

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
OH Vandiver 22
George Thornewell Smith Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: This is an interview with former Lieutenant Governor George T. [Thornewell] Smith in his law office in Marietta, Georgia. The date is March 23, 1994, and I am Dr. Hal Henderson. Good morning, Governor Smith.

Smith: Good morning, Dr. Henderson.

Henderson: Thank you for granting me this interview.

Smith: It's my pleasure, sir.

Henderson: You served in the state House of Representatives during the [Marvin] Griffin administration

Smith: Not during the Griffin administration.

Henderson: Not during the Griffin administration?

Smith: No, I started--my first year in the House of Representatives was 1959, the first year of Governor [Samuel Ernest] Vandiver's [Jr.] term as governor.

Henderson: Okay. All right. Did you support Ernest Vandiver in his race for lieutenant governor in 1954?

Smith: Yes, I did.

Henderson: How actively did you support him?

Smith: I wasn't active. I voted for him. That was probably all that I did in 1954.

Henderson: Why did you support him in that campaign?

Smith: I thought he was the best man in the race.

Henderson: He is lieutenant governor at a time when [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] was governor. What are your recollections of the Marvin Griffin administration?

Smith: Well, the recollection was subsequent to his administration rather than during his administration because all of the scandal came out after the four years was over with. Marvin was only twenty-four miles from Cairo [Georgia] where I was practicing law, and, of course, he was the favorite son down there, and I knew Marvin real well, but I never was close to Marvin. I never was active or anything. I never was appointed any jobs by him or. . . . I knew him, but that was all. He was a happy-go-lucky, storytelling fellow that everybody liked, and I really didn't know what was going on because I wasn't involved in state politics at that time, only at the local level and I really didn't know what was going on. I found out the last two years more about what was going on, I'll hasten to say, because Glenn Pelham was senator the last two years that he was governor. Glenn Pelham knew Vandiver real well and I was active from that standpoint.

Henderson: How did you come to know Ernest Vandiver?

Smith: Through his running for lieutenant governor. He had some relatives, not close relatives, I think about a second cousin in Cairo, and they were good friends of mine because he was on the city council and I was city attorney, and through that way I got to meet and know him a little bit better than you would normally expect.

Henderson: Did you play a role in his campaign for governor in 1958?

Smith: Not an active role because I was running for the House of Representatives at the same time he was running for governor. Now, he had--once again, Glenn Pelham was very active in helping him. He was a senator going out of office at that time; he had just served two years and went out. He was rotating out and Glenn Pelham was very active in it [Vandiver's campaign], and Glenn and I were very good friends. So I supported Vandiver but I was not active because I was running myself.

Henderson: He wins an overwhelming election in '58.

Smith: That's right.

Henderson: What do you attribute that to?

Smith: Well, two things were the budding accusations against Griffin and the fact that Vandiver took a very strong opposition against Griffin toward the end of his administration. Remember that was the fifty million dollar rural roads fight that went on in the legislature. Glenn Pelham played an important part in that, as I recall, and he prevailed. I was supporting him in that, in stopping the fifty million dollar road thing, even though I didn't say it out loud because I was running locally. But those were some of the things that I remember about it. He was a good, clean-cut man and he had all the power behind him right at that time, [Herman Eugene] Talmadge. He [Vandiver] had a clean record and [was] a nice-looking young man and really had no drawbacks, and his opposition was very weak.

Henderson: You mentioned the rural roads fight in '58. Why were you opposed to the Griffin position there?

Smith: I saw it strictly as spending the taxpayers' money to get [him] re-elected four years from then. It was a political ploy from scratch.

Henderson: Did you consider yourself a Vandiver man in the legislature?

Smith: Yes and no. There's a long story about that. I was a Vandiver man and supported him the first two years in everything he asked for. I remember the first bill we voted for, I think, had to do with wiping a bunch of old segregation laws off the books. I'm not sure but I think that's what it was. I don't remember what it was, but it was a very important bill. I supported him all the way through. Now, we got in a squabble the third year over the budget, and that's whenever I went the other way in that particular place. I never was opposed to Vandiver as a person and I never did oppose his programs. That's the only time I really was on the other side of the fence from him on an important fight.

Henderson: What was that fight all about?

