Henderson: Now he also calls a special session to deal with reapportionment. Does he play a major role in that session?

Byrd: I've forgotten to what extent he took over the leadership of that. I think that that was basically a session that was required by law, you know, and the legislative leaders themselves, as they did in the last go-round, pretty much controlled it.

Henderson: Looking back over the Vandiver administration, what would you say were its major accomplishments?

Byrd: Well, restoring integrity in government, gaining the confidence of the rank and file fellow on the street out there in his government. Ernie had good department heads. He made good appointments, good solid appointments. And, just generally speaking, he kept a tight ship and was a good steward. That's about what it amounts to.

End of Side One

Side Two

Henderson: Well, let me follow up with another question. Governor Vandiver proudly pointed to the fact that while he was governor he did not raise taxes, but yet at the same time he was able to expand services. How was he able to do that?

Byrd: Well, the economy was expanding along about that time. Some of the best growth we have enjoyed up to that period in time just happened to come along about that time, and the tax base broadened. That's basically how it came about.

Henderson: Okay. He was also proud of his efforts to improve the mental health program in the state. Could you discuss that?

Byrd: His wife took a great, active role in that, the mental program down at Milledgeville. As a matter of fact, she organized this movement with all the cities. I think they still do it. Now at Christmas time [they] come together with gifts and things and take [them]

down there. Yeah, Ernie took a lot of personal interest in the mental health program in the state. I know he improved it. Again, my memory fails to tell me what specific things he did, but that was sort of Betty's [Sybil Elizabeth Russell Vandiver] program, his wife.

Henderson: What were the major failures of the Vandiver administration?

Byrd: 'Course I'm not going to admit to any [laughter] 'cause I was part of it.

Henderson: You saw the governor on a relatively daily basis in running state government. How would you describe his stewardship?

Byrd: Excellent, excellent. Conservative, fiscally conservative, and I thought Ernie made a great governor.

Henderson: Would it be fair to say that he tended to be on the frugal side?

Byrd: Yes.

Henderson: How would you describe his relationship with the legislature?

Byrd: With the exception of that budget fight, it was good. [Laughter]

Henderson: How would you describe his relationship with the state bureaucracy?

Byrd: Good because he had appointed most of them.

Henderson: It seems that in past history periodically a governor and some top bureaucrat will get into a row. Did Governor Vandiver ever have a major confrontation with a top bureaucrat in the state?

Byrd: Not to my knowledge.

Henderson: How would you describe his political philosophy?

Byrd: It was that of a conservative, if you can tell me what a conservative is. He was fiscally conservative, morally conservative, and, now, morally, you know, that's a term I just

came up with. I don't really know what that means either, but he was a great moral individual. He was conservative and frugal where money was involved. He made an effort to associate himself with people that he wouldn't mind having in his home as guests, and he just conducted himself in that type of a fashion that said good things about him.

Henderson: How would you characterize him, a strong governor or a weak governor?

Byrd: I think Ernie was a strong governor.

Henderson: Now in comparison to some of his predecessors, say, Governor [Herman] Talmadge. Is he about the same level of strength as being a strong governor, or how would you compare him, say, with other governors?

Byrd: Well, I think Talmadge towered over all of us. Talmadge had some difficult decisions to make himself back there as governor, and he had an uncanny ability to do it. I think Herman was a tower of strength.

Henderson: Did Governor Vandiver have a laid-back style of dealing with people, or was he a very aggressive activist?

Byrd: Real laid-back, laid-back. He didn't come out charging. He looked the situation over and did take his time about making up his mind.

Henderson: How would you compare him with, say, Marvin Griffin's style of dealing with people?

Byrd: Completely different. Marvin was a glad-hander, come out front telling jokes, a great conversationalist. Ernie was quieter, was more of an individual, kept to himself more than Marvin did. Entirely different style altogether.

Henderson: How would you compare his style with, say, Herman Talmadge's style?

