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This is an interview with Terrel Sessums, speaker of the Florida house of representatives. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries in Tallahassee, Florida on May 20, 1974 and was transcribed by Joe Jaros.

Jack Bass: One of the things that I was intrigued by here is the fact that someone like you, who is relatively young, being speaker of the house and retiring, as I understand it.

Terrel Sessums: Well, in Florida, we have developed the tradition of rotating the leadership in the house and the senate both and I have really, I guess, relatively little seniority compared to many legislators. But I have served since 1963 and I will have, by the end of this term, checked off my list most of the major legislative concerns that I had. And while I have enjoyed being speaker for these two years, yet I have had about all of it that I can afford and would be quite willing to turn the gavel over to my successor. I first ran for the legislature back in March of 1963 when Florida began to start reapportioning the legislature. In college, I had been a political science major, had been very much interested in government and then went on to law school and went to Tampa to practice law in 1958. And after I had been there about a year, our state senator at the time, who is now Congressman Sam Gibbons, represents our district in Congress, invited me to serve as his aide during the 1959 legislative session and then at the 1961

legislative session, I took a leave of absence from my law firm and came up here and worked with him just during the sixty day session. That was before we amended the constitution in '68, so the legislature met every other year. And it was a very interesting experience for me. At that time, Governor Collins was still the governor, we were having a great deal of turmoil over the integration of the public schools and a great debate over reapportionment and it caused me to believe that perhaps the most important thing that needed to be done in Florida was to reapportion its legislature, because most of the men that I encountered up here who served in the house or senate generally represented a point of view held, oh, I guess a majority of the citizens within about a fifty or seventy-five mile radius of Tallahassee and were not overly representative of the people who lived in the more urban parts of the state in central and south Florida. It was just sort of like going to a different world when you came to Tallahassee. And our Senator Gibbons had defeated a senator from our county who was quite well accepted by what we used to call the "Pork Chop Gang" and many people in our area felt that he did not do a very good job of representing our interests. And when Sam served in the senate, there was a very great antagonism on the part of a great majority in both houses to any suggestion of reapportionment. In fact the problem was to preserve as many as a third of the senate to uphold the governor's veto of last resort legislation to close the public school system and some things of that nature. And I became pretty committed to seeing what could be done to reapportion the legislature and assisted in well. . . the majority approach up here was

to do something, but to do as little as possible. And there were some campaigns on . . . in fact, their approach was not to use the statutory approach to reapportionment, but simply to pass out a constitutional amendment that made some change and delay the thing until the people voted on it and then they had very little to vote on anyway. So, we went through one or perhaps two of these constitutional amendment elections and finally, in 1963, they did add some new seats to some of the larger counties. I ran and was elected to one of the seats added to Hillsborough and I think that most of the new people that were elected then came up feeling that the most important thing that needed to be done was to continue to reapportion the legislature. And that was the main tug of war, really, from about 1963 to 1966-1967. And with the background in history and political science, I began to feel that we weren't ever going to get anything done unless it was done by revolution or divine intervention, because the people that controlled the legislature were not willing to be persuaded that it was right to not allow them to exercise control. Finally, the United States Supreme Court added a lot of impetus to efforts to reapportion. That was the period when I came into legislative service and I think that we have now properly reapportioned the legislature and many of the things that needed to be done have been done. We are a long way from the millenium, but we . . . .

Walter De Vries: You said that in 1966, you didn't think that there could be any changes unless it was short of revolution or something like that. Now that you look back eight years, and we look at this legislature compared to the other states in the South and outside of it, and the enormous changes that have occurred, would you have believed that looking

back now at all the changes that have occurred, could have occurred in that period of time?

Sessums: Well, it would have been a little hard to realize prior to 1967.

W.D.V.: What prompted that whole momentum?