Smith: Well, for the first time we [the legislature] brought up a budget. Under the budget laws at that time, if you did not enact a budget every two years, the governor would operate the state on what the last budget appropriation was, and you could not appropriate, spend more money than what you collected in the last fiscal year. Well, there hadn't been a budget passed by the legislature since some time before Herman Talmadge went out of office, as I recall. I know one wasn't passed while Marvin was in there.

So Marvin was operating government, what we call, out of your hip pocket. In other words, he said all this separate money, you see--the old appropriation bill, which had to be followed up to the money, was met in the old appropriation bill. All the money over and above what it took to fund the old appropriation bill, the new governor could handle that money around most any way he wanted to, and we called it hip pocket government, running out of his hip pocket, and that's what was happening. So in 1961, Speaker George L. [Leon] Smith [II]

and a fellow named [Jack Bowdoin] Ray and Frank [Starling] Twitty--Jack Ray and Frank Twitty--they were the three real leaders in the House at that time, they set about to rewrite the budget laws and have an appropriation law passed every two years. The first year the legislature met--you know every two years you have a new legislature--and we got into a terrible fight about that thing, and we won in the House the first go-around. We, the dissidents, if you want to call it, [won] and the governor lost. [It] went over to the Senate--Peter Zack Geer [Jr.] was lieutenant governor at that time, and he was--no, Peter Zack Geer wasn't lieutenant governor at that time, he was Governor Vandiver's executive secretary. Garland [Turk] Byrd was lieutenant governor. So Garland and the governor worked together, of course, and they turned us around in the Senate and brought it back to the House, and at that time the governor got all his forces together and used all of his powers of the governor, which they had a lot of, and we lost it, our fight.

But as a result of that there was a committee appointed that met that summer and rewrote the new budget laws which are presently intact--not intact today, but the present budget laws are basically the ones that we wrote. I was a member of that committee, and Carl [Edward] Sanders was a member of that committee, and several more people. I know this: every member of that committee except one went on to hold some kind of statewide office before they got out of state politics. We rewrote the budget laws at that time, and we had to enact a budget every two years. We had to. In other words, if we didn't the government broke down. So starting then we wrote those new laws, starting when Carl Sanders was governor. In 1963 we started enacting the budget every year--every two years.

Henderson: You mentioned the powers of the governor. What are some powers that a governor has to prevail with the legislature?

Smith: Well, appointments, roads, pet projects, pork barrel, and that's powerful stuff for a local legislator. [Laughter]

Henderson: Now does a governor like Vandiver or Talmadge or Griffin, does he cut these kind of deals, or does his lieutenants in the legislature do this for him, or a combination of the two?

Smith: He cuts the deals and they put it through. You see, there's nothing as influential on a legislator as the governor to call him down to the office, sit him down, and have a conference with him. He lines them up and he tells his lieutenants in the House or the Senate, "This is what I want. I got the votes and let's go with it." Well, he doesn't talk to everybody all the time, but if he has a few hard nuts in a leadership capacity, he'll get them down and talk to them. If he can, he'd talk to all of them. You can't hardly whip a governor if he really takes an interest in it and he goes after it. It's hard to beat him.

Henderson: Did Governor Vandiver ever have you down to his office to talk with you?

Smith: No, he never did call me down there to talk to him.

Henderson: I wonder why not.

Smith: I don't know. He never did, not to try to change my vote. We talked about things, but he never did call me down to try to change my vote.

Henderson: Why did this fight take place in '61? I mean, this is a pretty serious challenge to a governor, and there's some leadership of the governor in the legislature that's leading the fight.

Smith: Yeah, that was the governor's speaker, you know. Back in those times, the governor elected the speaker--the governor's speaker and floor leader. I can't tell you why and prove it, but I think I know why. By taking the money powers away from the governor and putting it in the legislature, that made the legislature a very powerful branch of government. See, up until then the governor could handle the money around and pave roads and give things like that if he wanted to. But if the legislature got a hold of the appropriating powers and they appropriated it every two years, they could have a serious influence on how the money went. The governor, you see, would've recommended an appropriation bill to the legislature just like the president of the United States does, but the legislature was the last one that passed it and they would have the last say on it.

