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Interview with State Representative Bert Nettles, Republican, Mobile, Alabama, July 13, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter de Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: But the lieutenant governor really gets no salary.

Nettles: No, no salary. It's not intended to be a full time job. It's a legislative position.

Walter de Vries: He has no executive branch responsibility?

Nettles: No.

W.D.V.: Just a presiding officer.

Nettles: That's one of the problems, and one of the reasons he was unsuccessful in getting his full time resolution through the legislature. Because he wanted to continue to be the presiding officer in the senate, continue to name the committees in the senate and the committee chairmen in the senate--that's the power of the lieutenant governor--plus having the gavel plus also being a full time executive branch member. The number two man in the executive. And that's, you know, the conflict. The fellow who names the committees and who wields the gavel, who recognizes the people seeking recognition and who routes the bills to various committees. As in every legislature, we have grave yard committees and favored committees. And there was one bill, Commerce and Transportation, that got I would say over 50% of the hotly contested bills, last year. Before this last session, it was a nothing committee. But it just happened to be one that was completely dominated by state senators who were loyal to Beasley.

J.B.: His authority to appoint committees, is that by tradition or is it statutory or is it in the constitution?

Nettles: It's either statutory or in the rules of the senate. It might be in the rules of the senate that the committees are appointed by the presiding officer. . . by the lieutenant governor and by the chairman designate. Now they have threatened. . . and there's been some talk if a Republican were elected to lieutenant governor. . . that the senators would then change the rules and would come up with a committee on committees and also designate the chairmen of various committees themselves. Now. . . but that's never been done.

W.D.V.: But by tradition--

Nettles: By tradition, certainly, the lieutenant governor has always named the committees, usually in consulting with the governor.

W.D.V.: Doesn't the governor usually pick the people?

Nettles: Yes.

J.B.: On the key committees.

Nettles: On the key committees. See, this is what happened. The governor had picked most of the people on the key committees in the senate. But then when Beasley split a little bit from the governor, he had one committee completely dominated by his own people, Commerce and Transportation. So that became Foushee, state senator who is chairman of that committee. . . his alter ego for Beasley. And so that suddenly became the hot committee. That's the one where--

W.D.V.: Can a senator protest the assignment of a bill?

Nettles: Yes! But they don't do it.

W.D.V.: They don't do it.

Nettles: They kowtow to him. The saddest--

W.D.V.: But you can overturn that, can't you? The assignment of a bill?

Nettles: Yes, and they have done once or twice. But generally,

with a few exceptions, Richard Dominick. . . . I don't know whether you've talked with him. He was an unsuccessful candidate for lieutenant governor. But if you're in Birmingham and have some time, even by telephone, I think you'd find it profitable. He has been the chief spokesman for reform in the state senate now for eight years or longer. He did not seek re-election. Ran for lieutenant governor. Unfortunately, he doesn't come across well to the electorate. Very, very well qualified. Has the endorsement, I would say, of 80% of the newspapers in the state. Most of them. Well, he had the endorsement of two Birmingham papers, the local paper here--two papers here locally--, Tuska-loosa News. I think he had the Montgomery papers. One of the Huntsville papers. Still only got 20% of the vote. He was eminently qualified, but he just couldn't relate to the average man in the street and he was also underfinanced.

J.B.: Where does senator Pelham fit in?


Nettles: Pelham is a brilliant intellectual, in a way. He's from a family. . . old line Washington county family. This is the piny woods section . . . north of Mobile county. As you came down from Tuska-loosa, if you remember crossing the ^{Timbigbee} ~~Tom Bigby~~ River? You went through from Jackson. . . the ^{Timbigbee} ~~Tom Bigby~~ River on the south until you got to the four lane highway. Most of that area was Washington county. It's very poor land. You've got a few large family estates, but mostly it's people struggling. The piney woods section. That's where he's from. His father is an old line circuit judge up there from sort of THE family in that area. Judge Pelham, Joe Pelham was a big political power. The way he went, Washington county usually went. For years, back in the '30s and '40s. Pierre went off to Harvard where he was a cum laude graduate

or maybe magna cum laude graduate at Harvard. Came back here to practice law. Been immediately tied in with Wallace. He was Wallace's floor leader at the Democratic convention when Hubert Humphrey was nominated for vice president and Lyndon Johnson was nominated for his full term, in Atlantic City. When was that?

