

This is an interview with Harold Ford, State Legislator from Memphis, Tennessee and Congressional candidate. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries on August 19, 1974. The transcriber is Susan Hathaway.

JACK BASS: Tell me a little bit about yourself and the Ford family.

HAROLD FORD: There really isn't nothing to tell. I am Harold and candidate for the U. S. Congress.

J.B.: And you have two brothers who are candidates for the state legislature.

Ford: My two brothers who just won in the Democratic primary. They don't have any opposition now in the Republican primary or the general election.

J.B.: And you have been serving in the legislature.

Ford: I served four years, right.

J.B.: And . . . were you opposed in the Congressional campaign?

Ford: Yeah, I was opposed by five other Democrats. One was the first Catholic nun to seek office . . . Congressional office rather. She was one of my opponents and one other lady and three other men in the Democratic primary. One of the men was also a former member of the Tennessee house. He served six years in the Tennessee house and I served four.

J.B.: You ended up with what percentage of the vote?

Ford: I don't know the exact total. I would imagine that it was about 64 or 65, somewhere in that area.

J.B.: It was a clear majority, that's what I . . . How did . . . can you tell me more or less just how the black caucus operated in the legislature?

Ford: Well, really we never really organized a black caucus in the Tennessee house. I was elected four years ago, and I was very disturbed about not have a black caucus, and we could never really [adopt] the by-laws and all for the black caucus, who really [held the balance] for the state. We'd always used the name Tennessee black caucus when there were problems that would come up with the Dunn administration or the Democratic leadership. If we thought that something wasn't quite right, we would all meet under the name of the black caucus.

J.B.: So it was very informal?

Ford: Yes, it was very informal. We didn't have an office or Chairman of the black caucus at all, and we found ourselves meeting about once every other week, you know, to talk about different pieces of legislation that would effect all black people and we thought that it was time that, you know, we would all meet. We could not agree upon everything, but usually you would find every other week a piece of legislation, or something going on within the administration to go in and meet at the black caucus to take a firm position.

J.B.: Because of the make-up of the Tennessee legislature particularly in the house, but both houses being so close by party . . . 50-49 in the house and not that close in the senate, they put the black caucus as being in a . . . I think it was a unique position certainly among southern state legislators in holding a balance of power.

Ford: Well they put us in that position in the 87th General Assembly more so than they did in the 88th because in the 87th General Assembly whereas the leadership of the majority party and the leadership of the minority party both were real frightened every time a major piece of legislation would come up . . . they would be concerned about. They were afraid that they would not be able to pull the blacks to their side in order to pass a piece of legislation and the Democrats were frightened because they didn't know whether they could hold the blacks with them because the blacks really owed the Democratic party nothing because for years and years they hadn't delivered, and we were on the same fence with the Republicans, we couldn't trust the Republicans nor the Democrats. So most of the times we played it by ear. What has happened in a few instances, you had a black step out of line away from the black caucus accepting and realizing that self-gained and after the Democratic party or minority party got exactly what they wanted, you know, we were all black again. There wasn't anything that you could return the favor. We finally realized that we had to stick together on major issues and

also elect and select . . . elect constitutional offices we realized that the only way we could successfully do anything was to stick together. But in the 88th General Assembly, we still could recall those days of the 87th when the majority and minority party realized that, and they were able to convince . . . Democrats were able to sew deals with Republicans, who was very . . . You take in the last two sessions, East Tennessee Republicans were concerned about one thing, and that was establishing a second state supported medical school in this State, and they were concerned about that and that's it. They didn't care what happened. The \$1.9 million dollar budget could have been spent in the black community. All they were concerned about was passing that medical school bill, and the Democratic party was able to pull seven to nine East Tennessee Republican votes with them on every major vote, which killed the effect of the black caucus. It completely wiped it out. We had no more effect. What had happened was the administration was so strongly opposed to the second medical school and until . . . the only thing that we could do . . . I started off with the second medical school in support of it three years ago because I have a brother who is now at Columbia University with non admittance at the University Medical School, and four years ago as a freshman, the first year I served in the General Assembly, I was asked to support the second medical school, and my

comments in the house that day to the speaker was that if the University of Tennessee denied James Ford, who was my brother, the year before then for being accepted to the University of Tennessee because it was over-crowded then I thought we needed a second medical school. If he was denied because he was black, then I still think we should have a second medical school that would admit black people into medicine into the state of Tennessee, and I went on record in support of a bill, but at the same time when we learned that the Democratic party pulled these seven solid votes on their major issues in return to give them "x" amount of votes that they needed, then we immediately withdrew our support for the medical school because then, you know, we had no effect. Not all blacks withdrew their support, we were able to get enough black support from the medical school. I all the black support to the medical school, and we were able not to fight the medical school per se, but the poor let the Democratic party know, you still got to deal with us, if you are going to make that deal with those Republicans down there, and you know they always try to find some kind of deal with it, but the Governor's office thought the medical school . . . in chances of passing legislation. I'd be just perfectly honest. I never had a piece of legislation before the General Assembly that I didn't pass, and I had some very unpopular bills at times and some bills people thought it

was a joke introducing, but . . .

J.B.: What were some of these specifics. You are talking about bills that would help black people, right?

Ford: Bills that would help everybody. I never introduced a black bill while I was there.

J.B.: Alright. Bills that would help everybody, but of particular interest to the black community?

Ford: Well, a lot of times you would know that the black community has suffered greatly because of these bills not being *passed*.

J.B.: What are some examples.