Sessums: I don't know if you can pick out a single factor. I think that probably a combination of circumstances. One, of course, many states have reapportioned and not just Florida. I think reapportionment was one of the keys and without it, very little change would have occurred. Because the legislature had to reflect much more adequately the concerns of the people of Florida and until we reapportioned in '66 and '67, it just didn't do that. So that once it was reapportioned, there was a great desire on the part of the new majority in the house and the senate, to catch up and to change things. Now, to go beyond that, there are a couple of other factors that maybe you need with Florida. One, we probably had more changing to do than most states. I doubt very seriously if there are very many states that were more malapportioned than Florida. I have not researched the point or looked back, but it seemed to me that the majority of the house and the majority of the senate in Florida could be elected by between twelve and thirteen percent of the population, basically those who lived in the smaller and middle and northwestern counties of Florida. So, we were quite malapportioned and until we did get reapportionment. And also, I guess that starting with 1944, '45 and the end of World War II, Florida just continued to excelerate in growth and change the whole population distribution throughout the state. And as a consequence, although many states reapportioned, the new legislature reflected a population of a

state that had undergone tremendous change itself within a twenty year period of time and it involved just not a growth in population, but really a different kind of population, a complete of geographic emphasis within the state. Ya'll, I'm sure, are quite familiar with Florida's population development, but our capital was selected simply because it was about halfway between the two population centers of the state, that is, St. Augustine on the east coast and Pensacola on the west and our whole population axis ran from the St. Augustine-Jacksonville area through the north and west part of the state to Pensacola until I guess, really the turn of the century. And in the 1920's, population began to develop in the lower east coast, the Gold Coast area and in central Florida and the west coast area, so that today, the bulk of Florida's population really lives in central and south Florida. And they are people who have in-migrated from other states, who come in with a variety of backgrounds, so that once we were reapportioned, the balance of power shifted geographically and it shifted to a different population mix. For instance, in terms of racial composition, I would say that the attitudes from Jacksonville through this area and Pensacola are quite similar with those in south Georgia and Alabama. And I would say though, that in the rest of the state, you have had many people did not grow up, whose parents and grandparents had lived in the area, and areas that were never in a black belt with any type of an ante-bellum economy, not that they are automatically liberal on racial issues, but they didn't have the same type of conditioning. My grandparents came into this state in the 20's, one set from Wyoming and one set from Tennessee, in time for me to be a Floridian, but many people who lived in central and south Florida came from many other

places. And the black population, you tended to have in-migration of whites and you tended to have out-migration of blacks, so that even on racial matters, the population in my district has gone from slightly over 20% black, down from that to about 14% black and I expect that by the time of the next census it will be less than 10% black. In terms of absolute numbers, the black population will probably have some slight increase, but the increase has been the in-migration of whites.

(Interruption on tape.)

W.D.V.: It is apparent to us that the Florida . . . you say that the Florida legislature had so far to go in terms of malapportionment, but what about in terms of its operation, its staffing, the quality of its members, the product that it produces? As you look at other states in the South, do you see a difference in what you are doing?

Sessums: Well, I don't know how to compare the quality of our members with the members of other legislatures, perhaps you could do that better than I, but well, within the state, I can give you an illustration. Before reapportionment, the chronological age level of the house was much greater than it is now. And I think that in the more settled, rural environment, a greater emphasis on stability and seniority and everything like that, there were just many old timers around and the urban areas were really under-represented. Their seats were so worthless that the so called "vested interests" didn't worry too much about them. They didn't really count up here anyway, with rare exceptions, so that the young idealistic lawyer or somebody else could generally run for the seats and no one was too concerned with getting him elected or crowding him out and I think that we had some extremely able people

serving from the urban areas before reapportionment. The problem was that they were just submerged. I could give a number of illustrations. My own delegation from Hillsborough County had three housemembers and I would say generally that one or two among the three were among the most able men in the legislature, with all of the credentials with anybody else. But they would come up here, they would not be in the majority bloc, so they would not be selected for any leadership post or committee chairman, they would not be assisting in developing important legislation, so that a contemporary of theirs who came from the right area, namely De Walt Connor, for instance, who is now the Commissioner of Agriculture, who came up here from Stark, was no more able, perhaps not as able as some folks from urban areas, he just simply got thrust into leadership pretty well by his caucus so that he went onward and upward very rapidly and the others began to get just completely frustrated about the whole thing and would drop out or run for something else. We had a fair turnover in the urban areas with fairly good people, they were just not too visible or too many of them. And it could very well be that Florida is a slightly more urban state than some of our southern sister states, although I understand that things are changing in many of those. And I think generally, though not necessarily, a representative from an urban area is apt to be a little bit . . . I can again think of some very notable exceptions, but he is generally apt to be a little bit more aggressive, a little bit more . . . have a little bit more in terms of educational attainments , some things of that nature. And it could very well be that the vested interests didn't have the situation organized so that with reapportionment, a great deal