Now, I was in on this pretty close and I--without saying I know what I am talking about, I do--George L. and Frank and Jack Ray, all three of them are dead now, they saw where if they could get the money powers in the hands of the legislature, and they could get the legislature "independent" from the governor, that they could be powers of state government, and keep George L. Speaker of the House, and Frank floor leader, and Jack where he was. Jack was chairman of the Appropriations Committee, you see, and I was vice-chairman of the Appropriations Committee at that time when all this took place. That was really behind it, the legislature trying to get independent power where they could elect their own speaker and not be influenced by the governor. George got that in 1967 [unintelligible] [Lester Garfield] Maddox had the run-off.

Henderson: Is this something that Governor Vandiver is aware of that's going to take place or is he caught by surprise when . . . ?

Smith: Totally--excuse me, I'm sorry. Finish your sentence.

Henderson: Go ahead.

Smith: He was caught totally by surprise. In fact, he was off taking a little vacation during the break in the legislature. I forgot why we took a break, but we took a break for a few days and he was off on a vacation, taking a trip. When he got back, the House was on fire.

[Laughter] He had to fight like thunder to put it out.

Henderson: What was his reaction when he found out what was going on?

Smith: I wasn't there when he found it out, but I can imagine he blew up [laughter] like a volcano. I would have and I'm sure he did [laughter].

Henderson: One of the Vandiver administration's major bills was the Honesty in Government Act.

Smith: That was Bill Number One. That's right, Bill Number One.

Henderson: What was that all about?

Smith: That was all as a result of Marvin Griffin's shenanigans. He [Vandiver] ran on that. He came back and set up a bunch of laws to keep people in office from being so crooked. At least if they were crooked they would be caught easier and convicted and sentenced. That's what that was for, trying to legislate honesty, which you can't always do, but you can help.

Henderson: Do you think Marvin Griffin was corrupt, or the people around him corrupt, or a combination of the two?

Smith: That's a hard thing to say. Now, the people around him were; that's a cinch. How much Marvin Griffin knew I can't say, Dr. Henderson, 'cause I wasn't that close to it and I wasn't that close to him. I knew some of the people in his administration that were guilty of all

that mess, and I knew they was crooked as a dog's hind leg, and I think Marvin should've known. I think Marvin, he had to know something. I honestly don't believe that Marvin was taking money, but he turned his head I'm afraid in some instances. I can't prove that, but I don't see how as much could've been going on as it was and--you know that old saying about all that much smoke, there's got to be some fire. I just feel like he should've known it at least. Let's put it that way. It was too prevalent.

Henderson: How influential was Cheney [Robert Alwyn] Griffin in the Griffin administration?

Smith: A powerful force, a powerful force, a powerful force.

Henderson: Do you think he was aware of what was going on as far as. . . ?

Smith: I think Cheney knew what was going on. I don't know that he knew the full extent to it, but he knew what was going on.

Henderson: The legislature creates an economy and reorganization commission. What was that all about?

Smith: It was a good-sounding name [laughter] and a lot of good purposes. Without being too hard on the commission, I never seen commissions accomplish too much. It makes a governor look good, and I'm not going off on Governor Vandiver 'cause they all do it. It makes the governor look good and comes up with a lot of high-sounding ideas, and as I recall, Bill [William Redding Bowdoin]. . . I can't think of Bill's last name right now, but he was chairman of that commission, and they came up with some good ideas, and some of them were put into effect. It was trying to--I'd guess you'd say--recreate confidence in government for the people. After all the scandals of the Marvin Griffin administration they were trying to reincarnate

confidence in government for the people. They had a good man. . . . What was Bill's name? He was with Trust Company Bank. Later he was chairman of trustees of Berry College and [was] from Elberton, Georgia. He's vice-president of the Trust Company Bank. Bill . . . Bowdoin, Bill Bowdoin. They did a good job and they did a good press, I mean, public relations job for the governor.

Henderson: Governor Vandiver took a special interest in mental health.

Smith: Yes, and his wife was one of the leaders in it, very special interest. They made people more aware of what was not being done in the mental health field, and Mrs. [Sybil Elizabeth Russell] Vandiver, Betty, did a very good job. They had the, as I recall, they had the convoys to Milledgeville for the Mayor's Day. The mayors of the cities would have convoys to Milledgeville, taking things down there. They put it on the map.

Henderson: In the 1960 presidential election Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is arrested in Georgia, and Governor Vandiver plays a role in getting him released. Were you involved in that in any way?

