

This is an interview with Tom Lambeth, conducted on January 28, 1974 in Washington, D. C. by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries.

Lambeth: Well, I worked in Terry Sanford's campaign for governor, and then I was, for several months that fall, the assistant to the Chairman of the Democratic Party during the Kennedy campaign in North Carolina. And then for four years I was Terry's administrative assistant. And then, it was my nonpolitical period, for four years I was with the Richardson Foundation in Greensboro. And then I came up here with Congressman Preyer in '69, and I've been here the five years that he's been in Washington.

J.B.: Were you involved in his campaigns for governor and Congress?

Lambeth: In the campaign for governor, I really was not... I was in the governor's office then, and in spite of the fact that everybody thought it was being run over there, it was not. And I had a limited involvement in it. Mostly involved with watching the Ku Klux Klan and its participation in that race. I was... served on a kind of steering committee for his congressional campaign and had sort of an involvement in it, just as one of several friends in Greensboro that was... that were helping with the planning.

J.B.: What were the Klan activities in that race?

Lambeth: Well, most of that stuff is under seal. There was a... that story is a long one. We could go through it all day today. It involves going out and burning crosses in the courthouses in 33 counties before the first primary, and everything. And great confusion as to who was responsible for this. The Lake forces suspected that it was being done to embarrass Dr. Lake, and they suspected everybody as being responsible

for it. And I'm not certain of the whole story, because nobody's ever... most of what I knew was because of the relationship that we had with the Anti-Defamation League. We had several investigators, including one spy in the Klan. And some of the sources of information, we were really just trying to keep up with a number of things. So I'm not sure what the true story is. You'd have to get a lot of people who know a little bit about it together, you know. I suspect that they were used by Governor Moore's people to embarrass Dr. Lake. Between the first and second primary, Dr. Lake sent word that he could prove that that had happened, no reply, that it could be proved.

J.B.:

all
Lambeth: Almost/the people involved in that,met an untimely death during the next three or four years, so I'm not sure whether the true story'll ever be known. One committed suicide, one died of cancer, one died in a car wreck, and one was sent to prison.

J.B.: These were Klanspeople?

Lambeth: There was some suspicion. They also organized an assassination plot.

J.B.: Aimed at who?

Lambeth: They were going to kill Rich at a hotel one night in the second primary, when he won. They had a very interesting code to explain that he was dead. Somebody was going to call the other one and say, "The teacher has left town."

W.D.V.: Has anyone ever documented it?

Lambeth: I think it would be hard to do it. Wayne Walden has a good bit of it, or Jim Batten, one, I can't remember. I think it was Wayne. All we knew was that there were some informants, one of whom supposedly heard this plan from four men sitting in a cafe somewhere, and got some stuff.

There was enough coincidence in the information to believe that it might be true. I suppose they never gone through with that, I don't know. If they can't , obviously they . Preyer
was probably the only candidate to ever concede defeat in North Carolina, surrounded by private detectives and plainclothes bodyguards and things like that.

J.B.: Do you think those days are gone [for good] in North Carolina?

Lambeth: The Klan?

J.B.: Sort of limit it to

Lambeth: Oh, race. I suppose till we come up with something else. I think... being a great... very much of a force, I think. I think two party contests have already come of it. We don't have... I know of few places where Republicans would be willing, in North Carolina, to bear the label of a racist. They certainly wouldn't where I live. No question you have people who still have those... you know, who still have prejudices.

J.B.: I think I read this morning there was a Klan rally in Greensboro yesterday.

Lambeth: Said they had as many hecklers as they had...

J.B.: As you look back over the years you've been involved in politics, directly or indirectly, are there any other major changes that have occurred? Other than this one on race?

Lambeth: Well, of course, since I have had any... have had much involvement in it, I suppose the rise of the Republican party, decline in racial feeling. I think, probably, an end to any sense of geography in North Carolina politics, with the exception maybe of the extreme west, which might still have some sense of it. I'm not... there are some people who think the east still does. I'm not convinced that it does. The piedmont doesn't have any at all.

J.B.: Do you think the old one senator from the east, one from the west concept has become meaningless?

Lambeth: Well, we'll find out, because it stands maybe to have two from within 20 miles of each other in the least populated part of the state. I'm not sure that it has, but I must say, everybody else thinks it has. Haven't found anybody else that thinks that tradition holds, except Sam Ervin III.

J.B.: Is he interested in running?