Ford: The first bill that I passed was a bill on Memphis Light Gas and Water here in Memphis saying that Memphis Light Gas and Water could no longer charge 10% late charges on utilities because a person is one day late in paying his utility bill. We thought that penalization for not paying the utility bill was a disconnecting of a bill, not penalizing poor people 10% more. In other words, they would access a late charge after ten days after receiving their utility bill monthly, and it would be 10% of the overall bill, and usually you find people paying \$1.50 to \$6.00 on late charges twelve months out of the year. We thought that was unnecessary and uncalled for when Memphis Light Gas and Water was showing reports that the million and a half dollars, a fraction over a million and a half dollars revenue being brought in ever year, it

wasn't helping the utility company any, it wasn't doing anything, it was just sitting in the kitty alone, and we thought that those late charges could be removed because you had people who were on fixed income . . . take people on Welfare, they receive a check on the 9th. They had the billing cycle set . . . they knew that the poverty stricken areas whereas that those people would be receiving welfare assistance . . . getting it on the 9th and the last day they could pay the net just so happened to be on the 8th. The same thing would be true with other people who were on other fixed income, like Social Security. They knew proportionately in billing cycles in this community where the majority of the people on Social Security live. Those people receive their check on the 3rd. The last day they pay their utility bill on the net amount was on the 2nd of the month. These people were being penalized with very good intentions . . . paying their bills on the 4th, but were just not able to meet that date because they were on a fixed income and couldn't get their money until the 3rd, until the 9th or until the 1st of the month. And we've extended the time in which they can pay . . . five more days, which carried everybody over their time, they reduced the late charges to 5%, which saved the people of the city of Memphis a million dollars a year. They reported \$960,000 in revenue that was being missed after the bill was passed. That was

the first piece of legislation . . . and at that time I hadn't been seated six weeks, and we passed the bill in both houses and the Governor signed the bill. The other bill in the State of Tennessee, and we passed the bill in the house, although we weren't successful in passing the bill in the senate because of the senate's policy, but we were able to pass it in the house without getting it all down. It took a lot of hard work and about five months to get it passed after some studying, but I was successful in working with urban members of the general assembly and as a prime source of the bill and passed the bill. I have worked and passed the landlord - tenent bill. Tennessee was the 16th state to go on record and I think about the second southern state or maybe the first southern state to go on record as passing the landlord-tenent bill. We had to do away with the slum row poverty area in a city like Memphis and *other* counties also. We were successful in passing that . . . that bill wouldn't be related directly to the black community, although you had a lot of ghetto apartments in the black community, and which you can see in the City of Memphis now and the State of Tennessee, all over the State, you know, these landlords are remodelling and fixing these run down apartments and bring them up to standards now. Also, during the time they passed that deal . . . and we were successful in passing the housing rehabilitation bill that brought fifty-five million dollars into the community, where the people

on fixed income or low income or moderate income could not afford or could not make a loan through a bank to bring their home up to standards. In other words we passed the bill . . . fifty five million dollars in which the State would guaranty low income loans at low interest rates to any bank in the state to guarantee the loans. It also . . . not a bill that I sponsored, but one of the co-sponsors of a bill with the Tennessee Housing Development Agency. It took about a year to work on. After Nixon took back the Federal 235 low income loan, was able to go in and pick up the same kind of program and implement that program here in the State of Tennessee. We have not put it into effect as of yet because it's in a court battle now, and it should be out of the courts by the first of the year, but we will pick up the same federal low-income. On the housing project, we think there was a great step by the State of Tennessee and it wasn't by accident . . . in other words, without the goodness of white folks heart that they wanted these type of bills passed and become law in the state. We was just able to work hard, not as a black caucus per se, but as a majority whip of the house and Secretary of the Rules Committee to work hard, long hours, and make sure we would be successful in getting this legislation passed. Now there were a lot of county bills, a lot of city bills to feel the effect in passing bills would upset them because they wanted certain pieces of legislation passed. Senior citizens bill, you know, four or

five different pieces. They was very unpopular but we was able to make it . . . out of four years serving in the house, and I think we implemented eleven strong pieces of legislation, where Tennessee used to be the forty-fifth and forty-eighth state to put it on its books. We were able to implement it at this time with Tennessee being less than twenty-five. So that is a great step for the State of Tennessee.

J.B.: One of the things that we were told was that the black caucus, at least in the informal sense of the word, worked successfully in the re-districting plan for the legislature to create what may . . . at least gives a potential for a black seat out of Hamilton County.

Ford: That was true but at the same time blacks are about 18% or 19% of the State of Tennessee. It was this simple, either you draw a district in Hamilton County or we were going to beat one of these white Democrats, it was just that simple, and the same thing happened here in Shelby County. We said either you draw another black seat in Shelby County, or else we are going to beat one of these white Democrats. They didn't draw one in Shelby County, but we just beat the one we said we was going to beat.

J.B.: Which race was that.

Ford: . . . a big labor man. You know, we didn't ask to draw his seat . . . Shelby County is five blacks in the house, Shelby County should have eight blacks

in the house because of the Democratic party holding back. They don't want to face up to it.

J.B.: So Powell lost?

Ford: Yeah, Powell lost to a black, we defeated him in the primary.

J.B.: Who?

Ford: David Withers. So we picked up one from Hamilton County . . . you know, the black caucus can take credit for that. We didn't gain anything by picking up one. We should have picked up one in Hamilton County four years ago . . . not in 197 . . . we're four years behind, and that was only after just telling them either you draw one or else we will defeat the Chairman of the Education Committee, you know. We will just all take off work and make sure that we work on someone to defeat him, and until he believed that we was going to defeat him, then they got around and got busy and threw all the Republicans out of there, you know, and put a black seat in there. So that happened. The Republican lost . . . you know, threw all the Republicans out and all the Democrats got re-elected, and what should have happened was in Knox County, and that is what we tried to make the move on to pick up a seat. We had a seat in Knox County and the black that was holding the seat didn't run on the white ticket because the district was only 40 to 44% black.