Smith: No, I was not.

Henderson: President-elect John [Fitzgerald] Kennedy is reported to have considered Governor Vandiver for the position of Secretary of the Army. Governor Vandiver eventually asks that his name be withdrawn. Did he seek your advice on this position?

Smith: No, he did not.

Henderson: Okay. Is there any concern in the legislature that if he assumes the position of secretary of the army that Garland T. Byrd would become governor?

Smith: I didn't perceive of any. I don't recall any at that time. No, I didn't. Garland was well liked and doing a good job of lieutenant governor. I don't recall anything, any concern about it.

Henderson: In the 1960 legislative session the Sibley committee is created. What was the Sibley committee all about?

Smith: That's a good story about the Sibley committee. I don't know whether I want to tell you all about or not [laughter] 'cause I want to write my book. [Laughter] I'm very well acquainted with the Sibley committee. The Sibley committee was appointed to try to lead the administration--Governor Vandiver and [unintelligible] the administration in general and the state--out of a bramble thicket that we found ourselves in with public education and integration and so on. The purpose of the commission was to, allegedly, was to find out what the people wanted, but everybody knew what the people wanted. The commission was formed to try to get the people to accept what they had to do. And it succeeded. We knew what we had to do and we knew what the people didn't want to do, the majority of them, and that was what that commission was for. It did a good job of selling the people on what had to be done.

Henderson: You indicated at the beginning of your discussion there may be more to it than you wanted to discuss. Are you leaving something out?

Smith: [Laughter] Might be.

Henderson: Whose idea was it to have a . . . ?

Smith: It was nothing sinister that I'm leaving out.

Henderson: Whose idea was it to have the Sibley committee? Was it Griffin [Boyette] Bell's? Was it Ernest Vandiver's?

Smith: Now, I do not know where the idea was born. I cannot say where the idea was born, but I know that when it was revealed to me, the speaker [George L. Smith] told a group of us about it, that this is what they were going to do.

Henderson: There is some talk in 1960 about the schools should be closed to avoid desegregation. What was your position on keeping the schools open?

Smith: I didn't see how we could close them. I thought we had to keep them open.

Henderson: Now, being from a rural south Georgia county, did that position get you in trouble with your constituency?

Smith: Oh, yes. Yes, I wasn't taking a lead in it, I'll be honest with you there, 'cause I wasn't in a position to take a lead. But I thought we had to keep them open and I went along with the Sibley commission, what I thought they had to do. Oh yeah, that was not a popular position to take, so you just didn't talk about it. [It was] politically smart to keep your mouth shut, although you'd support it when it'd come to voting. I always found out if you just vote in Atlanta and when you go home on the weekend don't let nobody see you and then go back to Atlanta, you never get in trouble 'cause people didn't bother to call you on the telephone or write. It was only when they saw you on the street [laughter]. Just stay away from them.

Henderson: In 1961 Georgia has to deal with the desegregation crisis at the University of Georgia. How do you think Governor Vandiver handled that crisis?

Smith: Now you're really putting me on the spot. [Long pause] Let's put it this way: I suspect the governor handled it as good as he could with it, with the situation he was in. The anti-integration group had the bit in the mouth, the leadership in the House and the Senate had the bit in the mouth--George L., Frank, Jack Ray--and the governor probably had nothing else to

do, that based upon his campaign, as we remember, "no, not one." He was probably trapped in a situation that he wished he wasn't in. It wasn't handled too well, and that's not any particular criticism of him, the way the whole thing was handled.

Henderson: What about it . . . ?

Smith: Of course, that's partly based on hindsight; just have to admit that, you know. We're all Monday morning quarterbacks, but I was not in on any of the decision making in that. I was in on some of the meetings where they were talking about what they were going to do, but I was never a factor in the decision-making. I was privileged to sit in on some of their meetings, but never a factor.

Henderson: Did the governor ever ask you your opinion about what his course of action should be?

Smith: Not personally, no. He called for a vote one afternoon and I voted to keep the university open. Now, that was a private meeting on a Sunday afternoon in his office with a large group of people, and Carl Sanders and I, as I recall, were the only two people in the group that stated that we'd like to see the university kept open. Let them take them in and forget about it.