Lambeth: Yeah, he has been, but I don't think... It must not be serious, because if it was, I believe his father would be doing something about it. His father doesn't show any signs of helping him. But, you know, there are other changes. The women's role obviously has changed a good bit. I think it's difficult to have a woman campaign manager... women campaign managers in the counties. We've got to have them. In other words, a special appeal in which you segregate women from the appeal has probably gone. You have to make... definitely make an appeal, but I mean, there's just... has to be on another basis. I think there's been a change in the kinds of influences. When Terry went in in '60, it was still possible for... the approach of having some key people in each county being a determining influence in how the county voted. There were some where five or six people being for you probably made you carry the county. I think that's less true now because of television. I don't know how bad it's become yet, to the point where you can run for office in Raleigh and never leave town, and win. You'd probably do pretty well.

J.B.: Do you think you can look at the election of Helms as proof that television has probably changed campaign techniques and strategies in North Carolina?

Lambeth: No. I think any victory's a combination of several factors.

I doubt that someone like he could have been elected to office without television, because I... my impression of how he does in a crowd, you know, in the going around campaigning is that he didn't do that well. I'm sure that Nick won several times... several votes for every one that Helms won on the basis of standing somewhere talking to somebody. So I suppose television was a factor in it. But he had that, he had George McGovern, he had some issues. And, you know, some people thought that he was native-born and his opponent wasn't. A number of things contributed to that. But I doubt that... well, obviously, he would n't have been nominated, but I... not just because of his career, but his approach to the campaign. I think he would have been much weaker if he hadn't of had television.

J.B.: How do you interpret the '72 election in North Carolina, so far as setting trends? What was the significance of that election? Like in the first time this century elected a Republican senator, first time a Republican governor, certainly the first time ever in combination.

Lambeth: The Democratic candidates must have had bad advice. No, I dont think that at all. I don't know whether it set any trends because it was...

J.B.: Either that, or they failed to take what good advice was offered.

Lambeth: . Those who were taking advice seemed to do better than those who weren't. Well, you know, I don't know whether it's established any trends. Following it came all the events of the last year, which... It's conceivable that the Democrats will win back seats in the General Assembly, elect a senator and all of that. And I suppose people will then interpret that as being a reversal of the trend or something like that. I think that McGovern was a tremendous influence in the election. And more significant than that, I think,

is the fact that the turnout of voters. But I suppose I blame that on the governor. Now I don't know what you found about the people who didn't vote, so I'm only guessing about the people who didn't vote. I assume that a great many people who didn't vote were people who could not bring themselves to vote for one of the presidential candidates. Interestingly enough, we had fewer - apparently - fewer blank ballots in North Carolina than we had in '68, when we had 100,000 blank ba... '64, when we had 100,000 blank ballots in the governor's race. Which means that Dan Moore's margin was actually that inflated if you realize the unusual kind of blank ballot... 16,000 blank ballots in the presidential race. We didn't have, I don't think, anything like that in 1972.

J.B.: What do you think has been the impact of the Voting Rights Act in North Carolina?

Lambeth: Let me say one other thing because of the ... I do think that it certainly marked the emergence of ticket splitting as a household habit in North Carolina. When I look at Guilford County, which I would be more familiar with than anything else, it's just hard sometimes to find any reason in the way people vote, in terms of the... coming back and forth between philosophies represented by candidates. You know, when you find somebody that's a strong George Wallace supporter and a strong Rich Preyer supporter, a strong Tom Gilmore supporter, things like that, they... It's obvious that labels don't mean that much. On the other hand, the Voting Rights Act has helped, I think, in making it less attractive to appeal to the angry black.

J.B.: Helms didn't seem to suffer, though, from it. Did he?

Lambeth: Well, I think he does a good job of appearing to be anti-black to those people to whom it would be an advantage, and not be to those to whom it would be a disadvantage. I don't remember him talking very much

about race.

J.B.: He didn't have to. You know where he stands.

Lambeth: Well, the same sort of advantage that Nixon has in going to China. If you're sort of established as being against something, then every time you do something that seems to be contrary to that, I think you can get away with it. I guess people sort of say, well, "He really is not pro-Communist. He's really not soft on Communism." because of all those things he did back then. And Helms wouldn't have to worry about... he could probably have half his staff up here black, and nobody'd ever pay much attention.

J.B.: Well, he did talk specifically about bussing.

Lambeth: Not that much, though. Not that much.

J.B.: Didn't have to.

