

Harold Paulk Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection
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Robert Grier Stephens Interviewed by Dr. Harold Paulk Henderson
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EDITED BY DR. HENDERSON

Side One

Henderson: I am Dr. Hal Henderson. I am interviewing former Congressman Robert Grier Stephens, Jr. in his home in Athens, Georgia. The date is July 29, 1994. Good afternoon, Congressman.

Stephens: Glad to have you here in Athens and to have you talking with me about our Georgia politics some [laughter].

Henderson: Thank you, sir. Let me begin by asking you: when did you serve in the state legislature?

Stephens: I was sworn in in January of 1951 into the state Senate. The senatorial district that I represented had Athens and Wilkes County and Oglethorpe County, and you could serve in it only one term unless the other counties waived their time. So it became Clarke County's time in '51 for them to put the senator up and I ran for that term. So I served '51 and '52 in the state Senate. That's when I started, and then when my term expired I ran against the incumbent in the House and won that race, and I served three terms in the Georgia House.

Henderson: How did you become acquainted with [Samuel] Ernest Vandiver [Jr.]?

Stephens: I knew Ernest when he was an undergraduate at the university [The University of Georgia]. It's right unusual question for you to ask me, and I can't remember when I first became acquainted with Ernest. It just seems like I've always known him, but he and I had a lot of mutual friends. He's younger than I by a number of years, but we had so many mutual

acquaintances, and our association with the Tenth Congressional District when Mr. [Paul] Broun was our congressman he covered Franklin County too, and so they were When you had a meeting of Mr. Broun's Democratic committee, and I went to that, the people from Franklin County were there, and I don't remember whether Ernest's father was on Mr. Broun's committee.

But Ernest's father was very prominent in Franklin County, and he was on the Georgia highway commission for a long time. Mr. Vandiver had a good reputation, and he was a very strong Gene [Eugene] Talmadge supporter, and Gene Talmadge appointed him to the [board of the] highway department. I just got to know of Ernest and his family through so many other things that I can't tell you when I first met him.

Henderson: When you were going to the university as a student, does he come after you, or were you two contemporaries at the university?

Stephens: Well, part of the time we were contemporary, but we were actually in the law school together. I went to the law school in 1939, but I had been out of the academic world since--well, I got my A.B. in '35 and got my M.A. in '38. I went to school in Germany for a year as an exchange student. But Ernest came along in the interim, part of the time when I was in Germany, and then we actually became really more closely acquainted when we went to the law school together.

Henderson: Now, what was your experience in the law school with Ernest Vandiver?

Stephens: We shared classes. We went to the same classes together, and that's where we became, you know, more closely acquainted.

Henderson: At that time do you have any inkling that he has higher political ambitions, or is he just a fellow law student?

Stephens: I can't remember In '41 I went into the army, and I was away for basically for four and a half years, and that was during the period when Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall was the governor. I had been in the camp of Ellis Arnall while I was teaching, and Ellis, I had known Ellis Arnall when I was I met him in 1929 before I even came over to Georgia. Ellis was a member of the KA [Kappa Alpha] fraternity, and I pledged the KA fraternity. Later, although I wasn't in school with Ellis, I supported him for governor when he ran. Let me see, he ran in '36?

Henderson: 1942 for governor.

Stephens: '42. That's right, yeah. Ernest was a little bit--well, he supported the Talmadges, I'm sure, but I wasn't--at that time, I'm trying to remember whether or not Well, of course, Ernest, I suppose the first thing I remember in respect to Ernest in politics was when he got elected mayor of Lavonia and was the youngest mayor in the United States, which was a good accomplishment, achievement. I can't remember what those dates were but that's when I remember him basically as involved in politics.

Henderson: Now, he is adjutant general for Herman [Eugene] Talmadge's administration.

Stephens: That's right. Now, that was after Ellis Arnall's time, and after the war . . . and after he was mayor. Now, when Ernest was adjutant general, he was appointed after Herman had been elected governor, and after the two governor affair, or really three governor affair, and I had been the chairman of the election campaign for M. E. [Melvin Ernest] Thompson here in Clarke County. That was in '47--or '48, wasn't it? '48?