J.B.: '64.

Nettles: '64. And Pelham was on the platform committee and the spokesman for Wallace at that convention. He ran for the state senate. In fact I ran against him as a Republican, first time. We had been with the same law firm. When I came to Mobile he had already left the law firm I came with. No, in '64 was when I ran against him for the state senate. Think it was in '62, the Atlantic City convention. Anyway, he was elected to the state senate in. . . '66. You're right. '64 was the Atlantic City. '66 he ran for the state senate. Was elected. And for eight years he was up there. Probably the outstanding orator in the senate. Brilliant man, but erratic. He jumps from one thing to another. He's got a lot of populist in him. And yet he's also conservative and very much of a ham. If you hear him talk. . . . Well, people would pack the galleries during one of his filibusters. He was a great person to block legislation. But he really got out of his element this last term when he accepted the position as president pro tem of the senate and Wallace's floor leader. That gave him the responsibility of pushing bills through. And he found that just contrary to his style. He couldn't whip up enthusiasm for the passage of something. He could singlehandedly block a bill or obstruct something. Brilliant when it came to that. Or arousing public sentiment against it. But he's abrasive. He can describe a person beautifully. For example, Mobile has

a mardi gras tradition. Mobile is a very old community. Very much establishment minded. We change very slowly down here. A group of us, two years ago, tried to change the form of city government. We have a troika system, a three man city commission. And generally it's been unsuccessful. You've got three people constantly vying with the other two for the roles of leadership. No one person responsible. A group of us, mostly young people. . . most of them Democrats, but a few Republicans like myself. . . were active in it. And we had things. . . we felt like we were going to make a change until the establishment, at the last minute, really put the money in an effort to defeat it. And did, overwhelmingly. Just say this about Pelham. One of the people who fought against that change, Max Rogers, who is president of American National Bank here. A young fellow who had been in the legislature. I say young, about 40, 42. Was making a speech attacking, rebutting Pelham's accusation that Mobile wasn't going anywhere, that we were sitting on our duff not doing anything and the rest of the South was passing us by. We needed some new leadership. So Max just made a polite rejoinder, very gentle way. Graduate of Williams College in the east. And Pierre came up. . . asked him "What about the facts and figures" that Max Rogers cited, newspaper reporter asked Pelham. And he made one comment. He said "Well, Max Rogers wouldn't recognize progress if it picked him up by the ears." He's got big ears, like me. "And Max Rogers measures progress by the size of mardi gras floats." He completely devastated Rogers' entire position, you see, just with two clever statements. People still laugh. That was eight or nine months ago. Pelham has the way of striking at a person's vulnerable point. What normally people wouldn't do. You know, that's hitting below the belt. Something like

that. Referring to a person's big ears. But he's successful in it and has done phenomenally well. He's lost interest, though, in the legislature. He has wanted to go to Congress, but Jack Edwards blocks him there. Very popular Congressman who is a solid follower with just about every. . . with the rank and file votes. And so Pelham's never run against Edwards. He came within an ace of beating Frank Boykin  before Edwards was elected in '64. Pelham had run against Boykin in the primary, in '62 I think. Came very close to beating him. But that's a question as to what he's going to do.

J.B.: Does he have any state wide interests?

Nettles: I don't think so. He's had some problems lately. Some financial problems. Sort of tied in with some subdivision deals here and there. He, I think, is probably jockeying more on the national scene as a possible liaison man between the Wallace group and Kennedy. That's what he'd like to do. He was at Harvard this past year teaching.

W.D.V.: Was he at the Kennedy institute?

Nettles: Yes, at the Kennedy Institute last fall and early part of the winter. And thoroughly enjoyed that. I think made quite a few waves up there. Those people are not accustomed to his style of debating, I think. There was a story in the local paper and Pierre was telling me a little bit about it last spring. He debated one of the McGovern leaders who also was at the Kennedy Institute or maybe on the faculty full time. And they were discussing McGovern vs Wallace relative to the '72 election. And again, Pelham used his regular style and completely devastated the fellow.