Lambeth: Well, he really didn't talk about a whole lot of anything. He ran very effective ads, making it, you know, unattractive to vote for his opponent. But I don't really remember any great issues that he raised. And he'd do that, and then he'd come back and be the clean guy by saying, "I don't do that any more." I question how much... I don't know how much race played in those races, though, because a lot of people say... they say that they're against it because of what he had to say about the war. But the truth is, they don't want to vote for him because they think he's too friendly with niggers. So, I'm not sure but that people are telling you that they believe this on this issue, because they don't want you to know that the real basis for that is something else. A curious phenomenon we had in 1960 of all the people were voting against Terry because he'd endorsed John Kennedy, but they were wild about John Kennedy. We found in 1968 a district, that the first choice of 40% of the Wallace voters was Robert Kennedy. My guess is, however, if Richard ~~had~~ endorsed

Robert Kennedy for President, a lot of those people would have just been enraged. Explain that.

J.B.: 60% of the Wallace voters.

Lambeth: No, I think it was something else. I think the Kennedy thing was... with Terry was... somehow represented to them a betrayal of the South. If you were from the South you didn't do that. never could make up his mind to go ahead and do it. Kennedy you/ could forgive because he was a Yankee. I think it helped him in that way.

I'm not sure that that's right, but *[The South is]* the only part of the country that ever lost a war?

J.B.: On looking back with a ten year perspective, how do you evaluate Sanford's administration?

Lambeth: From my unbiased, objective stand? Well, I'm sure that it was ... answering now as a historian, and not facetiously, I'm satisfied that it will probably rank... if you're writing history in the 1990's, you'll describe it, probably, as the greatest or one of the two greatest administrations in North Carolina. But most of North Carolina history for the rest of this century will be a reaction to it.

J.B.: Why specifically do you think it will rank by 1990 as one or two great administrations of the century in the state?

Lambeth: First, I do think that the rest of North Carolina history will be a reaction to it, because you find that people today, in North Carolina politics, conservatives, moderate or liberal, talk the language that began then. Well, the *[idea of]* quality education, which was made fun of, which... everybody talks about it now. It has no philosophical identification at all. The idea of the governor having artists in the mansion. I mean, every governor does that now. The idea that the state initiative from the governor's office to go out and... that really began

with Hodges... Hodges did it... Hodges did it seeking industry. Then the governor's office began to seek in education and the arts, in continuing industrial development. An active governor's office going out and promoting change in the state, which every governor does not, every governor promises to do. It's hard to find a new... hard to find an innovation in state government since 1964 which isn't either some modification or refinement of something that was starting then, or can't be traced to that candidate. It's sort of a style of governors. Until 1961, governors were still some form of, again, in North Carolina, you had a modification of Clyde Hoey, something Luther Hodges was. And since 1961 there's been some...

J.B.: What was Clyde Hoey, in that sense?

Lambeth: He sat in his office and talked to people, and at 11:30 every morning he went down to the drugstore and had a Coke. And people said, "Isn't he great, he's just as common as the rest of us." And he didn't... upset the congressional delegation. Nobody knew him anywhere else until he came to Washington . You know, taught Sunday School. Acted as though he was as limited in his power as the governor of North Carolina really is, by the Constitution.

J.B.: One of the... Do you think part of the legacy of the Sanford administration was to develop a more active role for the governor's office in spite of the lack of constitutional power?

Lambeth: Yeah. And it was easier to do, though, because it was Hodges... Hodges in a limited area had begun to do that. And he had an easier time doing it because he got to be governor longer than anybody else. He got there through . He hadn't had no political battles, had no... The enemies he made, he made after he got in office, almost entirely.

J.B.: Why do you think that North Carolina failed to develop the tradition

W.D.V.: Let me ask you a little bit about the Congress. When you look at North Carolina compared with some of the other Southern states over the last 25 years, you invariably come up with some big names in the delegation who have... hold the chairmanship or are very high in the seniority. But at least we have one or two that are well known [nationally]

. You really can't say that about North Carolina, in terms of its senators or its congressional delegation. Now maybe it's changing now, but at least...

Lambeth: Well, you can't say about it right now... of course, there was a time when we had three major committee chairmanships in the last... 20 years ago we had three major committee chairmanships. One time we had four. One time we had Ways and Means, Merchant Marine and Fisheries, Education and Labor, and Agriculture. Of course, deaths did a lot for that.

W.D.V.: In the last ten years.