Henderson: He ran for [governor in] '48.

Stephens: '48, yeah, but at that time I had been elected city attorney of Athens and was taking part in politics, and Clarke County went for M. E. Thompson. Now, Herman and I became acquainted and friends when we were freshmen. He was a freshman in 1931 at Georgia, and I was freshman in '31, and we were on different sides of the college politics in the years that I was in college. Now, I never did dislike Herman. We weren't what you would call political enemies, but we were on different sides of the politics.

To make things clear: people never did understand when they said Georgia was a one party political state. Well, Georgia has been a two party system for years and years and years, and the two party system was Talmadge and anti-Talmadge, so far as my lifetime was concerned. The activity around the county unit system--see, I grew up in Atlanta. That was a different politics from south Georgia. The north Georgia and south Georgia were really separate because of that Talmadge and anti-Talmadge, but Senator [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.], you see, was anti-Talmadge, and he beat Governor [Eugene] Talmadge for the United States Senate. He was the stalwart of north Georgia, and Talmadge south Georgia. The two party system was really Russell and Talmadge when I came along.

Then when they had the . . . election that M. E. Thompson lost out on, I supported him from our county, and strange--not strangely enough, but that's when I first met Phil [Philip Mitchell] Landrum. Phil was very active as the executive secretary of M. E. Thompson, and I first met Phil because I went over to Atlanta for some meeting for Mr. Thompson, and Phil and I got acquainted. I'd heard of him before that time, but Phil and I had gotten acquainted by that time. But, see, that's--north Georgia and south Georgia were the Russell and Talmadge.

But it when it comes along about the time that Herman came along, he had . . . and Gene had the predominant election, but Ernest Vandiver, in my looking back at it, came into the political ring as one who might be able to unite north Georgia and south Georgia because he had a factor that people don't think about that was very helpful: he had married Senator Russell's niece, and she was great, not only because she was Senator Russell's niece but she's always been a great asset for Ernest. But it gave an opportunity for me to feel more kindly toward Ernest as a candidate for later on, because he represented bringing north and south Georgia together in that family thing as well.

'Course, Senator Russell, I had always admired and knew him. Senator Russell's father, Judge [Richard Brevard] Russell [Sr.], and my uncle, who was on the state Court of Appeals, Judge Elickstein, had been friends, and we had always felt that Senator Russell was a high-class person--and I still do [laughter]. But that was a factor that Ernest I knew him, having been acquainted with him, you see, over here in the school, law school, and we'd always been personal friends. Well, I was delighted to see him be appointed adjutant general and to be recognized.

Henderson: Now, let me ask you about him as adjutant general. Is he able to use his position to lay the groundwork for running for the lieutenant governorship?

Stephens: Well, yes, anybody that held public office could use the publicity they got or the name that they had. He did not misuse it. Ernest was one of the most honorable people I ever had dealings with, but he never misused his position. But you couldn't help but tell people how you felt about things.

Henderson: In 1954 he runs for lieutenant governor. Did you play a role in that campaign?

Stephens: That was the year that Marvin

Henderson: [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] was elected governor.

Stephens: Griffin was elected governor.

Henderson: He's [Vandiver] elected lieutenant governor.

Stephens: And he was elected lieutenant governor, and that is when you began to feel--I began to feel--this more or less fact that . . . Ernest represented a position between the two factions that had elected Marvin and the faction that had defeated Marvin. Now, Marvin ran in 1954, and I had been in the state Senate with Marvin as lieutenant governor. My personal friends and the ones that I had gone to college with had been the leaders of the House under Herman when I went into the House, and when I say leaders in the House: the speaker was Fred [Frederick Barrow] Hand, and the majority leader was from Pelham--no, not Pelham [unintelligible]. Anyway, George L. [Leon] Smith, II was from Swainsboro, and he had been the floor leader for [Herman] Talmadge. We had--I can't think of the fellow's name now, but we'll think of it.