of representation was added to the urban areas, you had a host of eager young men and a few women who were ready to rush in and tilt with windmills, and who came from relatively sophisticated constituencies. Well, that's probably not right, but I think the urban make-up of the state and its population mix contributed somewhat to this. I don't know, if I had to look beyond it for any other factor, I would say that there are a fair number of people up here who all went to the University of Florida and who were fairly active in a student government organization that again was perhaps not typical. I would say that the University of Florida, comparing it to other state universities in the region, has had several traditions that are relatively unique. The University of Florida has never compared very favorably with the University of Alabama or Mississippi in football, we've been trying, but we have never quite done it. But in terms of inter-collegiate debate, the University of Florida has been virtually, at least in the southeastern region, the Notre Dame of the debate world. And when I was an undergraduate, we would have as many as fifty debaters on the road any one weekend competing in debate tournaments ranging from Chicago to Dallas to Atlanta or wherever you might have. So, that any young man or woman who went to the University of Florida who was interested in government and politics felt that a valuable part of training to be prepared for that was to participate in student government at the University of Florida where students, perhaps, were given more responsibility than they were at many other universities and was a big thing and inter-collegiate debate. And I can look around state government and find many of my colleagues who served with me in student government at the University of Florida who were active in

inter-collegiate debate and who were in Florida Blue Key and who have continued that activity in the legislature. And that could be one thing that is lurking in the background, but I don't know how that compares to other states.

J.B.: Who are some of those people?

Sessums: Well, let's see. Our present governor was fairly active in it, though he was not at the University of Florida, he did his undergraduate work here at Florida State in Tallahassee. And he is probably the first student who is a product of the Florida State system, which when they became coed was quite similar to the one at the University of Florida. He did his law school work at Florida. Bob Sheving, who is on the cabinet, who is our attorney general . . . I would almost have to get out a list real quickly, but I can probably pick out a dozen or two Blue Key members who are fairly active in both chambers, who are committee chairman and such as that. I can . . . .

W.D.V.: Is there a general emphasis at the university of public service and . . . .

Sessums: Florida Blue Key really was the founding chapter of what became nationally the Blue Key organization and later it felt that the quality of the organization was being diluted, so it withdrew from the national organization that it helped found and it has just continued to be unaffiliated with any national organization. And looking at the senate, Senator Horne, the president of the senate, was chancellor of the honor court in our student government system and a member of Florida Blue Key, Senator de la Parte, the senate pro tem, was the president of the student body at the University of Florida, although he was not selected for Blue Key, primarily

because he did his undergraduate work at Emory. He came back and was very active in student affairs as a law student and was a summer school president of the student body and if he had had a little undergraduate involvement, he probably would have been selected. Dick Pettigrew was a president of Florida Blue Key and was active in debate, although he was not one of the varsity debators, Bob Sheving, who served with him, Ken Myers . . . Ken was not in inter-collegiate debate, but he and I were partners in the law school moot court competition. I can look through the house here, Jack Shreeve, who is chairman of our committee on criminal justice was a Blue Key president. Bill Birchfield, who serves as chairman of one our committee was very active in student government. I think that perhaps . . . .

W.D.V.: Were these people that you are naming and yourself, all at the University of Florida all at the same time?

Sessums: Pretty well, but it spreads out. United States Senator Holland was in his student days, active. Senator Smathers was active in debate and was the president of the student body. I would say that if I had the list of all these people, I could move through and pick them out fairly quickly, but . . . .

W.D.V.: Were they basically in the late fifties and early sixties that they were at the university?

Sessums: Well, Holland and Smathers were there prior to World War II, but . . . .

W.D.V.: No, I was thinking about the group that you mentioned?

Sessums: But you find there, pretty much that they came in in '48, '49 and through the mid-fifties. And I think that they activists of the day, instead of going out with petitions and things like that, generally tended

to get active in student government and also to participate in inter-collegiate debate and such as that and to look forward to and to prepare himself for some type of service role in state government.

W.D.V.: Has that continued, has that tradition been followed at the university?

Sessums: Reasonably well. I don't know, it's not, I don't think, an overly conscious deliberate thing. That is, it will dissipate a little because we have had considerable expansion of the state university system since then, but . . . .

