

This is an interview with Albert Gore, former United States Senator from Tennessee. The interview was conducted on August 17, 1974 by Jack Bass. The transcriber was Susan Hathaway.

(The first five minutes of this tape is static.)

ALBERT GORE: . . . Very happy and successful career in the business world today, and I don't desire to return to politics. I had a happy and long and [satisfying] career in politics and now I'm in another. The party could not be but ~~fragmented~~ ^{fragmented} when it has twelve candidates for the nomination for Governor, but there was no one candidate that dominated the primary, and as you have probably read in the press this morning all the successful contestants have endorsed Mr. Blanton. This was well and for the party. Mr. Blanton will have some difficulties. His difficulties will be with the liberal element of the party. [And with] some of the blacks, some of the intellectuals, some of the young, but Mr. Alexander though, may have some problems too before the campaign is over. So it is just starting. I am unable to make a prediction. I hope Mr. Blanton wins; I just introduced him and I am going to campaign for him.

J.B.: Does the feeling on your part and on the part of many of the active Democrats, . . . that if the Democratic party doesn't pull itself together . . .

A.G.: Will you ask that question again?

J.B.: Is there a feeling that if the Democratic party doesn't pull itself together in Tennessee and win this Governors race, that it is really going to be in bad shape in the future? In other words, that the Republicans could well end up being the dominant party for ten years to come?

A.G.: Well, the Governor's office represents the focus of political power in the state, not that of senators and congressmen. If Mr. Blanton is elected, Mr. Brock will be taken out two years later. If Mr. Blanton is not elected, then it will be very difficult to defeat him except he may be defeated in the Republican primary easily. So this is a watershed. After all, it is the Governor who appoints the employees, it is the Governor who controls the election machinery, it's the Governor who contracts, it's the Governor's office where I have said is the focus of power. Except for that, Mr. Alexander would not need a strong candidate this fall. That's because the state administration is in the hands of a Republican Governor, he will be a strong candidate. I don't have to tell you those primary things about candidates.

J.B.: Well, Mr. Blanton who was in Congress was usually on the other side of the fence from you and on occasion attacked you. Has he done anything since the primary to warrant your support, and the support of your followers other than having come out as the winner. Has he taken any positions . . . what is he doing to unify

the party and to bring back the elements of the party that opposed him in the primary?

A.G.: Well yesterday he has a luncheon for Pharr and Whythe all of those who were seeking the nomination. I think that is a big step towards unifying the party. Then the meeting held today . . . a successful meeting.

J.B.: What was the significance of this meeting today?

A.G.: What?

J.B.: What was the substance of the meeting today? Was it strictly another unity meeting?

A.G.: Another unity meeting to bring in party leaders other than the contestants of the primary.

J.B.: We attended his press conference yesterday . . . one of the questions put to him was why should he expect the support of blacks and labor based on his record. His reply was basically reflected that he though his record reflected interest of blacks and labor. I think that is a fair characterization.

Unident: But he had voted for their interest while in the congress which seemed . . .

J.B.: His position wasn't that he has changed or has a different approach to being Governor than he did in Congress or anything else. He was more or less just standing on a record that in the past has been against blacks and labor. *[I'm asking because I am really trying to understand it. Is there anything he is doing beyond the surface things . . .*

A.G.: I don't . . . This is the first time I had seen him since the primary. He's been down on the river fishing and he just started on his campaign, and I am unable to tell you what he has done. He has called me on the phone, and we talked about elementary things. After all the choice is Mr. Alexander's and Mr. Blanton's. Mr. Alexander managed Governor Dunn's campaign, and Ken Reed has managed Mr. Brock's campaign. They had adjacent desks in the White House, and the campaign was largely financed through the Nixon - Agnew thing, and the Watergate apparatus was tried out in 1970 and tested in three states; in Tennessee, in Maryland and in Indiana. So though I would have preferred a nominee with my . . . who had a record similar to mine, I think that would be perfectly natural, I suppose. I did not have a candidate in the primary. I did not choose to seek the nomination myself. Mr. Blanton had been chosen. My choice was between him and Mr. Alexander, and I don't hesitate anymore to support Mr. Blanton(?).

J.B.: When you referred to Alexander coming out of a Nixon - Agnew school, are you referring to his activities in the 1970 campaign?

A.G.: He was an aide in the White House too.

J.B.: Right, but didn't he leave the White House about that time?

A.G.: I think that is true, yes. He came to Tennessee and managed Governor Dunn's campaign and then Mr. Brocks, but this campaign will be over before

you write your chapter on Tennessee won't it.

J.B.: But if you are right that this election is a watershed, we are trying to think ahead to what might happen in the state's politics.

A.G.: 1970 was even more of a watershed.

J.B.: Can we talk about that one a little bit.

as to what happened in that 1970 campaign.

A.G.: Well, you said you read my book, you know what I have said about that.

J.B.: No, I have not read the book yet, I plan to read it.

A.G.: Well I have a whole chapter on Tennessee in it.

J.B.: Let me just ask you this question then. Since you wrote the book, have you had any additional thoughts on it?