J.B.: So was that district changed at all?

Ford: No. We should have picked up one of the state senate seats here and two house seats black, at least this

the one my brother defeated this time for the senate seat, and jumped in the race and he wouldn't withdraw, and we had added two new seats and I thought it was necessary that we step back out of it, and we went and got us a college student running for a state house seat, and we put him in a race to just test his strength to see if he would be ready two years from now in 1974, and we never showed the candidate until after the election, and John

we both were campaign managers and she never spoke anyplace or anything. She won 73% of the vote with five other opponents too was very strong.

J.B.: We have heard a lot about the *rivalries* in the black community in Shelby County, is it so? Are all those various factions unified behind your candidacy?

Ford: I don't know. getting the vote, you wouldn't care. Yeah, I don't think organizations or groups can mean anything to the voter anymore. I think it all depends upon the candidate himself or herself. We've never had organization. It's been the single organization endorsement of and he was forced into endorse me all he wants to. If they was endorsing me, they would carry the balance of their ticket. I didn't object. They all used my pictures, you know, the front of the ballot, but neither one of them endorsed my brother.

J.B.: Am I correct . . . you're involved in a law suite now involving the make-up of this congressional district.

Ford: Right.

J.B.: What is the status of that?

Ford: I am not involved in it myself.

J.B.: Okay neither the law suite is involved. (?)

Ford: Neither law suite that I am familiar with, but some of the people that work with us in this campaign was involved.

J.B.: Is that likely to be resolved before the election . . . before November?

Ford: I would hope so. I certainly hope so . . . not only that but we have heard from the Committee in Congress that even if Kuykendall defeat us with the margin of votes he received from those seven precincts, the Counsellors for the house administration committee said that by law he could not be seated no way. So you know. . .

J.B.: Why, I mean . . .

Ford: Because of the seven precincts that was added onto this district that are unconstitutional denying the rights of the black to be seated in the halls of Congress from a black district. They are having a press conference in Washington on Wednesday and they are going to . . . Peter Rodino is going to answer the questions and make it very clear that Kuykendall can not be seated if he is elected only . . . the vote is determined by those votes of those seven precincts. I don't think that Kuykendall can defeat us at all, and I don't think there is no way that some that he could be beat us by no more than 5,000 votes. In

the last election 15,000 voted in the seventh precinct.

is the heaviest precinct. Those are his heaviest precincts. In the primary he got little over 20,000 votes, and he got 10,000 votes out of those seven precincts.

J.B.: Those seven precincts have been added since the last election?

Ford: No, they was added right before Patterson was elected. See the general assembly of the legislature never put those precincts in the district. The election commission had put them in there . . . how the Republican control of the election commission . . . we've got letters showing from the the State Court of these elections wrote the Chairman of the Election Commission and said "look, those votes cannot be counted in the eighth congressional district. By law they are not in there. We will not count them in the state official vote." They won't even recognize them on the State Election Commission no more, but they put them over here themselves. See the Congressional bill says in all other precincts shall be placed in the eight congressional district, and in the sixth and the seventh which border Shelby County, they named precincts by number. When it got to the eighth, they say and all others shall be placed. So what happened, they went to the sixth district and got some precincts and divided them, said they were over populated and created new

precincts, so that means that those new precincts were never named in the Sixth Congressional District so they automatically placed them in the eighth.

J.B.: Did it create population beyond the variance?

Ford: Yeah.

J.B.: Who is the lawyer handling that case?

Ford: Attorney Eric Lincoln who is my finance chairman, Attorney Joe Kaflan, Attorney Terkeson. Now, you know, a Texas case had a 2.6 variance in the congressional populations, This is a 9.7 variance. In other words our congressional was supposed to have been one-half percent from 491,000 population. This congressional district, The Eighth Congressional District is not a one man, one vote anymore.

J.B.: So is it your contention, and I presume it is, but I want to ask, that this was done deliberately to try and prevent a black from being elected to Congress.

Ford: It's clear cut.

J.B.: Beyond that what is the major issue in the congressional race?

Ford: That is not an issue in the congressional race.

J.B.: What is a major issue in the congressional race?

Ford: A major issue is domestic policy because of inflation. Kuykendall has been the type of guy who has dealt directly with Nixon on foreign matters. He's more concerned about the Middle East than the . He's concerned

about everything except right here at home, and I think now is the time that people realize that they want a voice within and not a voice that will represent the big cooperation and the large industry.

J.B.: Did he vote against impeachment inquiry initially?

Ford: Did he vote . . .

J.B.: Am I correct that he was one of four Congressmen that voted against even holding an impeachment inquiry?

Ford: Right.

J.B.: Is that an issue of the campaign?

Ford: That was an issue at a certain point. It did not start off being an issue. We're going to deal with economics first, and I think what will happen when he brings the race issue up . . . the black - white issue, saying you know, we will use things on Kuykendall with Richard Nixon, you know, showing the dishonesty with Richard Nixons, Spiro Agnews and the Dan Kuykendalls together, which all of them have been very very close friends.

J.B.: How do you campaign in the white community?

Ford: How do we campaign in the white community? We do it the same way we do in the black. We've got . . . , it's our first shot. Except two pricincts in the primary, and we carried . . .

J.B. How about as far as campaign set up. I just noticed that . . .