J.B.: But when you got here then, in the first four or five or six years here, you began to run into a lot of people that you already knew?

Sessums: Oh yeah.

W.D.V.: From that group that started right after the war and went through about '55?

Sessums: Uh-huh.

J.B.: I mean, these were not strangers?

Sessums: Oh no, I knew many of the guys before I ran and when I came up here. For instance, the Congressman, when he was our state senator that I came up here to work for, had been a member of Florida Blue Key and active in student government at the University of Florida.

J.B.: Was there a conscious feeling, particularly on the part of those who came three or four years after you, during that period and into the middle sixties, of coming up here to turn things around?

Sessums: Oh, yeah. I think that most of these people, with the exception of one or two who came from rural areas who felt reasonably comfortable with the status quo, tended to settle by and large in urban areas, to reflect that point of view and were quite anxious to change and to catch up.

J.B.: Somebody told us that in Florida, that being a state legislator has status, more so than probably any other southern state.

Sessums: Well, I don't know. I would say that it's . . . I would think so, I would say that it reflects credit to be a member of the state legislature here, rather than not. I think that the public in Florida, like the public generally, may have a tendency to depreciate elected public officials somewhat, but I think that individually, most members of the legislature are reasonably well regarded by their constituencies. We lose more people out of the house because of attrition, that is, because they quit or they run for some other office than because they get defeated at the polls. Although, there are occasions when that occurs. I would say that most of the members of our legislature are reasonably well regarded.

J.B.: The combination of the Sunshine Law and the public disclosure law, aside from the obvious public benefits of both, what effect does that have on the members insofar as putting pressure on them, I guess that's what I'm trying to say? Is that a deterrent against them?

Sessums: The Sunshine Law?

J.B.: Combined with the disclosure law?

Sessums: Well, I don't think that the Sunshine Law is any deterrent to serving. To some extent, it complicates the way we work, but I think that it does it in a way that is beneficial. I could illustrate. When I first became a member of the appropriations committee, near the end of the term, we passed a general appropriations act. I was selected to be one of the house conferees on the conference committee. It was the first time that I had served on a conference committee and I felt it was a big deal and I was looking forward to it. One of my house conferees was Bob

Graham, who is the chairman of the senate education committee. Well, Bob had been real active in the student government at the University of Florida. He had been chancellor of the honor court and was in Florida Blue Key and was a good student. And so, I was discussing with Bob what we needed to do to be effective on this conference committee, because we were the two junior members of it and we had a strong position that we wanted to maintain in the allocation of funds for higher education. And we felt that we were going to have an uphill battle because of the greybeards on the senate side, Jack Mathews, who was the president of the senate, and Mallory Horne and Reubin Askew and some others who were fairly tough conferees. Well, Bob had checked out of some library the treatise written by a doctoral student at Harvard analysis the success of conferees on conference committees in the Congress. And we both read that to be properly prepped for this experience and it seemed to indicate that the most effective conferee frequently was just the one who was the most obstinate. So, we tried to fortify our position, not only with logic and reason and everything like that, but with a great deal of obstinacy also. And I departed a little bit from your question, and bring me back into it if you will. . . . well, you were asking about the

Sunshine Law, well that conference committee did its work in a weekend. We went out to Mallory Horne's lake place and the house and senate conferees were there with the staff director and we went through the issues and people were very candid and except for the primary thing that Bob and I were interested in, the whole thing was done over the weekend and then we had to wait a week to rationalize a way of compromising our

issue, but it was done out of the sunshine. Now, when a conference committee meets, there are going to be 150 people in the audience and the newspapers are going to be there and it is generally going to take more time, not necessarily, but generally. But that the other fact of that is that the public has a much better awareness of why changes are made and what they are and I think that there is a greater feeling of acceptance on what is done and I think that perhaps we avoid some mistakes that we might make by letting people know what's coming before it arrives, get a reaction from them before we finally wrap it all up and it is done. The effect of financial disclosure, I don't know what that really will be. Ma ny people are doing it voluntarily now and I suspect that this session will pass some legislation. I have an idea that that will probably keep some people from running. Some of them will be people that you may not want to run and others will be people that that is the straw that just breaks the camel's back and it just makes it that much more complicated. And it tends to be more complicated for a part-time public official than one who is perhaps on the payroll full-time. One other thing that I think may have made a difference in Florida that has not occurred too often, and that is we had a Republican governor, who was elected in 1966. And I think that he may have contributed unintentionally a great deal to . . . .