J.B.: Where is he vis a vis Beasley?

Nettles: He was opposed to Beasley and then Beasley got an endorse-

ment out of him this last time. So it's. . . Pierre's erratic. He jumps back and forth.

W.D.V.: On that Kennedy Institute, before we get through with this tape remind us to talk about that again. I was a fellow there, '69. And they're always looking for good Republicans to come up there for three months or six months or a year or whatever. If you're interested in that sort of thing, the procedure is that the former fellows--
[Interruption.]

J.B.: What is your own background? Are you a native of Mobile?

Nettles: No, I was born in Monroeville. Did you ever read To Kill a Mockingbird? That was my home town. It's about 90 miles north of Mobile between here and Montgomery. It's a small county seat town. I lived there. Born and raised there. Then I went to Alabama for undergraduate and law school. University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa. Then I went with the attorney general's office for a year. With Macdonald [Gavney?] who was then attorney general for the state. That was in '60. Came down here in '61 with a law firm. Then was elected to the. . . . Was not active in politics at all until '66 when I ran against Pierre Pelham as the Republican nominee. Pierre was. . . one of these wild sort of things. Republicans thought after '64 we could pretty well elect people without any difficulty, that this had become a Republican area. Of course, we immediately became aware of the fact that '64 was a one time shot and no Republicans were elected in '66 other than Jack Edwards as Congressman, who had entrenched himself in two years time and was re-elected. But Pierre and I had a good race. I raised one or two issues that got my name known. The [milk?] control board here is a problem. State milk pricing. Big racket in Alabama. And our race was closer than

any of the other 12 legislative races. Then I became active in the Republican party after that time. Was elected to the county committee. In 1968 I served as chairman of the state Republican convention. Then in '69 there was a special election which was ideally suited for a Republican winning county wide office. We had two vacancies. One member of the house was named to county commission and another to the judgeship. And I ran for one of the two vacant spots and was elected, overwhelmingly. I was fortunate in [who I had?] running against me. One had been a Wallaceite and a black. And I got about 53% of the vote. We had a very large turn out for a special election. Was re-elected in '70 for a full term. One other Republican was elected in '70. At the time of the special election I was the only Republican in the state legislature. In '70 we [static.]

W.D.V.: [Something about . . . Republican in years]

Nettles: The first one from here, in south Alabama, since Reconstruction. We had had a Republican senator elected in '66 from Birmingham, but he changed after. . . after one session he changed, not his registration but reidentified as a Democrat. So when I went to the legislature, by then it had reverted back. Traditionally there had always been one Republican in the legislature from Winston county, a north hill county up in. . . north of Birmingham, which had threatened or attempted to secede from Alabama during the War Between the States. And then in '72 I ran for US Senate for the Republican nomination. We had a big interparty fight. The young Republicans. . . some of the leadership . . . a lot of the leadership were unhappy with Red Blount and Jim Martin and felt that neither one could win against John Sparkman. We were uncertain that Blount would come back and run. We knew he wanted to. Jim

Martin was. . . . I think you could relate Jim Martin very much to Gardiner, in North Carolina. Very popular. Good speaker. Could relate to the people. But very shallow and old style politics. In any event, we wanted a new face and so I said "What the heck" and a group of us got together. I had the backing. Had a poll, interestingly enough, run by the Birmingham Herald. They ran it themselves of the Republican leadership. All the members of the state Republican executive committee and the county chairmen and what not. I edged Blount out, led that poll. And then a month later was trounced in the primary. It was a sad experience. Blount had about 55,000 votes were cast in the Republican primary when Albert Brewer was running against George Wallace neck and neck. And I think it was fantastic that we got out that percentage of the vote. It was well over 5%. . . almost 10%. We'd never had a state wide Republican primary before. I had been the one to take the case to court forcing a Republican primary. But in any event, we played right into the hands, I suppose, of Blount, who had just a fantastic amount of money and spent over half a million dollars in the primary. Of course was already very well known. And people who were comfortable voting in the primary. . . .