Ford: We haven't started that campaign yet. Campaign

staff . . . full time staff. We've got two white lawyers full time staff in Washington. Our press secretary is white, we have two of our . . . my personal secretary is white, and that is because I used her in Nashville and she is very good, and she has an assistant who is white. We've got campaign coordinators that are white. I guess out of 32 paid staff people, half of them are white and half of them are black. The volunteers . . . the majority of them are white. We've got a Memphis State Office, you know, 500 whites you know, working.

J.B.: What is your major source of campaign funds. I mean, you know, your staff is paid pretty good salaries?

Ford: We spent \$9,000 in the primary. We, I was making at least . . . I don't have the figures . . . we raised anywhere from . . . I think we raised approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 from churches . . . black churches in the city. We raised approximately \$30,000 in the black community just from \$1 to \$20 in contributions coming in. We had a mass mailing of contributions coming in. We carried the campaign, you know, directly to the black community and asked them to put the money up to finance the campaign, and that was about it. We raised a good 85% of our money for the first time totally from the black community, and we raised campaign contributions from the white community . . .

J.B.: How about organized labor, did you get support from them?

Ford: I guess we'll get it now in the general . . . we didn't have any in the primary. We had only one professional labor organization with us and that was the American Federation of State, County, Municipal employees who endorsed us, but did not support us financially.

J.B.: What sort of support is Ray Blanton going to get in the black community in Shelby County . . . what sort of support would he get in the Governors race?

Ford: I think Ray Blanton will pick the black vote up. I think he'll carry the black community. I am sure he will throughout Tennessee. I don't see any reason why Ray Blanton will not carry the total black community.

J.B.: Why would he carry it?

Ford: Why wouldn't he?

J.B.: Well two years ago he got about 60% which is relatively low for a Democratic nominee for state-wide office.

Ford: Well number one, it was a different race. He was running for U. S. Senate, and this is 1974 and he is running for the Governor of the State of Tennessee. In 1972 Agnew and Nixon were at the top of the ticket, and I don't see any reason why . . . Baker had to defeat him. No one could beat the Republicans in 1972 . . .

J. B.: No, no. Baker got substantial support, but was that because . . . how much of it was anti-Blanton, and how much was pro-Baker?

Ford: I think that every vote Baker picked up was because he wanted to vote for Howard Baker. He didn't pick up but about 30%.

J.B.: Did Lamar Alexander have any of that . . .

Ford: Lamar Alexander, no way Howard Baker. There is no way that you can compare the two. You know, a Lamar Alexander and Howard Baker, there is no comparison. You know, and the way that I see it this time, Lamar ain't got nothing to offer.

J.B.: Do you think there will be an apathetic black vote in the Governors race?

Ford: Ugh.

J.B.: Has Blanton done anything to strengthen his appeal in the black community?

Ford: Lamar Alexander hasn't done anything either. I don't see anything at all that Lamar Alexander has done to strengthen him . . . nobody even knows him.

J.B.: Does the Election Commission, being Republican, controlled in Shelby County an issue at all?

Ford: No its not an issue at all. Number one, because it has been this way all the time . . . if the Democrats can carry Shelby County, Democrats will have control of the election commission, it's just that simple. The Democrats have control of it for about 50 years. If they want control of it again, they'll vote and carry Shelby County Democratic in 1974.

J.B.: Was this jerrymandering of congressional district . . . is that at least an underlying issue that carries over into the Governors race?

Ford: I don't think it'll carry over to the Governors race. [Interruption]

J.B.: Do you see any potential at all of a black elected official association developing in Tennessee?

Ford: Black Elected Officials Association? You know, I don't quite get the . . . say it again.

J.B.: Associating the black elected officials.

Ford: That has been organized already, you know.

J.B.: On the state level?

Ford: We've got a national level that everybody is participating in. I don't see any type of organization like that coming into view . . . too many black elected officials now . . . we can communicate together not as a black politician or a white politician but as an elected official. I can call on members of the senate and other members of the house . . . don't have to go through, you know, a black white thing . . . we just talk the cold facts of a piece of legislation and that's it.

J.B.: When you campaigned among whites in this congressional race, and you say you will be going door to door, will you usually be accompanied by someone on the staff who is familiar with the neighborhood or volunteer worker?

Ford: Yeah, usually when we go door to door, we don't

usually go with one or two, we usually carry 30 - 40 into a precinct and work it door to door. We usually do it Friday afternoon at 4 o'clock and work teams. We got a solid six hours. You can always pick your top volunteers, you can pick your top people in the community that would know everyone. A lot of times we have been just as effective . . . so I don't have to knock on every door.

J.B.: What is your basic message, particularly when you are going into a white area that is not familiar with you, has not been in your house district?

Ford: A lot of times . . . usually it is very brief and very short. A lady answers the door, "mam' I'm Harold Ford, a candidate for Congress and would just like to be your Congressman from the Eighth Congressional District, just wanted to stop by personally, shake hands," and ask them for their support and their vote on November 5th, and that's it. Then, their reaction will depend on my next reaction. You can tell with their expression . . . pleasant, you know, accepting you or just brushing you off right quick, and you can usually judge, you know, the ones that will accept you. The ones that will vote for you . . . all of them will probably say yeah, okay, but you can't tell by yeah, okay. But you can tell by their expression, you can tell how they act if their cousin is seating in the living room, or if someone else is sitting there. You can pick up their reaction immediately. You can tell whether

you have made a friend, and so many people are shocked that are coming back. The white community never had door to door campaigning. We experienced this in the primary by the fact that I was out door to door in the primary. When I got off the plane from New York the other day and a white gentleman walked up and said "Harold Ford, I just want to shake your hand, and say that I voted for you." He said "you don't recall this you were at my home and asked my wife and I to vote for you," I looked at him and said "no, I certainly don't." He said, "we didn't forget you and we won't forget you in November." He said "we've been Republicans all our lives and you are the first candidate that has ever come by and knocked on the door and asked us for our vote." I still didn't recognize him, I was a little embarrassed but you can't recognize everybody. So, you know, I think we are going to carry that door to door type campaign without looking for all the votes, all we want is 10% of it, and we are going to shoot for more, but all we want is 10%.