(End of side A of tape.)

Sessoms: . . . . over the years, if it ever really had been strong. So that when the old legislature came to town, most of the major legislation was prepared by the governor, or by the cabinet officers and they pretty

much farmed it out to their friends as the people who sponsored it and then handled it. And the legislature had little or no capability of its own to really do anything. They had one or two staff people and the clerk and the sergeant and that was about it. You depended heavily, not only on the lobbyists, but very heavily upon the executive branch of government which lobbied a great deal. And legislative leadership did not too often challenge the executive. Governor Collins had his problems with the legislature, primarily over a racial matter, but the rest of the executives supplied most of the legislation. Well, in 1966 . . . I'm trying to get my years straight, Florida did, I think, finally legislatively do a pretty adequate job of reapportioning itself. The new members were elected and in the same election, Governor Kirk was elected. And that was, if you will recall the situation, we had an incumbent governor, Eden Burns, who was a Democrat, who served a two year term. And then he was defeated in the Democratic primaries by Robert King High, the mayor of Miami. He was really the first breakthrough of a man who came of a south Florida, one of the left out areas. Governor Burns came from Jacksonville, a relatively large urban county, but it by virtue of geography and tradition, had always been in the Pork Chop Gang, northwest Florida group. And it had been accommodated pretty well within that group and it had never really related with the guys from central and south Florida. Well, when Mayor High, who was the mayor of Miami, beat Governor Burns in the primary, it represented a shift of the political balance really, somewhat from north to south Florida. But the people with Governor Burns were so unprepared to accept this that they did not support Mayor High and they vigorously

supported the Republican candidate, who I think without that factor, would never have been elected. But he was elected, although we did elect strong Democratic majorities in both houses. But Governor Kirk came to state government without ever having held a public office before and without any real knowledge at all of state government. And in his inaugural address, he surprised everybody by calling us into special session a couple of days later. And we had finally finished that up and gotten home when the district court then promulgated a new reapportionment plan and we had all new elections. And the court plan, I think, probably did apportion us a little better, but there were probably really only about four or five seats that were where guys could not run for re-election under the court plan under our own. It did not represent that big a change. And it was a real surprise to those of us from the urban areas as well as those from the rural areas. We had new elections and Congressman Gurney, who is now our United States Senator, did a lot of t.v. work in the lower east coast. And the court elections were special elections and the only people on the ballots were legislators. There was a very low turnout for the elections and you had a new Republican governor who was at the zenith of his popularity, which did decline constantly thereafter, with the help of one of the most vigorous Republican Congressmen who was trying to prepare his campaign for the U.S. Senate. And we just had a very bad time in that election. We had a substantial increase in the number of Republicans elected, in fact, all incumbent Democratic members of the house from Miami north to Volusia County, the Daytona Beach area in through Orange were basically wiped out. And so we came back then, just as the term was getting under way, with a Republican governor and with suddenly

significant Republican minorities in both the house and the senate, capable of upholding the gubernatorial veto. And I think that this had a dramatic effect on the legislature and operated with these other things to cause the legislature to really start asserting themselves as a co-equal branch of government. And the governor was . . . if we had had a Democratic governor, I don't think that we really would have cut ourselves clear of the apron strings as quickly or as easily. We would have been inclined to try to agree and still lean on the governor for a lot of help and leadership. But the positions became so antagonistic that we developed, we decided that the legislature had to be prepared to sort of really govern Florida whether the governor liked it or not. And so we undertook to write the general appropriations bill and to start acquiring staff for our committees and to put our own house in order. And I think that the combination of reapportionment, reflecting great change in the state, the combination of a Republican governor with a competition with Democratic majorities in the house and senate, are two of the factors that helped most of this jell. And the governor himself, for instance, when it came to the subject of constitutional revision, he said to a privately to a number of us, he said, "Look, we want to revise the constitution." Well, the preceeding number of Democratic governors had said the same thing. But then here is where he parted greatly with them. He said, "Frankly, I don't care a whole lot what you put in it, I just want a new constitution. I would like to be able to appoint the cabinet rather than have them elected, but I don't honestly see much chance of ya'll agreeing to that, so go ahead and revise the constitution and let's get a constitutional commission working on it and get the job done right and I won't bother you." And he didn't

really, he had very little input in what was done there, so that a Democratic governor would have been full of ideas and direction and everything like that and chances are that very little would have been done. So, I think that all that helped a great deal and I don't know of any other southern state that has had . . . well, there have been several other southern states that have had Republican governors. I don't know if any of them have had Republican governors quite like the one that we had or that we could have had similar experiences with a different type of Republican governor, one who had not too really a good understanding of what state government was all about, did not have the benefit of a very experienced staff, although he had some talented people working with him. And it gave us a challenge that we may not otherwise have had to move out.