Byrd: He and Herman were more alike from the standpoint of individualism. Herman didn't particularly like crowds or people. He could bring himself on any occasion to enjoy them, but he didn't go out seeking them. Ernie didn't go out seeking them. [Cut off]

Henderson: How would you describe Ernest Vandiver as a politician?

Byrd: Well, he wasn't really a politician. He was more of a business individual. He led people well. When you characterize a politician as being someone like Marvin, you know, that type of personality, but yet, you know, every so often people with Vandiver's personality make a better politician than the glad-hander does. No question he was a good politician. He got elected governor. The public was just ready for somebody of his type at that time.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a speaker?

Byrd: Ernie was a good speaker.

Henderson: If I may digress just for a moment, I'd like to ask you this question. Let me just ask you the same thing about . . . did you ever hear Eugene Talmadge give a speech?

Byrd: Yes, when I was a boy, yeah.

Henderson: Okay. How would you compare his style of speaking with, say, Ernest Vandiver's?

Byrd: Governor Eugene Talmadge's style was entirely different. It was a different time, a different era, and different ways to raise the emotions. Back when Ernie came along there was more of a tendency to use a prepared text, a prepared speech that the press expected copies to be distributed. If Gene Talmadge ever had a prepared speech it was something on the back of an envelope or piece of brown paper sack. So that's the difference.

Henderson: Is television beginning to play a major role in campaigning in '58?

Byrd: It just, just had begun.

Henderson: How would you characterize Vandiver as a political leader?

Byrd: Well, it would be hard for me to say, other than the fact that he inherited a group of people who were loyal to him, so it wasn't hard to lead them. He inherited the Talmadge organization. They recognized him as taking over Herman's shoes at that point in time. So he was a good leader in that respect. He held them together.

Henderson: In 1966 Governor Vandiver enters the governor's race but has to withdraw due to a heart condition. Were you supporting him prior to his withdrawal?

Byrd: No, I think that's the race that I wound up in too, as I recall. By that time the public got wind of both of us. [Laughter]

Henderson: He eventually supports James [Harrison] Gray [Sr.] in that campaign even though you were a candidate. Why didn't he support you?

Byrd: I have no idea. I sure don't. I've often wondered about that too.

Henderson: Have you ever asked him that question?

Byrd: No.

Henderson: In 1972 he runs for the U.S. Senate, and that's an unsuccessful campaign. Did you support him in that election, and why do you think he was unsuccessful?

Byrd: What year was that?

Henderson: 1972. That's the year that Sam [Samuel Augustus] Nunn [Jr.] eventually wins the nomination.

Byrd: Right. I didn't take any active interest at all in that campaign. My friends down here in this area were probably supporting Sam Nunn. Sam is local here to us. My son now

practices law over there in Perry [Georgia], and Sam's mother, when he went over there some seven or eight years ago, was involved in a reception for him. We've been close to the Nunn family over the years. So for that reason I doubt if I took any role one way or another as far as Ernie was concerned.

Henderson: Why do you think he was unsuccessful in that election?

Byrd: Historically and traditionally those who've been in office in Georgia are never successful in regaining it since Gene Talmadge's days, and Gene wasn't always successful. When he had opposition, he got beat every other time, when he ran for governor, you know. [Cut off]

Henderson: Final question. Let me ask you: what do you think is the place of Ernest Vandiver in Georgia history?

Byrd: I think Ernie has earned a place in Georgia history for no other reason [than] the fact that he was able to handle and cope with the problems that came up at the University of Georgia, the university system, as a result of the great racial turmoil that was going on at that time. To his credit he got into that fight and he resolved it in a manner that was to the best interests of the people in this state. It wasn't dragged out like it was in Alabama or Mississippi or Arkansas. It was handled here in a business-like manner, and probably, in thinking about it, maybe to his discredit in the minds of a lot of people. Maybe that's what happened to him and me both to some extent after that. The people, you know, they realize he did the right thing, but they just wasn't wanting [sic] to congratulate him for it, wasn't wanting to brag on him for it.

Henderson: Governor Byrd, I want to thank you for this most interesting interview, thank you very much.

Byrd: Well, thank you.

End of Side Two

END OF INTERVIEW

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