J.B.: Do you leave campaign literature on that type of campaign?

Ford: Oh yeah. I don't usually hand it to them because I am so busy shaking hands, you know. We've got one of our staff people or volunteers, they do that. They also ask them if we can put a bumper sticker on their car, could they display a poster in the yard, you know, we'll find something to put on them in some kind of way.

J.B.: What is the main difference . . . what sort of

reaction are you getting in the white community that you can't get in the black community?

Ford: Well . . . number one, it would be a little hard to say. I can go into the black community and every door will know me, not half the doors, all the doors know me personally when I knock on the door, and I don't even have to introduce myself, number one; I don't have to tell them about Harold Ford, they already know the work that my brother and I have been doing already.

and convince them what we will do for the community, they know. It just the mere fact . . . a lot of them will say, "just go back boy, you got us, get somebody else," sometimes you'll walk a whole street and they say the same thing. They say "just put some signs out and go see somebody else." That type of thing, you know, we've knocked on so many doors that were black we've just . . . not being tired of seeing you, just being sure we can count on the vote, but we don't ever take it for granted. We just wave and say "we don't want to take you for granted, now, just wanted to make sure."

J.B.: Did your organization work on voter registration specifically?

Ford: Yeah, we are already behind by five days. We were supposed to have started last week.

J.B.: Do you have the whole district, particularly the black precincts organized to the extent that they . . .

Ford: No, what we are going to do . . . what we are

doing, we are organizing some precincts that were all white, that blacks have taken pre control of the precincts . . . I mean whites are moving out and blacks are moving in, and we have got about seven of them, and blacks are not changing . . . they are already registered now, they'd encourage on the election commission's role, and what we are doing, we can get that Eighth precinct, we can pick up enough votes to make this district 65% black.

J.B.: Isn't that mostly with volunteer workers?

Ford: Yeah that's what we . . . we are going to try probably Wednesday to take \$25,000 and build that. We just can't go out there and build it. Like we've got an office being opened to be set up. You've just got to have so many volunteers. You'd be surprised at the volunteers that we have, and when people work all summer like the kids do now, they just love it and come back and sit down, what can you say. Here are people that have worked, worked, worked . . . all your staff, today was there first day to report back and told them this morning they could go on home and they said they wasn't ready. So what I am saying is when you have got people on your staff you are not going to pay them a full time salary, but when they are working 21, 22, sometimes all night and all day straight, they need a break. So we gave everybody a two weeks break . . . everybody except me, you know. I continue to campaign door to door. All I do all day is contact the conservative element of the Democratic party trying to get

them all with certain black statements that in the primary so we can heal the wounds and get back together . . . now all we got to do is continue for a little while longer it would be alright. If we could maintain a solid 98% of the black vote . . . if we maintain a solid 98% of the vote, and at the same time pick up another . . . John Hooker in 1970 running for Governor picked up 78% of the black vote. If we can get on November 5th, we don't need no white votes at all, and that is pulling 96% and 98% of the black vote. That's not a hard job pulling 90% to 96% of the black vote . . . 96% to 98%, that's not hard at all. The hard part . . . if it is organized properly we can get 98%, that is with no registration right now, I mean, that is as the district stands today. Now if we are successful in getting these registered and make the district 50 - 50 . . . you know all we need is a 65% and pick up 94% of the blacks that vote, which would be easy to do.

J.B.: In other words what you have to do is get the blacks registered to the polls to vote.

Ford: Right.

J.B.: Which is easier in Memphis than it is in most parts of the South because there is a much more traditional vote.

Ford: Right, plus the fact that blacks have always outvoted whites in Shelby County in the Eighth Congressional

District, except in 1972 was the first time whites outvoted blacks. Blacks have always percentage wise outvoted whites, which I think they will do it again in 1974.

J.B.: If you get elected to Congress what is that going to mean to Tennessee politics?

Ford: I think it will mean a complete change in Memphis politics, and I think Tennessee politics realize that there must be some changes made in there. I think what happened on August 1st was a clear indication that the black community can no longer be opened up, can no longer be taken for granted, they must be dealt with with respect and realize that black people have sense. They know now the answer to survival to and I don't think there is no way that no one could sell this black community and not go out and elect Harold Ford with 98%. I mean the momentum, you know, surprised me . . . just go out in the streets. I can go out in the streets right now and the momentum which you would see, people running after me . . . So, you know, I think the momentum that we have built up . . . the black people are ready, they are ready to make their change . . . I think my being elected to the Congressional seat will name a black mayor to the city of Memphis in 1975. I think that white people are afraid of that, so are the white political leaders, that is what they are fighting about. So when we get elected on November 5th, we'll name the mayor in 1975 a year later. We have to name him.

J.B.: Would it be Fred Davis or not?

Ford: Oh shit no. I mean, no.

J.B.: Maybe someone now on council, or someone . . .

Ford: Oh I don't know. You know, we haven't even thought in terms of who it might be. We . . . and our other thing is . . .

J.B.: Is he supporting you, by the way?

Ford: Who, Fred Davis?

J.B.: Yeah.

Ford: I would doubt it. I would doubt if he could support one of my opponents, but I would doubt if he could support me at this time. Why now, I don't know, but I think [Interruption]

J.B.: What do you think is the major need facing state government in Tennessee?