The leadership in the House of Representatives that had been the ones that supported and elected Herman Talmadge were my personal friends. Phil [James Philander] Campbell [Jr.], who later became commissioner of agriculture, came from Oconee County. I've known him ever since he was a young boy here, and he had been a member of the KA fraternity like I had. He and I had roomed together when I went over there in the Senate. Also, Jack [Bowdoin] Ray from Norwood had leadership in the Talmadge House [of Representatives] party. You had Fred Hand, George L. Smith, Jack Ray, and Phil Campbell, and Frank [Starling Twitty], he was the floor leader for Marvin--that's what it was. Not for Marvin, for Herman.

Anyway, they, as well as Herman, found out that they had to make a decision as to whether they were going to stick together as a leadership group, or whether they were going to have to break up and support Marvin. Well, they stuck together. But Fred Hand was the nominee, and Fred Hand was very popular in Athens. Fred had been on the football team here and graduated from the University of Georgia, and he'd been very active in the alumni work in supporting the university. So Fred was the candidate that we--I, being from here, had run with Herman's support when I ran for the House. He asked me to run for the House, Herman did, because I had not been anti-Talmadge in the legislature. Because these other people--well, let's put it like this without making it too confusing. George L. Smith and I had been in college together. Jack Ray was one of my greatest friends. We were members of the same fraternity, and I had pledged him and initiated him, and he and I had been just great friends, and they wanted me to help them elect Fred Hand.

Well, you see, Ernest comes along, and he's supporting Marvin because of that, but Marvin got Ernest to run in order to offset these other Talmadge people that--Marvin split the Talmadge support and got elected. Now, Ernest . . . Ernest didn't get out and throw dirt at the other candidates like . . . Fred Hand and others. He just didn't take part in the race as far as I remember. You know, he . . . didn't throw any dirt or anything like that at Marvin, but he just wasn't as active as much as you would think he might be. It wasn't as much of a ticket, and, you see, I think . . . Who was the lieutenant governor candidate? Charlie [Charles Latimer] Gowen, or was Charlie later on? Charlie Gowen ran for governor, didn't he? Anyway, Ernest . . . wasn't the strong, outstanding supporter of Marvin Griffin. At least I didn't feel that way.

Henderson: How would you describe the following individuals of the Griffin administration? Marvin Griffin, how would you describe Marvin?

Stephens: Marvin was one of the nicest politicians I ever met actually, and Marvin and I got along real well. When I was in the Senate, I found out--I was a young lawyer, and I studied the bills, and Marvin sort of depended on me a little bit without having any official job to help explain bills on the floor and pass them. Marvin was very nice to me, and I wanted to say that he was one of the best friends the University of Georgia ever had, and I appreciated that, and I supported him when he was governor for the three years that I was under him. He did more for the university than any--almost any--governor we've had.

Henderson: Now, some of his critics would say that he had the most corrupt administration in Georgia's history. Do you think that's a fair assessment?

Stephens: No. Some of his aides and others like Cheney [Robert Alwyn Griffin] were accused in the newspapers and others of selling and buying State Patrol jobs and everything, but so far as my personal knowledge is concerned, they never--well, I'll give you an example: I had the opportunity to recommend two young men for the State Patrol here, and I went to Marvin and he told me to see Cheney, and I told him that I'd like to have these--at different times--men appointed. They were appointed; both of them were appointed, and no question was asked of me as to any compensation of any kind by me or him or anything. I had absolutely no reason to Well, they didn't ask me to pay them anything in the first place, and I wasn't going to pay them anything in the second place, but they wanted to have my support, I suppose, for some of their programs. So those things were political appointments to a great degree, but so far as to

any what you would call corrupt practices were concerned, I never had any personal knowledge of any of them.

Now, Cheney got a lot of publicity [laughter]. I heard Cheney, told me one time, "You know, that Marvin liked to ruin me." [Laughter] Cheney--There may have been some fire where the smoke was, but in so far as my personal knowledge is concerned, I never knew of any and was never told or approached at all in any way [unintelligible].

Henderson: Do you think there's any more improprieties going on in the Griffin administration than in previous administrations?

Stephens: From what I had heard I don't think so. There used to be stories about Gene Talmadge and the stories about pardons and all of that, but in so far as my personal knowledge is concerned, I never knew anybody that was involved in it. Now, there could have been. That don't mean that it wasn't so, but I'm just talking about it personally. I never ran across--I might have believed some of the stories that somebody told me, but I never ran across first-hand, eyewitness idea.