W.D.V.: How do you feel about the tradition of rotating the speakership and the presidency of the senate?

Sessums: Well, I would say that in many ways it has been beneficial and I realize that the overwhelming weight of authority, including intellectual thought is that it is bad. But I have felt that it continues to keep our system more open, to new ideas and new enthusiasms, and it I think that it causes more things to happen than if we were to settle down with more stable leadership and continuity of leadership. There are risks involved in it and there are limitations involved in it. I can see now some real good reasons for having a permanent speaker that I didn't see before I became speaker. On the other hand, I think that our process will probably be more stimulated by a changing of the guard than if I or another person was to continue

on as speaker. I have not really set down to sort it all out, but I think that our rotation of leadership has been more of a plus than a minus.

W.D.V.: How about the practice of the selection of the speaker by the caucus before the next legislature comes in?

Sessums: Well, I think that's a desirable thing to do. It gives the incoming leadership a little warning and a time to organize their program and thoughts and to set up. We have changed our caucus rules somewhat to do it in a slightly different way in the future.

W.D.V.: It's being challenged now, isn't it?

Sessums: Not the system, the individual. Yeah, so that . . . of course, that can happen anytime. I would say that Florida, like any state could suffer if the membership makes a poor choice of leadership. And there are some who could provide more effective leadership than others. Now, the speaker in Florida is a little bit different animal than he is in some states. I'm sure that you have seen many different variations on this. In some ways, I enjoy, probably, a lot more strength or stability or power than the speaker in say, a state like California, who ostensibly is a prominent speaker, but still, a motion with the greatest dignity in California is a motion to declare the chair vacant. Now, this may make the speaker, although he's a prominent speaker, it may make him quite responsive to his majority bloc. But I am elected for a constitutional, two year term. I have the right to be re-elected, but the tradition has been otherwise, not any formal rule or provision. And I can pretty well decide what committees we will have, who the leaders of the committees will be, who will serve on what committee, what staff we will have and a number of other things. It would appear

by itself to be almost a tremendous grant of dictatorial power and some speakers can determine also what bills are going to what committee, although there are some restraints on that. But after everything is said and done, you still have to have majority of the members who are in general agreement with what you are doing. So that although they are not all written or spelled out, they are very practical limitations on the authority and power of any speaker. He still has to get people to do things because they want to do, and not because they have to do them, if he is going to be consistently successful in getting something done. And because of that, I don't think . . . .

(interruption on the tape)

. . . . so that I would say that a bad speaker will probably not be as big a calamity as some would fear and that a great speaker may not be quite as great a speaker as some of his closest friends or zealots would think, because of the fact that you've got many other people whose opinions and points of view have to be taken into account and sometimes they don't do exactly what you want them to do. In the case of a good speaker, that may be bad and in the case of a bad speaker, it may be good. The one thing I would be reasonably sure of, I think that when speaker Pettigrew made some move toward having more permanent leadership that they put the cart before the horse in a way. I would say that if they want to have a permanent speaker or permanent senate president, that you will have one provided if you make the job one that someone would be willing to hold and perform on a permanent basis. But it is, in our system, just about a full-time job with party-time compensation and everything else. And most speakers that I have known, have been delighted

to pass the gavel on to the next speaker. They have needed to get back to their business or their profession and I think that the thing that would do more to provide for a permanent speaker than anything else would be to take the salary and double it and then if you had a fellow who really liked being speaker and a membership that wanted to continue him, he would be in a circumstance to continue. And Florida has not done nearly enough as a number of our sister states. Georgia, Massachussets and many others, their speaker or senate president can afford to continue.

W.D.V.: How do you assess the cabinet system?