Henderson: Do you recall who else was present at that meeting?

Smith: Oh, it was a room full of them.

Henderson: Was Roy [Vincent] Harris present?

Smith: I don't know. I can't recall [unintelligible]. I think, now, Dr. Henderson, I think it was composed strictly of Senate and House members and department heads. I don't think it was any outsiders such as Roy there, as I recall. I don't think he was, no.

Henderson: How large a meeting was this?

Smith: It must have been twenty-five, thirty people there. As I remember, the governor's office was filled.

Henderson: And what was the consensus of the group there, the . . . ?

Smith: The consensus of the group there was not to let them in school, and the House leadership took the lead in that.

Henderson: Why do you think Ernest Vandiver, who had the reputation of being a segregationist, an ally of Senator [Herman] Talmadge, a very close relationship with Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.], campaigned in 1958 as you mentioned, "No, not one," why do you think he moved away from that position and accepted the idea of "let's keep the schools open even if they're going to be desegregated"?

Smith: Because he faced the realities of life. He realized that to carry forth his idea of "No, not one" would totally destroy the public schools and education, and he felt like or was convinced that that's the best thing for all concerned to do what he did. I think he was right.

Henderson: At that time did you see that ending any future political future career of his?

Smith: No, I didn't. It might have; it might've had an effect on subsequent races, but I didn't see it as that then. Well, let me back up. At that moment, once again I'm looking back now. At that moment, I probably thought it killed him 'cause I didn't know what the future was, but as it turned out I don't think it was deathly to him.

Henderson: He addresses the legislature in January 1961 in a historic night session.

Smith: Yes, I remember that.

Henderson: Do you remember that session?

Smith: Yes, I remember that session.

Henderson: What was the mood and atmosphere of that session?

Smith: That was dealing with the desegregation order. It was a hostile mood, not toward him. It was just unrest, and hostility, and uncertainty filled the air because those were troublesome times . . . and the uncertainty of it all. Nobody was sure where we were going or what was going to take place.

Henderson: What was your reaction to that speech?

Smith: I thought he made a good speech. I thought it fit the mood and the time.

Henderson: He not only has to deal with the desegregation crisis, he also has to deal with reapportionment and the county unit system. Do you recall the discussion or the fight in the legislature about reapportionment?

Smith: Do I! I was in five reapportionment fights when I was in the legislature. I don't recall when the suit was filed attacking the county unit system, but I know it had been going on long enough until it came out, the court decision. [It] came out in early spring of '62 because that's when Carl Sanders was running against Griffin for governor, and that elected Carl Sanders governor because the rural vote could not match the city vote. I met with the pains of reapportionment. The first reapportionment came about in the Senate. [The legislature] had a special session in the latter part of September and the first of October 1962. That came about as a result of the Senate--you know, the Senate, they all rotated the Senate. Every third year a county would get somebody. Well, that reapportionment did away with it, rotating the Senate. You elect a senator and we'll reapportion the state as to give equal representation, "equal representation."

That was a bloodletting. Carl Sanders had been elected governor and I had been elected speaker-designate, so we had gotten enough votes in the committee to elect me speaker. So I took a right active part in that special session in the latter part of September, the first of October, on reapportioning the Senate. It was a tough fight over in the Senate. Of course, the House just about was willing to go along with anything the Senate passed. But it was a tough fight, trying to get those districts set up where everybody could be protected. Unless you've been through one of those things, you don't know what it's like and I can't explain it. But it's a fight. It's a fight.

Henderson: Did Governor Vandiver play a major role in this, or did he leave this to the legislature?

Smith: No, he played a major role. The governor had to get involved in it. It was such a new thing, and so many customs and traditions were being--lines were being crossed. You had to have leadership from the top and he took a very active part in it. He took a leadership role in it.

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

Smith: Well, the fact that he realized what he had to do to save the public school system, I think, was one of the most courageous decisions a man ever made. He got elected on something that's directly opposite of that. That was not popular during that time and despite the unpopularity of it, he realized what he had to do, and he just took the bit in his teeth and did what he had to do. That was a compliment to the man's courage and his foresight. That, in my opinion, saving the public schools, I think, was his major contribution, and [that he was] willing

to do it, you know. He could have muddled through, you know, until the next governor and let him take the fall, but he didn't do it. He just took the heat and got it straight.