Ford: The major need? For them to turn their ears toward programs and turn their ears towards legislation that is needed by the people. Stop taking that 1.9 billion dollar budget with the state of Tennessee and carrying that budget and leaning in one direction only. Tennessee is faced with a lot of problems. One thing Tennessee is a big country state, they have a lot of farmers in the state of Tennessee. At the same time, we've got four urban cities . . . cities that constantly need growing, they can not fully complete growth with people in the state administration like Winfield Dunn, who is concerned only about conserving those

voters who are very conservative and voted for him to elect him.

J.B.: How do you assess Winfield Dunn as Governor?

Ford: Just a very conservative dumb dumb, that is my assessment.

J.B.: He views himself as being very progressive.

Ford: I think he has used the same kind of Richard Nixon's tricks . . . you know, Tennessee belongs to him and no one else. He is running this State, this is his State and he can do what he wants to do, and he's above the law.

J.B.: What have been his strong and weak points in so far as the overall black community in Tennessee is concerned?

Ford: I don't think he has any strong points. I don't know of one thing that Winfield done, has talked about to try to implement for the black community. I don't know of anything that he has tried to do to stop the real . . . to stop his administration from always cutting out blacks out of his administration in every phase of government. He's tried to stop every program, he's tried to make sure . . . he's made sure that the revenue sharing funds that the State of Tennessee has received . . . not a nickel of that money would be drifted into the black community . . . he made sure of those things. He never named a black within his administration until the last few months. He never let a black play

in a leadership role within his administration. I have known of no black participation that he has had out of the four years that he served in office. I don't know of anything, you know, that Winfield has done. He made it clear that when he was elected that blacks didn't vote for him, he owed the black community nothing, and those were the statements he made in his inaugural speech, and you know, it's been very clear since that time. So, this is why I don't believe that black people are going to get sucked in by Lamar Alexander.

J.B.: Did Dunn ever specifically ever meet with the black legislators at all?

Ford: Only when he wanted something . . . only when he wanted to con us into something. I wouldn't meet with him. I stopped meeting with him after the first one or two meetings I realized that all he was after was something that he wanted done for him to look good.

J.B.: In the early meetings did he ever, you know, ask for input?

Ford: No.

J.B.: Did he ever ask about problems facing black people?

Ford: No.

End side 1 tape 1

J.B.: What was your reaction when . . . what was your reaction when Governor Dunn hung the painting of Abraham

Lincoln in the Governors office in Tennessee?

Ford: I had no reaction at all. I recall it, but I don't have a reaction whatsoever.

J.B.: What did it signify to you?

Ford: Well it is very hard to say what is signified. I really don't know what to say. Knowing Winfield Dunn, he'd do anything. He might not have even known that it was Abraham Lincoln on the picture . . . you know, very seriously, you know. Someone could have very well sent him the picture and he thought it was something good to do so he just put it up. I don't think he had any meaning to have it at all. Since he put it on the wall someone probably told him to come up with some reason, but you know, I just assumed Winfield knew what he was doing.

J.B.: How about his kindergarten program?

Ford: He didn't pass his program, the Democrats . . . we passed ours, I mean, he didn't pass his. Which one, the one he implemented?

Ford: The one he proposed.

J.B.: . . . two years ago, is dead.

Ford: You are saying that the state-wide kindergarten program has not come from . . . did not originate with the Governor?

Ford: It's not his. The program that we passed had nothing to do with Winfield Dunn. It was totally a different bill from Winfield Dunn's altogether. The Democratic control of the house implemented the kindergarten program that we have

now in the State of Tennessee.

J.B.: How do you view the issue on Tennessee's lack of a state income tax?

Ford: I don't know, you know, the state income tax thing has been a real real touchy . . . for one it will be 1977 or 1978 before the Constitutional Convention will be here . . . anyway, a real touchy position, he's in a real tough spot. I don't view it no way. I don't . . . I am not that much of a financial expert, you know, to know whether it is good or bad. Some people say it is good and some people say it is bad. I don't know, in as much as legislature . . . we had nothing to do with it, and no need for us to get bogged down with it . . . we had nothing at all to do with the state income tax.

J.B.: Depending on who one talks to, we have heard the contention made that . . . that Jake Butcher, and large support, strong support in the black community in Memphis is attributed solely to financial investments from his part in the campaign.

Ford: In what campaign?

J.B.: For Governor. I mean, the charges have been made that the black vote in Memphis was bought by Butcher, and secondarily by Haney to a lesser extent. Is that basically true, or is that an oversimplification, you know, is there no validity to it at all?

Ford: I doubt if they bought any votes. I don't think black votes can be bought. You know, the white racist people

talk about Kennedy buying black vote. You know, black folks are not dumb. Dutch Odum spent more money than practically all of them . . . did he buy white votes? You know, Lamar Alexander spent tons of money, did he buy black votes?

J.B.: What is the basis then of Butcher's strong showing in black precincts in Shelby County?

Ford: I guess the same . . . you know, blacks selected them a candidate . . . there was about 15 of them running. You know, I think Lamar Alexander spent more money than all of them. I mean no white vote.

J.B.: The fact is, the return showed that Butcher did run way ahead of the field, and there was a black candidate running. Why did Butcher do so well?

Ford: So the only thing about it. . . that is a racist statement, number one, and I personally . . . anytime anyone questions me on a racist statement . . . then I, you know, it gives me a different opinion even of you.

J.B.: That is why I wanted to make it clear. I am not making the statement, my question is just that this is what we hear from other people.

Ford: You might hear that from the news media. I don't think you heard that from other people. The news media might have said that itself. I don't think you hear it from other people.