Henderson: Why do you think the Atlanta papers were so critical of Marvin Griffin?

Stephens: Well, it was because of the county unit system, and the nucleus of the attacks that the--see, Marvin was a Talmadge man, and the attacks that had been made by Eugene Talmadge and others in south Georgia against north Georgia, and the focal point had come when Atlanta felt, and the politicians in Atlanta, and the newspaper people in Atlanta like [Ralph Emerson] McGill, they felt like that Atlanta was not getting the attention that they ought to get. They didn't have people representing Atlanta on the boards and everything, and that they were not getting what they should get due to the popular vote, and they knew that they couldn't do

anything about it until they got rid of the county unit system. The county unit system was the focal point of their attack of Herman, and Marvin, and Gene. That's my opinion.

Henderson: How would you describe the relationship between Governor Marvin Griffin and Lieutenant Governor Ernest Vandiver? Was it cordial?

Stephens: Yeah.

Henderson: Adversarial?

Stephens: No, it was not ever thought to do with [*sic*] adversarial . . . until we came to the last session [1958] for the election of Ernest and the change had to take place. Now, as I've said, I was a friend of Ernest, and I went over to Ernest's room . . . at the hotel with several others, and Ernest didn't have a lot of people coming around talking to him about running for governor at this time because Marvin couldn't run again, I think, because he had to be out for a term.

Henderson: Right.

Stephens: The leaders of the Herman Talmadge group had their noses out of joint for four years when Marvin was the governor. See, they had been the leaders, and everybody that wanted anything done about school building or anything that they needed--and I'm not saying buying, just the legislation--they had to deal with George L. Smith and the others. Well, when Marvin didn't have their support and they had gone over to supporting . . . Fred, Marvin couldn't appoint any of them to his leadership in the administration. So they were just on a sideline waiting, and they came to the conclusion that Ernest would be the one that could bring them all back together because he had that up in north Georgia, and south Georgia, and the Senator Russell support, and the old-line Talmadge people.

I don't know who had this idea, but they was just beginning to line up, and these people told Ernest that "We can help you get elected governor." That's George L. Smith and Jack Ray--now, I'm not saying that I was in on the things, but you hear so many things. I mean, this is what I think is true. They told him that "You've probably seen that not too many people are coming around there to talk to you." But [Smith and Ray] say, "Marvin has proposed a piece of legislation called the Rural Roads Bond Issue that will have to be voted on, and it is a big expense to the state, and they're a lot of people that think that nobody but the contractors want it, and they don't want this big expense. In order to break with Marvin you've got to come to a conclusion where people can see you've broken with Marvin."

Well, Marvin put a lot of his last years in office trying to get that rural road thing passed, and they talked Ernest into being against it as the point to break with Marvin. I don't know--I wasn't in, as I said, on any of these things, but I could see what was happening, and that they were thinking that if they could tell Ernest how to get elected, he would be obligated to them and put them back in the places of power, and that happened. Now, there's nothing that I am implying that anything crooked was done, but it's just the politics of it. They told Ernest that to the Georgia public you could make this rural road business a real expensive thing, and that people ought not have to pay for the rural roads, and they're talking about toll roads that you can't get anywhere in Georgia without paying a toll, and they made a real campaign issue out of it, and Ernest jumped on it, and they got behind Ernest and elected him governor. Now, I voted and supported Ernest for governor because I thought he, character-wise and experience-wise and every-wise, ought to be our governor.

Henderson: There was a gentleman that ran against him by the name of Bill [William Turner] Bodenhamer [Sr.]. Do you recall Bill Bodenhamer?

Stephens: Yeah, Bill was a preacher, and Bill had a campaign of prohibition. He didn't have any thought that he could beat Ernest, but he thought he'd get a lot of publicity. He really was not--he couldn't have beat anybody on his platform. He was a man of high character, but he wasn't a leader.

Henderson: Now in that 1958 campaign Ernest Vandiver makes a statement, "No, not one." What did you think about that promise?