J.B.: He spent about \$10 per voter then, right?

Nettles: Yes.

W.D.V.: That's got to be one of the all time records. That's better than Fulbright.

Nettles: But, anyway, he won it handsomely and of course when the general election came along he tried to tag John Sparkman as a McGovern type and referred to the Sparkman-McGovern ticket and just. . . . Sparkman has his problems. Old age is one of them. But he's never been a

McGovernite. And people just didn't buy it. We tried to tell Red this. A lot of people did. He just got. . . . One of the things about Red Blount. . . . He had been a progressive, well, a moderate to a progressive and I think a man of honor and integrity and had always stood up to George Wallace. But soon as that election came along, he tried to get so close to George Wallace and to identify as a man Wallace would be more comfortable with and tried to picture Sparkman as a man who favored busing and was for amnesty. All of these wild eyed things. And he just. . . . It was a sad thing because he not only lost the election overwhelmingly, he lost his popular support with the news media, with a lot of the people who I think really count.

J.B.: Do you think it would have made any difference if he had run as Red Blount?

Nettles: No. Because he couldn't relate to people out in the street. I think the only way a Republican could have won. . . it would have been an uphill battle. . . would have been on an issue, an image or what was Sparkman's chief drawback? His age. And have a young person with a new, fresh image you know, running against him. That's what we're convinced ourselves of. The money never came in.

W.D.V.: You think it was Blount's campaign strategy that defeated him rather than the White House or the Committee to Re-elect. . . endorsement of Sparkman.

Nettles: It was an endorsement, but I don't think it really mattered that much.

W.D.V.: That's just a rationalization?

Nettles: It's a rationalization.

J.B.: What effect did that have on the Republican party here when in effect Blount got dumped?

Nettles: Well, it wasn't played up that much down here. It was just the fact that down here in the state election there was a letter, I think, that Blount published from. . . . A Dear Red letter. Came out right before the election and a picture with the president that he ran in all the state newspapers. Full page spread. This very nice letter from the president. And the problem with Blount was he couldn't relate to the people, he couldn't build any issues. In Mobile, where we were full of these issues. . . . He came down here and would talk about amnesty or busing and things like that. Trying to tie Sparkman to McGovern. Running strictly against McGovern. People wanted to know, really, what Blount could do for Mobile. Several of us had asked him. . . well, why not just say that if you go back to the White House, you've been in the president's cabinet, you can get the Tennessee Tom Bigby completion speeded up. You can get more industry for south Alabama. Sparkman's been up in the Huntsville area all his life and concentrated there. But Blount went his own way. I don't know that anyone could have won that election. But certainly I don't think anyone could have lost it any heavier.

W.D.V.: Do you think that election set back the Republican party in terms of state wide elections, etc?

Nettles: Yes. We have no viable state wide candidates other than the three Congressmen. And they, of course, I think, at the present time, would be wise to continue to stay in Congress. Because they have a good solid following. I think they're respected in their constituency. Certainly Jack Andrews does here. I think Bill Dickerson has established himself quite well in his second Congressional district. John Cannon has a good fight this time. . . .

J.B.: Who is he running against?

Nettles: The president of the Birmingham city council. Nina Negli-
ana. Who is a lady of considerable position in Birmingham and has long
been in city politics up there and will probably have the endorsement of
the morning newspaper, the Birmingham Post-Herald. I think John's big
problem would be if the Watergate issue blows up. Say if there's an im-
peachment vote in October. Whichever way he goes can have a great bear-
ing on the election. Birmingham's a very volatile situation. It swings
back and forth. They had a very popular Congressman, George Huttleston,
who everybody thought was safe as he could be. '64 came and the rank
and file voter just voted for an entire Republican ticket and elected. . .
turned the Congressman out and elected Buchanan overwhelmingly. So he's
got a little dangerous position there. Probably is the weakest of the
three Congressmen. But other than those three, we have no viable state
wide candidates.

W.D.V.: You were the first Republican legislator in 1969. What
about in 1970? What happened then?