Lambeth: Well, part of that's because of having a two-party delegation. You know, having people not around long enough to get established. It's going to be harder now because of the new rules in the House that make you... forbid you from being chairman of a committee and chairman of a sub-committee at the same time. That sort of thing will help these other people get up there, but I think part of the reason that we'll be all right now with what is a diminished... greatly diminished influence, will be because we had those four. And when they left, you know, everybody else was so far behind in the delegation, we've got a second one, third one, you know, we could have two committee chairmanships within the next two terms - if everybody stayed here. I am told by people who have been here and whose judgment I respect, that our delegation has gone from where

Sam Rayburn would have said at some point to somebody that it was the best from the South, to where it would not be considered that at all. But I... It's hard for me to defend that because I didn't know those other folks.

J.B.: Who were the four committee chairman that were .

Lambeth: Bob Dalton was...

J.B.: Bob who?

Lambeth: Bob Dalton was chairman of Ways and Means... Appropriations... Ways and Means. *Robert* Dalton. He was here for forty years. Graham Barden was chairman of Education and Labor and, you know, kept federal aid to education from being law for decades. Herbert Bonner was chairman of Merchant Marines and Fisheries which is much less an important committee now than it was at one time. It was important to him because he was from the coast. And Harold Cooley was chairman of the Agriculture Committee, which, of course, was a very important committee to North Carolina. It is a less important important committee every day. Now, that was considerable. I doubt there was probably any state in the union had those four...

J.B.: What about the United States Senators?

Lambeth: Before Watergate, we really only had one United States Senator of great influence in the Senate, and that was , and he was there for a very brief period of time. I don't think Senator Ervin has any terribly great desire to be... you know, he's got pretty much one theory of interest and to have that. And he always sort of let Senator Jordan handle the North Carolina business and went wright along with it. Bill Cochrane, really, and Senator Jordan were... the years that he was up here, they were the people that did everything that required a North Carolina senator, and Senator Ervin joined them. Ervin has done more of that lately. In fact, I told Holshouser recently ...

he said that... to some newspaper editors, after he was very critical of Ervin, to please not quote him, since he had to do business through his office, couldn't do it through Helms's. But...

J.B.: Why with Helms was...

Lambeth: I don't... I couldn't explain it. I was... sort of sounded... And I think he made it, must have made it... No reason for somebody to misquote him on that. And Senator Jordan, of course, was not the kind of man that... Bill... that kind of was perfectly happy where he was, being a member of the club and being the housekeeper for the Senate. And had, really, considerable influence because of that. I think he could have gotten a great deal done about anything, but what he wanted to get done was limited. He was very, very popular - far more popularity, I'm sure, in the Senate than Senator Ervin ever has.

J.B.: There've been several theories propounded recently about the role of the Southern congressmen, who yield... collectively yield far less ^[influence] than they used to on the direction in which things are going, and the influence ...

Lambeth: They can't find any way to get together. They started last year trying to organize as a block, which may have been a mistake. I think it would be easier if they were an unorganized block, maybe, because they started organizing... because what they decided was that they'd have to organize themselves like the Democratic Study Group, and they...

J.B.: Is this the Rural Caucus?

Lambeth: No, no. But organize something that's called the Democratic Research...

J.B.: What?

Lambeth: The Democratic Research... something. They don't say group.

J.B.: It wasn't the Democratic Research Group?

Lambeth: No, that's not it. It has a name, and I ^[don't know] the founding members of it. That'll show you how interesting a group it is. Rich goes from a meeting of ~~g~~ that group to one that Dick Boling has each week that is the Democratic moderate... We subscribe to all the research effort of the DSG, although he's not an active member of it. And, anyway, we're just sort of... track all sorts of lines. But they've had a hard time establishing policy on anything other than sort of negative issues like bussing. They started organizing themselves as Democratic supporters of the President, right at the time that all of that started falling apart.

J.B.: Is this the group that Waggoner heads?

Lambeth: Right. Joe Waggoner, yeah. Sonny Montgomery. The main... the only thing I can think of that they've done successfully is twice they've gotten together the group to go over and sit with the President.

J.B.: ?

Lambeth: Well, the first time, they were told that they were going over to have a chance to tell him how they felt about things that he was only hearing from partisan supporters and from the press. This group is sort of in the middle, to go and talk to him. And it turned out to be a pep rally, which sort of embarrassed the people like Rich who went. They've got a little staff set up now, but it is a very unorganized block. And it in no way can compare with the influence of the DSG or the Republican House Conference or something like that, which are really very well organized staff, good research, that sort of thing. They start from a negative basis, too. That may be part of the problem, it really does...

J.B.: Did you walk over here?

Lambeth: Yeah.

J.B.: How long does it take?

Lambeth: It'll take you... depending on how you walk, ten to fifteen minutes. I made it in under fifteen.