Sessums: Well, it's one of our political dilemmas. If I were designing a system of government, I would not have the elected cabinet. However, it is one that has been fairly deeply engrafted into our tradition. Now, to make you, to help you understand why it is a little hard to change that tradition . . . during many of the Pork Chop years, before our legislature was reapportioned, the cabinet were the good guys. The cabinet were the ones who ran statewide, who tended to be deferential to the urban areas, much more so than the legislature. So, the urban areas began to sort of forget about the legislature, let the bright young lawyers run for those jobs, the power structure really related with the governor and the cabinet. And they felt that they had some input there because the guys had to stand statewide elections. So that it has probably not been until 1968 or so that you began to, with the emergence of a different kind of legislator, that you began to sort of confuse that image, so that some of the cabinet officers now are beginning to look like the outpost of the industry that they deal with and are little bit more of the bad guys. I think that the cabinet system could work very nicely for Florida if the

voters ever selected a governor and cabinet officers who had reasonably similar points of view or philosophies. The odds of that occurring with any consistency are, I think, remote. The question I've had is whether or not the cabinet system is just too deeply engrained in our tradition and constitution and everything else to successfully make any change in it. Most of us felt that the effort to change it would be so extreme and the chance of success so remote that there would be nothing productive to do it, but to not hit the cabinet system head on and to try and make it work as constructively as possible for the state.

J.B.: We've heard it defended on grounds that it brings executive decision making into the open.

Sessums: I don't see that. If anything, some issues it can very well obscure it. I think that executive decision making is most visible when one executive makes and is accountable for the decision.

W.D.V.: But as a practical matter, the authority of the legislature has increased in the last eight years, hasn't it?

Sessums: I would say so, yes.

W.D.V.: In the appropriations process and other things. And as has the governor since the new constitution.

Sessums: Well, the new constitution did not hit the cabinet system head on. It continued it, but it did do a great deal to strengthen the governor's position in the scheme of things.

W.D.V.: So, you may be accomplishing that obliquely, even if you didn't want to.

Sessums: To some extent, yes. And I would suspect that, well, there may be a tendency on the part of some who have strong disagreements with some

cabinet members to question the system rather than the officer, but they may not question other cabinet officers. For instance, I would like to hear a discussion on this subject between, let's say, Dick Pettigrew, who has been, I think, generally opposed to the cabinet system and reasonably well thought out in his approach to it, and Bob Shevins, who is the attorney general and serving on the cabinet. I think that Dick would generally strongly approve of Bob Shevins as a cabinet officer and he may not approve of the comptroller or the commissioner of agriculture or some others. I would say that some people who are opposed to the cabinet system would be much less opposed to it if there were different cabinet officers. I think that as time goes on, the cabinet like the legislature, will be more rather than less inclined to accept the dominant view of the majority of the state. And I think that the cabinet, although it was ahead of the legislature in reflecting the public will, at this point as a whole lags a little bit behind it and has not made that adjustment. When it does, the cabinet may get along a little bit better with the governor and the legislature and it may work a little bit more smoothly than it is at the moment.

W.D.V.: Now, you are retiring as speaker and also from the house, does that mean that you are going to drop out of state politics?

Sessums: There is some speculation that I may be a lieutenant governor candidate, but that is all it is, and . . . .

W.D.V.: How do you feel about it?

Sessums: I have avoided giving it a great deal of thought. If the governor came to me and said that he would like for me to do it, I would get in high gear and think about it and it would be a little bit of a dilemma. I enjoy public service to some extent, but I have

grown quite weary of moving my family up here every year and moving back to my district and trying to cope with a law practice under all of this. I, well, the governor put it to me this way when he was running. He said that he had gotten to the point where he either had to get into full-time public service or get out of it. And I am at that point. And either alternative is reasonably attractive. But the governor has many good choices to make and I'm not sure that I would be the best one for him and I'm not campaigning for it and . . . .

W.D.V.: How about the cabinet?

Sessums: No.

W.D.V.: There ought to be some vacancies there, shouldn't there?