Nettles: We had one other elected. Two of us in the house, none
in the senate.

W.D.V.: What do you think you're going to have this time?

Nettles: We hope for between 10 and 15.

W.D.V.: Is that going to result in any kind of Republican caucus
or anything like that?

Nettles: Yes.

W.D.V.: A Republican organization?

Nettles: Yes it would. We already have a very close working re-
lationship, the two of us in the house. You only have 106 in the Alabama
house. 105 the next term. 35 senators. And we were. . . voted together

on just about everything, critical issue. And we worked very closely together. Comment on Doug Hale, who's a young engineer who is now completing his law school work in Cumberland in Birmingham. Has several accomplishments. He is the person, I think, who deserves the most credit for getting the ethics law passed through the Alabama legislature. If you're familiar with this. . . . It's the common cause ethics bill and it's probably the strongest ethics law of any state in the country. So strong that the courts are just emasculating it daily. They're letting out one group after another. And soon only going to apply to the legislators, is my prediction. But it was in committee. The speaker of the house. . . . The senate had voted it, had killed it. Common cause bill that had been introduced into the senate by senator George Lewis and Richard Dominick. The house bill was in an unfavorable committee that was dominated by former house speaker Rankin Fife. Speaker had placed it in that committee to ensure its death. Was very much opposed to it himself and said that he would not run for re-election if it passed. And he's not running for re-election. In any event, the committee refused. . . finally forced the committee to have a meeting. Doug Hale was a co-sponsor of the bill. Helped draft it and was one of the two sponsors of it. Representative Hill of Florence was the man whose name appeared first on it, but he began to sort of back off when he saw the hostility of the house leadership, legislative leadership generally, to the bill. So Doug, contrary to the advice of most people, took the floor on the last possible day to force the bill out of committee and something that had never been done in modern times in the house. Force a bill to be voted out of a committee. There is a procedure under the house rules for this, but it had--

J.B.: Just roll call vote?

Nettles: On a rollcall vote.

J.B.: What's required to have a roll call vote in the house?

W.D.V.: Is it a discharge ?

Nettles: Have 10%.

J.B.: 10% of the members present?

Nettles: 10% of the members present or voting can force a roll call vote. Its not really that much of a problem. Just a matter of the speaker recognizing that 10% call for ayes and noes. Then the speaker says, calls for ayes and noes that support it.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but a discharge motion requires members elected.

Nettles: Discharge motion. . . it requires a majority, a simple majority. And this is in effect what that was. I forgot. But it was a discharge motion and it was filed on the last day it could be filed and still in proper sequence to have it voted on. And the newspapers picked it up and it became a real big thing. On the next succeeding day, legislative day, he did go to the mike and speak, force the discharge motion and forced it to a vote. And it passed by a good margin. And from then on it was downhill all the way. The newspapers had picked it up and once you were able to force a vote, a recorded vote, then it was all over. The house passed it. What they did. . . and one of the things that is hurting the bill so much now. . . a lot of the opponents of the bill loaded it up with some very ill advised amendments, trying to make it so severe in some ways that If fact newspaper, all news media people were brought under the bill. That was later knocked out by the federal court. But several such amendments were offered to make it unpalatable. Yet it passed.

J.B.: Is Common Cause a strong organization in Alabama?

Nettles: No, very weak. But it does have some good ideas. Many of us in the legislature have tried to pick up the good ideas that are offered, such as the ethics legislation, and try to push that. What I'm saying is, this was a man who said "I've got nothing to lose. I'm not bucking for a committee chairmanship. I'm not bucking for promotion. I'm not concerned about patronage from the governor." So he went and so to speak when the house leadership, legislative leadership said "We don't want anybody touching that discharge petition." He went to the mike and made the motion.

J.B.: [Something about the value of the two party system.]

Nettles: Yes, it's come up several times in the last. . . .

J.B.: Will there be Republicans in the senate next year?