J.B.: Do you want to start walking back over?

Lambeth: Yeah, we can talk and...

J.B.:

Lambeth: That would be the quick way, Jack. I got lost trying to do that, so don't get... if you could get to it, lots of luck. I'm not sure it's that much quicker because, see, you have to walk the rest of the way anyway. You're going to Gillis' office? I think it's easy enough to walk over there above ground.

J.B.: What about the Rural Caucus?

Lambeth: Well, I think that probably - I'm not as familiar with it, but I have the impression that it probably is more successful in its first year. Maybe it's because it has a limited objective. It's got some very solid people on it.

W.D.V.: Yeah, it's supposed to be based on a coalition of rural Democrats and conservative Democrats.

Lambeth: Well, it mainly is... my understanding of it at the moment is that it's mainly rural Democrats. And it's sort of Charley Rose and Glidden from Missouri, who's very very... I think it's Missouri, but I'm not... very impressive person. Very impressive. Rich, too. And I just have... you know, I don't know much about it. I just have an impression, from what I've heard about it, that it's been more successful in its effort than this other group.

J.B.: There's one more point. Other people have been heard to express that 1972 congressional elections in the South, insofar as Democrats are concerned, was a turning point with more and more Democratic congressmen

from the South either being more progressive, more , like Democrats vote more often with the Democratic majority, and this represents a turning point. Could you comment on that?

Lambeth: First, there are three groups in the Congress as far as I can see. One is essentially the group that gets 70% or better ratings from the Americans for Constitutional Action, whatever the A.C.A. is. The other group gets 70% or better ratings from the A.D.A. And there is a middle group, which is sort of... floats between both of those, and it's made up of about 40 or 50 Republicans and about 40 or 50 Democrats. The most prominent Republican being John Anderson, of course, chairman of the Republican House Conference. I think that the new Southern Democrats fit closer... fit closely in that group. They are... I think they're more like Northern Democrats than Joe Waggoner is. But how much they're like them, I'm not sure. The issue, you know... the House organizes itself again on almost every issue, in terms of parties. You know, there're two parties each time there's an issue, and it has nothing to do with the national political...

W.D.V.: Well, the argument is that during the sixties, Democrats more and more pointed to the Republicans on the events of that decade, and that now, what you have according to the '72 election is a reversal of that. More and more...

Lambeth: Well, there's no question when you look at the report that just came out of the presidential support and that sort of thing for this first of this Congress. There was a shift back. But that's a combination of things. The things they were voting on, the President's problems. You had a situation here where the War Powers bill was just made for a Southern Democrat, to take the Congress' point of view on the War Powers Bill. Well, that's created a liberal vote in the last

session of Congress. A liberal vote. It's one of the most conservative votes they could have cast. And they've been conservative almost any time in American history. But last year, because it was putting them into confrontation with the President. Because Republicans and conservative Republicans stayed with the President out of loyalty, against what would be their philosophical nature. You've got Southerners who felt free to vote their old attitude about the Constitution, and free now to vote against the President. You've got them all coming up with a high rating on that one bill. But I don't think that represented such great change on their part. But I think it is a different kind of person who wins now as a Democrat. In the first place, to win a Democratic primary in the South, now, more and more, you have to have some black support. Some labor support and some . So you get to be the nominee with a different kind of support, maybe, and still there's enough party loyalty that your chances are good of being elected. So, yeah, you are, by certain standards, a different kind of a Democrat. But then there are all... You know, everybody explains Rich being here. I don't know there's any change in anything. We've got a district that... two counties went for George Wallace, Nixon's... one of Nixon's strongest districts in North Carolina, and Terry's poorest district. And you got . And I don't think that...

J.B.: precincts?

Lambeth: In '68, in the , he ran very well. There were several reasons for that, one being that all the Wallace campaign managers were supporting him, and they did as good a job of putting the word out as anybody. I would say that he runs well. Of course, it's hard to talk about that since he hasn't had any real, real hard opposition.

(Interruption in tape.) ... in the city areas. In the rural areas, he would probably not do as well, Wallace precincts. The Wallace precincts, at least in our district, they're all kinds of places.

J.B.: Does he run better in the cities, then, because of labor's influence?

Lambeth: No, labor's lack... a combination of factors. You get about 35% of the Republican vote and that's concentrated in the cities.

J.B.: No, but I meant in the Wallace precincts in the cities. Is that because of labor's influence.

Lambeth: Yeah, I think it probably, probably... probably is. Probably is. I'm not sure.