J.B.: We heard it from other people. Now, maybe some of the other people that we heard it from are Republicans.

Ford: That same statement . . . racist newspaper, morning and evenings paper put out. I don't know of either one of the two very well. I know both of them well, but not, you know, not well to defend them, but I just hate to see the word black folks always being brought up because black folks voted for them . . . black votes can't be bought . . .

J.B.: Okay, so . . .

Ford: And I firmly state that black votes can't . . . that day and time is over a long long time ago. If that was the case then in 1971 when Bill Morris was running he could have bought every vote in town . . . black vote in town. Blacks voted for the man with no money. It is white folks who are raking off all the white candidates for all their money, and anytime on the black community. There are white firms here who charge half million dollars to Howard for PR work, go out and pick up the white support in the community and bring him in on a stand to run a campaign. Black votes . . . I think, went out and voted for the person they wanted to vote for.

J.B.: What was the basis then of Butcher's appeal?

Ford: I think his credentials, you know, made him worthy of not only picking up the votes he picked up, he should have won in the primary. I think he's about 37 years old, he's appealing, he's got the type of a personality that you could accept, and according to his platform . . . you know, a poor boy that won at one time, now has made it

successfully, and I think his credentials were there. He could fully represent the needs for everybody here in this city, and I don't think he got a run away vote, the only thing that I hate is that he didn't get 50,000 votes here in Shelby County, he would have won the Governors race.

J.B.: Was there any perception of him as being a potential winner among that field and someone who might beat Blanton that had less appeal based on his record?

Ford: You better say that again.

J.B.: Was there any sort of a feeling within the black community that if you looked over the field the black community would be better off to unify, if not completely, to throw . . . to unify to the extent behind a single candidate to make its influence felt later.

Ford: No, I think, you know, in the race a lot of people try to bring others issues try to defeat Ray Blanton by a particular candidate. I think there was a change, we had a black candidate in the race, I think the Democratic primary was a family type fight with all Democrats fighting and I think everybody in the race. That is why so many people stayed neutral.

good candidates regardless of who won, was better than either one of the full Republicans in the race. I think there was no question about that, and it didn't make any difference. I think it was a real clean and fair election. The only thing that I hate is that we don't have

a run-off to determine between Butcher and Blanton, you know, the majority of the vote.

J.B.: Do you think that if there had been a run-off law, whoever would have won would have come out as a stronger candidate?

Ford: Yeah, but . . .

J.B.: Simply by being a majority candidate.

Ford: Being a majority candidate. you got a lot of people in there now and Blanton win . . . only picked up ex-number of votes, can he win. With all these other Democrats throwing their hat to Ray Blanton, I think that will come in. I think they will unify behind him because now join forces. I think he will probably win.

J.B.: I would think that you would anticipate a large turn out in November, particularly black voters in Shelby County because of your own race.

Ford: We sure hope so. We're going to do our damndest to get them there.

J.B.: You also anticipate then that a strong turn-out will also vote in the Governors race at the polls.

Ford: I am sure they will.

J.B.: Do you plan then to endorse Blanton, and do you expect him to endorse you?

Ford: I haven't talked with him at this time.

J.B.: You would consider that to be the probably course

of events based on being Democrats and being politicians. I mean that is basically it? I would presume his endorsement of you would be . . . if he does that, would represent some sort of overture to the black community, wouldn't it, indirectly at least? How about if he fails to endorse you?

Ford: Just have to wait and see. I don't think he can afford to. I don't think he is going to . . . the man 75,000 votes, I don't think no one ever looks at. I don't think nobody is going to look at. It still wouldn't make any difference. I probably will support him as Governor. Ray Blanton is going to need help. All we need is 8% - 10% of the white vote, and I don't think there is no way we can miss that. If he talks about race we've got him, you know.

J.B.: You're talking about Kuykendall. If we can get him to fight a race, then we've got it. See, we won't be able to bring in what we have wanted into this campaign and fully tie him with Richard Nixon unless we can get the race issue. The only honest men in Watergate are the black men, these are the men that told it. We just got certain things we can tie in . . . tie campaign . . . Kuykendall, we've got to make him fit into the program.

J.B.: If he brings race into the issue, then how does that fit into the campaign strategy? Does it fit in to the standpoint of even more mobilizing the black community, or are you speaking of white reaction in the community to that

. . .

Ford: That would help too. With . . . Kuykendall will create the issue for me in the black community without even saying anything, and it takes someone else sometimes to create the issues. We've got to force our opponent to make the issues, and we have got to make sure that they are on a racial wise. We want Kuykendall to take issues of bussing and race. That is what he used on Patterson in '72, and we are going to try to force him out in our first public appearance together. We are going to force them out of him. Probably he won't make it that night, but he'll make it the next place he goes alone where he won't have me to contend with. All we want to do is for him to make it public, we'll blow it out of proportion for him. We will, at that point, take him and put him on the defensive from then on to the campaign, if he falls into our plan the way we got it planned, but we're . . .

J.B.: You think that is going to have an adverse reaction to Kuykendall in the white community as well?

Ford: No.

J.B.: Is that part of it?

Ford: No, because we are going out working in the white community.

J.B.: Okay, that's what I am trying to understand. The race thing then is to mobilize the black community.

Ford: The race thing is also . . . see if Kuykendall

brings up the race thing, then he is going to put us out there in the white community . . . and we are going out there knocking door to door . . . white . . . first thing they are going to say he's not as bad as they say he is, you know, we need something . . . Kuykendall would help us in the black community . . . white community.

J.B.: Okay.