Stephens: That promise wasn't called [unintelligible] until after I had left and was in Congress, and they had proposed the civil rights legislation in the Congress. I'm not sure that I'm getting my dates right, but they had this movement over here at the University of Georgia that . . . came to a head with the student uprising here, and Ernest realized that the--I can't remember whether this was before the Supreme Court made a decision or not, was it? See, the *Brown v. Board of Education* was in '54 or '56.

Henderson: '54.

Stephens: And the Civil Rights Bill came along in '64, and . . . I won't say--we can look this up--this is just my memory--the law as it stood meant that if he followed through with that promise that he had made, that he would have to urge the people to disobey the law. I think I'm right, and he stood up against what was very unpopular. But I personally thought he did what was right under the circumstances.

Henderson: He has to deal with the desegregation of the University of Georgia

Stephens: Was that before the civil rights thing?

Henderson: Yes, sir, that was in 1961.

Stephens: '61. I knew it was right after I had gone to Washington. Was that--no, that wasn't when Dr. [Walter Dewey] Cocking was fired. That's why I was saying I'm trying to remember the exact dates. But anyway, I personally thought that he did the only thing that he could do and be honest with what as governor of Georgia he thought was the best thing to do. Now, I Go ahead.

Henderson: Looking back on Ernest Vandiver's administration, what would you say were some of the major accomplishments of Ernest Vandiver?

Stephens: Well, again I'm going to have to tell you that I have not any vivid recollection and for the very reason was that I was not involved in them I was in a new situation in January, 1961, and I was pretty well up to here trying to find out what was going on in Washington, having never been in Washington more than two weeks in all my whole life before I went up there. I hadn't had any contact so far as a job with any member of Congress. I had always followed and admired people we had in Congress, but I had a lot to learn and I can tell you that I haven't got any specific things that Ernest did except that I don't have any feeling that I was opposed to proposals that he made.

As I have pointed out, Marvin was in position to do more for the university than anybody ever did, and if you will follow my thought: Georgia had for years and years importuned the federal government to give them things for their agricultural school and everything--to Washington, and Senator Russell--they had the power--and Senator Russell said to the legislature openly, he said, "Until such time as you give me, from the standpoint of the state of Georgia, support that we can be given if I put this, you know, agriculture at the

university that you will support it. You pass money to build buildings for it or to provide faculty. In other words, if we give a \$100 million to the state--to the agriculture school, how much can you put up to support that hundred million dollars to make whatever's going to be given a first class thing?" He said, "Until you do that I'm faced with this: you say you're going to put a peanut laboratory somewhere, and Georgia says we'll give you ten thousand dollars and the other school says we'll give you a hundred thousand. Where are they going to put it?" So he said, "Until you meet what is necessary by beating them on state funds, I can't do anything."

Now, Marvin became the governor and after his first year B. E. Thrasher [Jr.], the state auditor, said that "If we don't do anything about changing any revenue lost in Georgia, at the end of your administration Georgia will be \$85 million in committed funds by the legislature, and we've got to either decide not to finance these things or have a new tax bill." Marvin had enough courage to propose an \$85 million tax bill, and that was to be added on to the sales tax bill that Herman got passed. My first experience in the legislature in '51 was to vote on the sales tax, and Georgia had a \$100 million budget in 1951. We passed the sales tax in April of 1951, and the collection in the nine months after that--not the whole year--was \$95 million above the hundred million, almost doubled the tax.

But then the university and Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology] and all our university activities began to pressure the legislature for more activities for their helping the schools, and Marvin said, "All right, you're talking about a science center at the University of Georgia," and says, "It's estimated to be \$14 million. Now, Senator Russell has told us until we in Georgia offer courses and faculty members to support federal programs at Georgia expense, that he can't get the money for us." Says, "I'll put up this \$14 million plus the other things if you

can pass my tax bill." There were eight points in that tax bill that everybody agreed with except one, and the proposal in Marvin's tax bill was to say that you couldn't take from your Georgia income tax the federal income taxes, which is still what it is now.