Sessums: Yes, I have encouraged Ralph Turlington to run for commissioner of education and he was appointed to the vacancy that occurred there and I am not interested in being commissioner of agriculture or any of the others. I might conceivably be, just because of the secondary role that the cabinet has as the state board of education, but no, I'm not interested in running for cabinet office. I think that what I will do will be to go back and practice law and try to be a little bit more helpful to other candidates. I have always been a candidate myself and perhaps a little bit more reserved about being involved in other campaigns, at least in the primary stage. And I think that I can probably be a little bit more active and helpful to people there. Then, if I get many opportunities . . . . many opportunities for service arise, so I figure that if I get too unhappy with the practice of law, feel too restricted in it and want to get involved in some grand debates, I can find an opportunity to do that. They come along with probably greater frequency than we like. So, that's probably what my situation will be.

J.B.: How do you assess the role of the Democratic party in state politics?

Sessums: Well, it has been changing a little bit. At home, generally the elected Democratic official has given the party as wide a berth as possible. The party has had little influence, it has not always enjoyed too good a reputation and the dilemma for the Democratic office holder is whether or not it is worth the effort to try and straighten it up or to try and ignore it and be identified with it as little as possible. I think that the attitude most public officials now have is that you cannot or should not ignore it and that the party ought to be improved and strengthened to play a more active and useful role. And I think that is the direction we are inclined in, but I'm not sure that the party has really made it or that the party itself is too strong or influential.

J.B.: Has the problem on the local level been control by party organization by people that are more strong on ideology than anything else?

Sessums: Well, frankly, people at the local level have been involved in the party in the past, well, they have been . . . well, there has been such apathy that it has been very difficult to even get people to serve as precinct men and precinct women on local county executive committees. And generally what will happen every few years is that someone will make a run at electing a majority of the seats to select a chairman and then tries to keep them filled through appointments by filling vacancies and things like that. And they have been more concerned with survival and petty things than they have with anything of real substance.

J.B.: The position I hear is that organizationally, Republicans tend to be stronger than Democrats.

Sessums: Yes, I would say that is quite true. Well, at home, some of us decided that it would probably be better to shake the party up and so, my aide at the time was elected . . . well, we offered a slate and we obtained the control of the party and elected the chairman and such as that. It is sort of an intermediate stage now, they at least enjoy some slightly improved reputation and they are generally working to help elect Democratic candidates in the general elections and they are not blowing what money that they have on just advertising themselves. But I think that at the state level, the party is much more actively involved than at the local level except in a few counties. I think that the party generally has fairly good leadership and I think that the governor and our junior United States Senator are both quite supportive, but not enough time has gone by and the party has not acquired muscle or experience or the money or anything else to really call too much of a tune.

J.B.: Do you see then, a stronger role for the party in the future?

Sessums: Yes, I think that it will become stronger and more involved rather than less. But we have a long way to go there.

W.D.V.: Any regrets about the last eleven years?

Sessums: Oh, not really.

W.D.V.: Anything that you would do differently?

Sessums: No, most of the legislative programs that I've been really interested in have worked out fairly well. I was a zealot for reapportionment and we are reapportioned about as perfectly as can be done. My next major subject area was in the equalization of public school finance and we have been pre-eminently successful in that. I've got a long laundry list of things that need to be done and some suggestions that I would make to

the next crowd. Because I'm sure that there are many more important legislative battles to be won. In fact, I can now see a number of new subject areas that have not occurred to me before that would want a great deal of time and effort. But I don't have any particular regrets. I would still recommend legislative service to anyone who I thought was really interested in doing it and who had the confidence enough to be helpful. But many of us have different personal circumstances. I've got young children in my family and I have not just . . . well, the first time or two that I came up here I commuted. My wife didn't like it, I didn't particularly like it. It was a matter of chasing home on Friday afternoon and coming back up here Sunday night or Monday morning. And it was very difficult to keep my law practice going or my law partners happy. And my children are now at an age, well, they are ten, twelve and eight and they are beginning to be involved in more things and after the first time or two of commuting, I found that it was just much better just to move them up here with me, so every session, I have generally leased an apartment and moved my family up here and stayed up here during the session, except for one or two trips back on Saturday. And then, we moved back at the end of the term, but my children are now involved in school activities, boy scouts and little league and if I had to take a democratic vote, my family would no longer come up here and I . . . .(interruption on tape) . . . this last year I had the gross income of right about \$50,000. That included the sale of assets and my income from public service and my law practice has been in the neighborhood of \$30,000 to \$35,000 a year. And I can't . . . I mean, you can live very comfortably on that . . . . (End of tape.)