Ford: Kuykendall has been fooling folks for eight years and we are just going to prove to the voters of the eighth congressional district. See Patterson didn't go to the people, we're going to them, ain't no way in hell Kuykendall is going to go out knocking on doors, that's not going to happen, and I knocked on black doors in the primary and I am going to knock on the white doors in the general, you know, we know we might get run away from some of them, but we are going anyway. He'll have twice as much money as we have, which we don't mind.

J.B.: Do you get a general difference in reaction in lower income white precincts . . . white residential areas and upper income . . . middle and upper?

Ford: Really, we haven't worked but about one and a half precincts, you know, fully worked them. The rest have been just spot checks and shopping centers. I haven't found any difference in any of them. Now I never looked for the lower income white community really, I just started going to the precinct . . . doesn't make any

difference which one, except a Republican precinct . . . I mean I got sense enough to know that there about 23 or 27 of them in this Eighth Congressional District, and I wouldn't waste their time noway. I know where they are, so I won't go in them. I've got 120 more to go in, so which should I go in that twenty some. Then that 27 precincts, we've got 63 solid black precincts he's got to overcome, so 63 and 63 is 126, you know. That means, you know, he's got 63 precincts to work to overcome me, number one. That means he has got to outwork from there.

J.B.; Do you find that blacks expect more of an elected black official than they do an elected white official?

Ford: Much more, much more.

J.B.: Is this a major problem?

Ford: One of the major problems. They expect much more from a black, you know. A lot of times whites have been raised and voted for white candidates for so long until they just . . . a white person can do a better job. White folks just realized that. I mean just believe in it until you . . . Memphis blacks believed the same thing until we came along. We had blacks say "oh no, I'm not going to vote for him, I'm going to vote for this white," John and I got out here and started building their confidence to let it be known that you can still be very vocal and at the same time be effective, and I think

that is how we gained the respect of them.

J.B.: The . . . is Bill Brock the most unifying factor of the Democratic party?

Ford: Who?

J.B.: Bill Brock.

Ford: You think he unified the Democratic party?

J.B.: I had the impression that he is potentially the most unifying force in the Democratic party as a negative force, . . . it seems to be much more unity built around an opposition of Brock, than unity on any other single thing that we have been able to come upon.

Ford: I would think that . . .

J.B.: How do blacks perceive Brock? We've talked . . . white liberals tend to be very, you know, their reaction is that we have been able to . . .

Ford: You know the thing . . . white liberals are the ones that blacks can't trust.

J.B.: What is happening on that?

Ford: You take our campaign. I would never try and get a coalition with white liberals, in fact I have not even called them and I won't call them to get a coalition going. I think the greatest damage to the black race is that white liberal.

J.B.: In what way?

Ford: Setting blacks back, . . . blacks any good. They always use blacks as a cushion to get them where they want to go. This has been true for

liberals . . . but what I smell when I call on a white liberal that white is always around and telling blacks what they want to do, always at the same time getting where they want to go and leaving the blacks behind.

J.B.: Does Richard Fulton fit into that category?

Ford: No. Richard Fulton wouldn't fit into that category, not at all.

J.B.: Okay. I was asking sort of to help me define . . .

Ford: Let me see who would fit into that category . . . I don't if you know a lot of people out of town, who do you know?

J.B.; Not a whole heck of a lot of people.

Ford: That's true. I just wanted to know who you know.

Ford: One of my opponents for instance . . . Mark Klanakey who ran against me in the Democratic house, do you know him?

J.B.: No.

Ford: Theory . . . outspoken liberal he claimed. He said he wouldn't support me for Congress against Kuykendall.

J.B.: How about your new Democratic Chairman in Shelby County?

Ford: Very good one. Jim White, very good. I've served with him in the house. He's served in the senate

he is very good. He unified the party.

J.B.: What role does Avon Williams play in the legislature?

Ford: What role?

J.B.: And how effective is he?

Ford: Very effective, in fact, he was voted among the senators as the most effective legislator in the senate last year. He is always co-sponsors of bills, we have co-sponsored each others bills. So we have worked closely. Bills that I passed, he passed. We worked together for the first time, we have had to fight for power . . . coalition, not coalition but relationships . . . when blacks have been effective in both houses. We had to commend each other . . . anytime he gave me the green light he'd pass one in the senate, then I'd step it up and get in on the floor for a vote and it would pass in the house. The same thing was true I could give him a green light to go ahead with the bill, he'd pass it. Very effective. Very, very effective. We passed some bills that nobody even dreamed we could do it. So I'd have to respect him as the most effective legislator.

J.B.: Did Bill Brock's image create an emotional response generally among blacks?

Ford: I don't think that blacks even know Bill Brock, even though he won in 1970. I don't think blacks know anything

about him. They knew about Albert Gore, but they didn't know anything about Brock. One out of four would know about him. All of them would know that he is the person they shouldn't vote for, they would know that, but they would . . . but Bill Brock wouldn't answer when they said who . . . Bill who, they wouldn't know.

J.B.: But they do know him well enough to know that he is the man he shouldn't vote for?

Ford: Yeah, then when you talk about Bill Brock for the U. S. Senate, you know, somebody else . . . they'd take the other guy, you know, something like that.

J.B.: Do you think Blanton is going to win in November?

Ford: I don't think there is any question. He is going to beat the socks off that guy. At first I thought it would be a hard job, but it won't.

J.B. Why?

Ford: Well you know, youthful image of Lamar Alexander, he's got it, and I just felt that the guy was on the ball. He's not on the ball like I thought he was, and I have been reading up on it, Blanton will knock him out. I was under the impression at one time that get black votes, he would probably get two or three different blacks come out of, you know, forty. They won't get even 5% of the black vote. So, will be in the making.

End interview with Harold Ford.