Well, now, that was a very hard thing for people to vote for, but I had the \$14 million promised to us here if we passed it, and Marvin kept that promise. Also, he started to build a [unintelligible] for the Georgia Center for Continuing Education, those things, and then after that was done, Senator Russell was able to get the food laboratory, the peanut laboratory, and it just was a great thing. But it . . . was a strange thing that when Marvin ran for reelection after he had been out, he didn't get but 1,875 votes in Clarke County. That was just the backlog from the Talmadge/anti-Talmadge and the civil rights and everything. Now, I don't know whether I answered the original question that you asked me about that, but Ernest came along in all of that and helped when he was governor.

Henderson: There was a coliseum built over at the university during the Vandiver administration. What was the role of Ernest Vandiver in building that coliseum?

Stephens: That's right. I had forgotten. Well, it was proposed from the university, and it had been proposed in the, I think, the first proposal of it had been made--not the first one but in the '51/'52. It had been rolled over, but Ernest, now that you remind me of it, I believe that Ernest supported that and got it done. I should have said--but, you see, I was in Washington and didn't follow these things as quickly. But now that you've mentioned that, I believe he was the governor and was responsible for it.

Now, I'll tell you, another thing that Ernest was responsible for that helped. When I went to the legislature in 1951 I had been in the history department [at the university] and was

interested in the history, and Ben [Benjamin Wynn] Fortson [Jr.] was the secretary of state. Ben was from Wilkes County, and Ben's family and my family had been friends for many, many years. Ben's brother was my law partner, and Ben got me interested in the archives building for Georgia. I proposed legislation that Ben drew up for me, and Herman Talmadge appointed a committee of me and George [B.] Brooks and [Thomas Watson] Mobley and Alpha [Alsbury] Fowler [Jr.], I think that was our four.

We began proposing in '51 that we have this building built, and I introduced the legislation and Ben talked about it and he got us to go all over the United States to see the things, go to the National Archives. In 1958 or '59, I can look it up, the legislature--Marvin agreed that we ought to have it done, and the bill was finally passed, and George Brooks and I took the bill to the governor and he signed it. Then we had to get Ernest to sign it. Well, Ernest signed it as the lieutenant governor, and that was '58, and in '62--'61 or '62--Ernest dedicated the building. That building, he signed the thing but also followed on through and got the money for the archives building. It's right there at the Capitol, that big marble thing named for Ben Fortson. But Ernest got the money for it. [Cut off]

End of Side One

Side Two

Henderson: Congressman, let me ask you a question about Ernest Vandiver and his style of dealing with people. How was he around people? Is he a backslapper? Is he aloof? How would you describe him?

Stephens: Ernest was just Well, he wasn't a bootlicker, and he wasn't a hail-fellow-well-met. He was just a nice, substantial person. Ernie was he was just sort of even

tempered. He had a good sense of humor, and every now and then he'd laugh at a joke of mine [laughter]. But he was not a--well, he was not an orator in the sense of a spellbinder. He got his points across, and he wasn't stumbling and mumbling, but he wasn't known as a real orator. Although . . .

Henderson: How would you describe his style of dealing with people, say, with Marvin Griffin's? Is there a difference between the two?

Stephens: Yeah, yeah. Marvin Griffin, and this is what I've seen happen over here. Marvin was not popular in Athens, even as I told you, and that's because of the old anti-Talmadge and the county unit system and the Atlanta paper influence here. Marvin had a marvelous ability to tell stories in a gathering. If he got up and made a speech, he could have everybody laughing in fifteen minutes. Marvin came over here one time. We--[Robert] Chappelle Matthews and I and Julian [H.] Cox--were representing the county at this time, and Marvin came over at our invitation to meet with a group of about fifteen or twenty people, with the chamber of commerce and people. Basically, they had never voted for Marvin, but after a half an hour of association in a small room with Marvin, everybody was just fascinated with his personality. Now, this is no criticism of Ernest and his style, but he didn't have that touch that Marvin had to, you know, mix with people. As I say, that's not any criticism but some people . . . That's just about it. I can't express it any better than that.

Henderson: How would you describe him as a politician? Was he a very capable politician, average politician?

Stephens: No, he was well above average. He analyzed the times and his opportunities and was able to--well, the boys that were in school with him in the law school and then

undergraduate school all liked him, and he was able to talk with people and get them to see that he would make a good candidate.

Henderson: What was your impression of Betty [Sybil Elizabeth Russell] Vandiver?