A.G.: What I wrote still holds up.

J.B.: When you think about Tennessee and the other southern states, the Republican party has been able to build and be successful at the state wide level and in the state legislature. No other place in the South has this occurred. At the state wide level have they not been successful?

A.G.: Well, you will see when you read the book that I wrote. Tennessee differs we have always had a very strong Republican foothold in East Tennessee. This state is one of three grand divisions . . . some people even call it three states, with physical barriers separating the east, the middle and

the west. In East Tennessee you have overwhelming support for . . . the north, the union in the Civil War. It's that old. All sorts of federal pensions up there for the last hundred years

It's the first congressional district in Tennessee

[that] is the most predominant, percentage wise the strongest Republican district in the United States.

The second congressional district has never had a Democratic congressman. But the third congressional district for a large part of the time has been Republican. So in that whole end of the state you had a very strong

ideological, reactionary, majority Republican and tremendous majority . . . then the Democratic sections of the state; middle Tennessee, largely Democratic, although there a number of Republican Counties in Tennessee, wherever you find hills and mountains you find Republicans. That is not only true in Tennessee, as you know, it is true in Alabama, Georgia and a few in Mississippi, Kentucky. The strongest Democratic allegiance in the state was in the west; when Ed Crump controlled Memphis and voted with one voice. The break started in . . . the break away from the Democratic party in 1948, when Crump supported the Dixiecraft ticket. This grew . . . it became very acute with the civil rights legislations, and came to almost a mass conversion with the murder of Martin Luther King and the racial . . . you know, the marches, and the demonstrations. So what you have had, has been a merging of the traditional Republican minority with the

so called Dixiecraft elements of a Democratic party, which has in 1970 and 1972 constituted a new majority in the state. This has been challenged and tested now, and you can write your chapter after you see the results. Now of course it had been challenged in 1970, though I did not win, I received the largest vote of any Democrat in the history of the state. I ran unabashed liberal campaign. Mr. Blanton ran in 1972 a conservative campaign. The results were not very encouraging, but he ran with . . . when Nixon and Agnew were at their top and when George McGovern was carrying the Democratic banner. So what effect that him down, I don't know. But in any event, Blanton is from West Tennessee, has long had the allegiance and support of many people who have left the party on occasion. Perhaps he can bring them back into the party or hold them in the party. We shall see.

J.B.: Is that coalition of Eastern Republicans and Republicans in the West basically

an issue of race in holding that coalition together? Between Western Dixiecrat Democrats and Eastern Republicans. Is race still an issue that helps to hold that together?

A.G.: It's the cement. It is very deep, it's an emotional issue, but I have written a whole book about it so . . .

J.B.: If that is the case do you see that continuing in the future? That holding together based on that . . .

A.G.: I don't think racism plays the part of politics

past. In some parts of the country . . .
(The machine was obviously malfunctioning throughout this interview. The first five minutes of the tape are blank, and once again there is continual static and no conversation for about 4 minutes)

. . . that's what it is all about.

J.B.: If he loses. Would you expect him to be the last Democratic nominee for Governor or Senator that would get the nomination with that sort of conservative image.

A.G.: I couldn't say that. Suppose you had another race when there are twelve candidates. Mr. Blanton was nominated with 22% or 23% of the vote. This kind of a split up, it might be either a . . . if there are three liberals running you might have different results.

J.B.: If there were a run-off primary would that help strengthen the Democratic party?

A.G.: Yes.

Unident: How would it do that?

A.G.: Well it would certainly give to a nominee the majority of support of his party, but in a close one there would be a run-off. This was certainly one which I took a stronger position and had to represent a minority, but we don't have a run-off, unfortunately, Governor Dunn vetoed it in the interest of the Republican party.

J.B.: Did you give any serious thought to making that race this year?

A.G.: NO. I don't want you to quote this, I'm having fantastic success in the business world, and it is quite challenging and rejuvenating, exciting, interesting; to start at an age of a different career in both law and business at an age when most men are pushing to retire, and then have a most gratifying success. So I have had a political . . . attitude and it is my attitude now . . . it was then . . . I have had a political career, a long, a happy and a fruitful one. I went out of public life, not as I would have chosen. I would have chosen to serve another term, and then retire, but second only to that, I went out as I liked to go out with my guns blazing, I put in a hell of a fight for the things I believed in. I now stand in the state .
I really think I can say that I am more popular in Tennessee than I have ever been in all my career, but I don't wish to return to politics having had that career.

J.B.: Does that mean you have ruled out any race to return to the Senate?

A.G.: If I had plans to return to the senate, then the course would have been for me to run for Governor this year, to run for Senate as Governor, but I don't wish to return to the Senate.

J.B.: What would have to happen for Tennessee to go Democratic again in the Presidential election?

A.G.: Perhaps a serious economic recession.

J.B.: Do you think then that conditions will be more of a determiner than personality?

A.G.: Yes. There must be conditions that would

. . .

(Another break in the conversation due to probably a faulty machine. The transcriber assumes that this is the end of the interview.)