Henderson: Do you see any shortcomings or failures of Vandiver administration?

Smith: Oh, all of us have shortcomings and failures, but I wouldn't. . . . This far away in the game, I can't remember one big enough that you'd just call it a flat-out failure.

Henderson: How would you describe his stewardship as governor?

Smith: He did a good job. He's honest; he was dedicated to the job. He really listened to advisors, and that's one of the hardest things in the world to do in a place of leadership. When you get that high, don't you ever forget it, to listen to other people. It's not easy to do, but he listened to people particularly in the school situation, the Sibley commission. He recognized the problems with the budget thing, and although he got back control of it, he was willing to put his shoulder to the wheel and help straighten it out and get it straight, and he did that. He was a listener and he was not bull-headed. He was determined and had a lot of courage and determination about him, but he was not bull-headed. What I mean by bull-headed, just say, "Heck, I'm going to run here, and I don't care what the situation is." I think the school situation was one of the greatest exhibits of him being able to do what he thought was right, not what he wanted to do.

Henderson: Some of his critics have accused him of being stubborn. Did you see traces of that in your dealings with him?

Smith: Oh yeah, but, my Lord, if a governor's not stubborn he ain't a governor. They're going to run over him. You got to be stubborn. I called it bull-headed a while ago, didn't I? [Laughter] Determination is stubbornness; it just all depends on who's describing you, you

know. Your enemies describe you as stubborn; your friends describe you as determination [sic], a mind of your own. I never did see any stubbornness to the standpoint of a detriment to the government.

Henderson: Okay. How would you describe his political philosophy: conservative, moderate . . . ?

Smith: Conservative. Now, of course, back then they would have called it radical because he went along with the school deal, but he was conservative. He did just what he thought had to be done in order to save the school systems for the best of the state.

Henderson: Would you consider him a strong governor or a weak governor or somewhere in-between?

Smith: He's somewhere in-between. He certainly wasn't a weak governor because a weak governor couldn't have taken the leadership on the reapportionment; he couldn't have taken the leadership in saving the schools; he couldn't have taken the leadership for agreeing to appropriation laws to be changed. You can't be a weak governor, and agree to those changes, and take a part in it. He didn't step back and let somebody else do it. He took part in it; he wasn't a weak governor at all.

Henderson: Did he have a laid-back style of dealing with people, or did he have an aggressive style, or some place in-between?

Smith: Some place in-between. Governor Vandiver was not arrogant. He treated people--you felt comfortable around him. He was not laid-back; he was a very intense man. He tended to his job; he was very intense. In fact, he got so intense one time his health got kind of

bad on him, and it was nothing in the world but just living under strain and intensity, but he was an intense man. He was not a weak governor at all.

Henderson: Were you with him on social occasions, and, if so, is he the type of person that's a pleasure to be around? Is he congenial?

Smith: Oh yes. Yeah, yeah. Governor Vandiver was a little on the quiet side, a little on the reserved side. He was not a loud mouth. He was not a joke teller like Griffin, a happy-go-lucky. He had a serious--most of the time he was conservatively serious, I'd put it. But he was a pleasure to be around. I was not in that many small social gatherings with him, but he was always pleasant to be around. He was not an unpleasant man at all.

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

Smith: He was a good politician. Any man that can get elected governor is a good politician.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a speaker?

Smith: He had a good voice, a good speaker. He was better than most but not a orator in Herman Talmadge's field. But he was a good speaker, good speaker. [He] had a good voice. He was always intense, and interested, and put force in it. [He] believed in what he said.

Henderson: How would his style of speaking compare with, say, Marvin Griffin's?

Smith: It was entirely different, totally different. Marvin was always--had a lot of levity in his and spoke by using stories to illustrate things. But Governor Vandiver never did put much foolishness in his talks. His talk was all meat, and he went straight to the point and covered it that way. Governor Griffin was more entertaining than Governor Vandiver. I suspect what you'd say the difference was, if you remembered anything about Governor

Vandiver's speeches, you'd remember the meat of them, but Governor Marvin Griffin's, you'd probably remember his stories and never remember what he'd said. [Laughter]

Henderson: How about comparing his style with, say, that of Herman Talmadge's?