Nettles: I don't know. We have a possibility of one or two. It's going to be difficult. The problem was that we were all set and ready to go with single member legislative districts for the first time. You see. Our strength's in the urban areas, primarily. And what we had to do in the past was run. . . my constituency in Mobile county, the two times I got elected. . . over 300,000 people. You've got certain Republican areas. Your white collar areas. Generally qualify as Republicans. But those areas can be swallowed up in a hurry when you get out in the rural sections of the county, the blue collar areas and the black areas. And although we've tried to make overtones. . . . Really not just tried to make overtones, we have courted the black vote. It's still, when it comes down to a Democrat vs a Republican, we [try to] cut our loses as much as we can. So long as a Republican can attract 30 to 40% of the black vote. . . in the past that's been figured as giving him a chance to win. We haven't been able to do that even with some of the candidates

that have been running, you know. Wallace type. What's so discouraging,

you've got, you find these Wallace candidates. . . the people who vote the hard line on every type of conceivable vote aimed against the black segment of the community. And yet get a lot of that support in the election simply because they're Democrat.

J.B.: But you're able to get 30 to 40% of the black vote?

Nettles: Oh yes. In fact, in my elections I've gotten a majority of the votes voting for a non-black candidate. I've had black. . . . The first time I got elected, there was a black candidate running. Most of the blacks voted for him. Of the blacks who voted for either the Democrat or the Republican, I got a majority. The last time around, I got. . . I think I got a majority of the black vote. There was not a black candidate. I had a very hard core Wallace type candidate, young articulate, very personable. Wallace came down and personally campaigned for. And I had one vote that they kept throwing up to me. I was the only person re-elected to the house who voted against Wallace's stand on Pritchard school house resolution in 1969.

J.B.: What was this resolution?

Nettles: This was a position. Wallace. . . we were having problems then and Mobile was a sort of key area. I suppose more torn up than any other area of the state. I'd just been elected to the legislature. [A name] and I both were elected in April of '69 at the beginning of the regular session. That fall. . . the courts announced during the summer that Mobile schools would be completely integrated. Announced. . . re-establishing the district lines. And the courts had come up with a plan. Released it, I think, in middle August. As to where the children would go. And there was a lot of busing of white children to black schools and blacks, mostly blacks to white schools. But Wallace made a speech in Pritchard, which

is a blue collar area. You're probably familiar. . . Jay Cooper is now mayor out there. An interesting thing. But this had always been. . . prior to the last few years, had been the hard core area of Wallace support in this area. As much as any area of the state. And Wallace had said we're going to block the federal courts, we're going to take our children and put them. . . . Take your children to the school that you want them to go to. I'm governor and it's all right for you to do this. And the legislature has one more day to meet. A few days after Labor Day. "And I am going to introduce a resolution. . . I have a resolution introduced, calling for people to take their children to the school of their choice regardless what the court decisions might be. And I'll back them up. And we're going to find out who the men are in the legislature and who the boys are." It was a pretty clear cut issue. The resolution was introduced, ironically by Sage Lyons, the fellow who had been elected with me in that special election. We had been in law school together and close friends. I was the only one in the house to speak against it. Very simple. I'm not in favor of busing, I'm just in favor of law and order. I felt the governor was wrong, that it was ill advised of the legislature to recommend to their constituents that they place themselves in contempt of court and to further harden already very difficult emotional situation. No good could come of it. And there were four other people who voted with me. Five of us. I was the only one in this county. So. . . I was told at the time I would never be re-elected if I spoke against it. It was a hard fight, yet it shows how much feeling has changed here that a person. . . . I would think three or four years before I would not have been able to be re-elected. This was the issue and probably the key issue when I ran a year later for