Stephens: Betty? Well, Betty is . . . a very personally attractive lady. She meets people easily; she's got a nice style about her; she remembers people's names; she remembers wives; and she's a good hostess. Where you might say Ernest is not quite as responsive she makes up for that to some extent by her vivacity. She is just a warm, nice person.

Henderson: How would you describe Ernest Vandiver's political philosophy? Conservative, moderate, liberal?

Stephens: He would be conservative to moderate, rather than the other way. He never was a racist, so to speak. I never felt that his candidacy of a basically racist [philosophy]. He had wanted to do things like build that archives building, and he wanted He helped the university. He didn't do as much financially for the university because he didn't have the money, and what he did, well, was just absolutely great too.

Henderson: How would you compare his campaign--well, his speaking ability, say, with Marvin Griffin?

Stephens: Well, Marvin was a little more of an orator, and that's the only comparison that I can make. Of course, Marvin used humor. Ernest has got a good sense of humor and talked, but Marvin used that as one of his main ways of getting things across.

Henderson: Of all the Georgia politicians you've heard speak, which one, in your opinion, is the best speaker?

Stephens: Well, Herman Talmadge is probably one of the best speakers, and Carl [Edward] Sanders was a good speaker. Carl had a freshness and youngness about him, but Herman had a way about him that was very attractive, as far as speaking is concerned. Now, Ben Fortson was an accomplished speaker. Ben was, uh, let me see Denmark Groover [Jr.] was in the legislature with me and Denmark was a good speaker.

Henderson: In 1972 Governor Vandiver runs for the Senate and is unsuccessful.

Stephens: Well, he had a heart attack at that time. Isn't that when he had the heart attack?

Henderson: Well, that was in '66 when he was running for governor.

Stephens: Was that '66? Oh, that's right. The second time, yeah. You're right.

Henderson: Why do you think he was unsuccessful in that Senate race? Was he too far removed from politics, been out of office too long?

Stephens: Yeah, but you would think when Senator Russell died

Henderson: Right.

Stephens: Well, I think you put your finger on it partly. He'd been out of office for too long, and the second thing is this is when Jimmy [James Earl] Carter [Jr.]

Henderson: Appointed David [Henry] Gambrell.

Stephens: Appointed David Gambrell and then Sam [Samuel Augustus] Nunn [Jr.] came in and won the election for the un-expired term. I think possibly what you have said would be a factor, but Jimmy Carter was the governor, and he had the ability to pull a lot of strings. But David Gambrell was not an unpopular person, and David Gambrell had access to money. His father was an outstanding lawyer, and David had done remarkably well as a young candidate.

But one of the factors, as I said, was Carter could use the influence as governor, for one thing, and another thing was the fact that. . . one of the most astute politicians that we've had in many generations was Carl Vinson and Sam Nunn, and that is astuteness. Now, Sam Nunn is one of my favorites, but I did not vote for Sam Nunn when he ran for the first time. The reason I did not was because I thought David Gambrell had done a good job on a banking committee, and I didn't know Sam, actually. I have since that time gotten to know him and I've felt like I campaigned for him 100 percent. But I had had no contact with him. But Mr. Vinson was a very powerful man, you know, as chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and he was still in office, and he had a lot of influence in that.

Sam had been in the legislature and had made a very favorable impression on that whole legislature, and part of the fact that Jimmy Carter was governor and the second thing is that Sam had the personality to influence the legislature made it uphill for Ernest. Then Ernest still had that . . . saying that he was not going to do something, that if the people wanted to criticize him then he couldn't it around that for the extreme racist [?].

Henderson: My final question to you, Congressman: What do you think is Ernest Vandiver's place in Georgia history?

Stephens: Well, I think that Ernest will stand well as a person whose administration you had no breath of scandal personally, that he worked at his job, that he made Georgia a better place in which to live.

Henderson: Congressman, I want to thank you for granting me this interview. It's been most informative.

Stephens: Well, I hope you can use some of it [laughter]. But I've always liked Ernest Vandiver and think that he made us . . . a good man.

Henderson: Thank you, sir. [Cut off]

End of Side Two

END OF INTERVIEW

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