Smith: Well, Herman was one of a kind, you know. His style was--I don't use the word flamboyant 'cause Herman wasn't really that. He [Vandiver] just was all business on the stump, all business. He wasn't as good a speaker as Herman was, but he was a good speaker.

Henderson: How would you describe Ernest Vandiver's personality?

Smith: Governor Vandiver had a--I don't know how to describe his personality. He was withdrawn a little bit. He was not an outgoing person per se. I don't know how to say. . . . He was quiet and there wasn't a whole lot of foolishness about him. [Cut off].

End of Side One

Side Two

Henderson: We're talking about speaking styles, and before we leave this I'd like for you to comment on Governor Ed [Eurith Dickinson] Rivers. I understand that you heard him speak on occasion.

Smith: Yeah, I'm one of those people hanging around that's old enough to remember him [laughter]. He was from Cairo, Georgia, by the way, at one time. He practiced law in Cairo, Georgia. A little side story on Governor Rivers is he ran for solicitor to the state court or justice of the peace, I forgot which, one or the other of those offices. He got beat in Grady County, and when he got beat, he moved and went to whatever county it was he went to over there.

Henderson: Lanier County?

Smith: Lanier County. That's the reason he left Grady county. He couldn't get elected to--I think it's solicitor of state court, but I'm not sure . . . or city court. I'm not sure. That's the reason he went over there. He was a fire-eater. He was--I can't use that word on here because I [unintelligible] that you put it in that book [laughter]. He was a fire-eater. He was just like he came with a burning flame. He rared, and pitched, and pounded, and snorted. He and our former Governor Eugene Talmadge were very similar in style, but as I recall, Governor Talmadge had a stronger, more bass voice than Rivers. Rivers was a little more high-pitched, but they went after it. That was back in the days when you didn't have speaker systems, and they had to talk loud and hard and fast, and they did it. Entertaining.

I remember the first time I ever heard--I can't remember the first time I heard Ed Rivers. Now that I can't remember, but I remember the first time I heard Gene Talmadge. It was at Bainbridge, Georgia, in his opening campaign for governor, the first time he ever ran. My daddy thought the sun rose and set on Gene Talmadge anyway, and we went down there with my Uncle Gene Richards and some of his family. We went to Bainbridge, and they had the speaking out in the old park there at Bainbridge and they had barbecue. Gene [Talmadge] snatched his coat off and [showed his] red suspenders and those were the times [laughter]. Ain't nothing like it, I tell you. It must have been ten or fifteen thousand people there and the town was running over. Let them have it, Gene. It is nothing compared to an old time political rally, and there's not a whole lot of people remember them.

Henderson: Well, let's move back to Governor Vandiver.

Smith: [Laughter] All right.

Henderson: In 1966 he is the leading candidate in the governor's race and he withdraws due to health reasons. Prior to his withdrawal, were you supporting him for re-election?

Smith: No, in '66 I was running for lieutenant governor.

Henderson: So you were not . . . ?

Smith: I was very busy [laughter] trying to get elected.

Henderson: Governor Smith, let me ask you the final question: What do you think is the place of Ernest Vandiver in Georgia history?

Smith: Governor Vandiver came into the governor's office at a very difficult time. [He] had all of the scandals of the Griffin administration behind him. He had to re-establish people's confidence in government, and by the time he had done that--he did a good job of it. He came in and re-established the people's confidence in their governors because he was an honest, upright man, and he convinced people he was. He did a good job of that, and then, by the time he got his breath from that one, we hit him in the solar plexus with this integration of the University of Georgia and the school problems, and he'd wrestled with that. He came out of that, I think, the way he should. He did what he thought he had to do for the good of the country or the state, whether he wanted to do it or not. Personally had nothing to do with it.

I think the measure of the greatest of a man is to do what he thinks should be done rather than doing what he wants to do, and he did what he thought should be done ultimately. That takes a big man to change his mind and do something he thinks of as the best for the state rather than what he wanted to do. Then he wound up being hit with the appropriations problems and reapportionment. I suspect Governor Vandiver had more real knotty problems in his administration than any governor's ever had, and history has proven that he handled them

well. He will be remembered for that. He handled about four knotty problems real well. I thought he came out of them real well.

Henderson: I want to thank you for taking your time to grant me this interview. It has been most interesting and informative.

Smith: Thank you.

End of Side Two

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