re-election. My opponent was picked to run against me, probably one of the stronger of the new young faces coming along. He ran on the ticket of get Wallace a person he can work with, who can work with him, somebody's who's not afraid to speak up and stand up for your children. This sort of thing. Never will forget though. . . . Ever could get a tape of this it would be something that people should remember. Always get a little emotional when I think back on those times. There was a film on channel 10 here, the NBC affiliate, of Rene Bradmer [?], who's a young tv news reporter who was covering the school desegregation and enrolling of the students right after that, those few days. Wallace's speech, firey speech out at Pritchard, telling the parents to go to school was all right. He was telling them to do this. Could take the children to the school they wanted to go to, regardless of what district they'd been placed in, been assigned, under the court order. And there was a scene a week later, Rene Bradmer stopping this lady who was running out. . . . white lady, middle aged, I'd say blue collar lady, not well educated but very emotional, upset, crying, visibly crying there on the television. Bradmer stopped her, grabbed her, asked "Ma'am, what's wrong?" And she looked straight in to the camera and said "The governor lied to me." "What do you mean?" "Governor Wallace lied to me. I was at Pritchard last week and he said I could take my child to any school that I wanted to. And I can't." Broke down crying. She had a child she was taking home. But this was the type of thing that had been. . . . there were many scenes like this because of Wallace's involvement. And of course all it did was harden the situation. Luckily, Mobile learned from that situation and a year later we had a. . . . there was a further court order that was so harsh. . . . It called for triple

pairing of schools. It was a 5th circuit order, overruling some local judges. The community. . . the black and white community leaders sat down and worked it out and got very good support from the local school board. In '71 they worked out a three year moratorium. They worked out a plan essentially, I think some people referred to it at one time as the national plan. One way busing. Whites being bused to white schools and there are blacks being bused. But there are no all white schools of any consequence in the county. There are a number of all black schools, in black areas. But the flight, the white flight to private schools had been so great. . . and the lack of public support of the public school system was building at such a rate, that the black leadership decided they had to save the public school system. We worked out a plan that has been implemented and it's worked out quite well. I shouldn't have gone with that. Mobile, though, is coming along. It's changed so much in the 15 years that I've been here. Well, the whole South has. The race situation. And one of the things, one of the keys to it, the legislature. . . has been the fact that two blacks were elected in 1970 from Macon county. Fred Grey and Tom Reed and they have conducted themselves generally quite well. There's very little racism on the legislative floor of the house and senate now. And I think with more blacks being elected you're going to have more communication between all segments of the community. You'll have at least three [blacks] who will be in the legislature from Mobile county. And it's going to be a healthy thing. They'll be able to speak from their sphere of influence, that area of the community. And I think that's an important thing that we've been missing.

W.D.V.:

Doug, what's his last name?

Nettles: Hale, h-a-l-e, from Huntsville.

W.D.V.: Did you both come out of the Goldwater movement? Were you involved with that Goldwater movement at all?

Nettles: No.

W.D.V.: Was he?

Nettles: No.

W.D.V.: How would you describe the two of you ideologically?

Nettles: Moderate.

W.D.V.: Moderate?

J.B.: How did you get into the Republican party in Alabama? Why did you move into the Republican party when you got politically active?

Nettles: Well, my law partner had asked me. . . my senior law partner suggested I run against Pierre Pelham. I'd never really thought about it. I'd worked very hard at practicing law. He, of course, thought I'd run as a Democrat. This was again, you have to remember, right after the Goldwater sweep in 1964, when people thought you could probably get elected as a Republican. That the old tantamount theory had been thrown out the window. I thought about it and I felt like I could not be happy with them. The Democratic party was in complete turmoil. I was not a Wallace-ite. Wallace completely dominated legislative politics in Alabama. At that time he dominated the state committee. Bob Vance later emerged to take that situation away from him. And I couldn't sign the loyalty oath. I had voted for Goldwater in '64 though I had not been active in the campaign. And I'd voted for some other Republicans. The Democrats had a loyalty oath which they required of all candidates to sign that they had, in the previous election, supported all the Democratic nominees for office. And of course this was ignored by many, but I just felt like I'd be more comfortable in the

Republican party. I never regretted that decision. It's been interesting. I felt like I've possible made more contribution in building the two party system. . . trying to do something toward building the two party system. And I am. . . I feel more at home with the majority of Republicans if you consider it on the national scene than I would be with the majority of Democrats.

W.D.V.: How do you feel about the majority of Republicans in this state?

Nettles: It's difficult, really, to know how the majority of Republicans feel because we have only a very small hard core group and that's constantly changing.

W.D.V.: Let's say the organizational leadership.

Nettles: Very comfortable. In fact. . . areas of disagreement I have with Dick Bennett, our state chairman, but generally I feel quite at home with his philosophy. I think it's. . . . I disagree with some of his recent statements but I think he's a person who is trying to build a party. The membership on the state committee. For example, the fact that I had a plurality of the state committee members in a secret poll that was conducted by the Post-Herald. Unsigned post cards that went out. In the senate race against Red Blount and Jim Martin. I think that indicates that a sizeable portion of the state committee feel generally as I do philosophically. If you look at the. . . . You should talk with Bill Harris, who is a young executive director of the state Republican committee here, who is a full time man, salaried. He was on my staff in the senate race. Another person, Phillip May, who had been with me is in a salaried position with the state committee and had been a full time worker in my campaign. You got a lot of younger people who are getting involved in the Republican party as an alternative to the

no party system that the Democrats are offering. We've done quite well on college campuses. We've got some active young Republican organizations that are not the. . . . You've got your ultra-conservative types, but you've got a lot of young moderates who want to see some solid change made in the legislature and in the state generally who feel that the two party system is the best way of accomplishing this.

J.B.: Do you think the Republican party in Alabama is more moderate than many other southern states?

Nettles: Yes, than in some other southern states. The young Republican party is not all that active. But I would think if you looked at the last three presidents, you've got three very responsible, moderate people. The last three state chairmen of the young Republican federation. Neil Accer from Montgomery, immediate past chairman who was a very, I think, well qualified and reasonable young man. The current chairman, from Russelville, recent/^{law}graduate from Alabama, Jeb Sessions, who likewise has his feet on the ground and decidedly is not the wild eyed type on any issue. And the predecessor to Accer was Ed Allen, who was for a number of years. . . I think two or three terms, chairman of the young Republicans. Also a lawyer. Birmingham. And these three, I think, really appear representative group of. . . . I'll match them against any of the young Democrats. These are three people who are not. . . did not run for public office. Just interested in building, improving the political scene in Alabama. And who are middle of the road philosophically.

J.B.: Then the Goldwater wing is not in dominance in Alabama.

Nettles: No. I think the best evidence of that is the fact that Jim Martin is no longer in leadership position.

J.B.: Where does John Grenier fit in?

Nettles: John is very close to Dick Bennett, the state chairman, and through Dick Bennett and some of the other members of the state leadership of the Republican party, maintains an active advisory role. But I think his role is advisory at this point. He is, unfortunately, much. . . he and Jim Martin polarized the two sections of the party. Sort of the moderates on the one hand and the hard core right on the other hand. John was a very abrasive type and as party chairman he made a great number of people unhappy in forming alliances within the party to maintain his domination and control. So a lot of people who are moderate by nature and philosophy personally opposed to John Grenier.

[Interruption.]

I suppose the one group I sort of carried in the senate race were the younger voters, the ones on college campuses who voted in the preferential primaries. In the polls that were taken they were mostly in universities and colleges. I won almost all of them. Sparkman beat me in one or two. I think Blount ran ahead in one. But generally speaking we had a real good backing of these young people. Most of them did not register and those who registered. . . . Many of them did not register.

W.D.V.: You're saying that the younger Republicans involved in politics are basically moderate.

Nettles: Right. The young Republicans involved now. . . basically there are more moderate. . . they are more moderate than not.

W.D.V.: What about many of the Republicans, the older Republicans who really got their start in the Goldwater years, between '64 and '66?

Nettles: Well, you've got several different groups. You've got the old party members who were born Republicans, who are basically con-

servative. Not all that hard right. They're just Republican. . . many of these from north Alabama with a Republican tradition. Have moved in here with the new plants that have come in since World War II. Who just feel philosophically at home with the Republican party and who are a little evangelical--

[End of side of tape.]

So many of the hard core people on the race issue have really felt at home with Wallace. And we lost many Republicans, committee members, some state committee members, who wanted to become active in the Wallace campaign. Who left the party. And so it's--

J.B.: So George Wallace has had the effect of making the Republican party in Alabama more moderate than in the other deep South states.

Nettles: Than in many of the others, yes. I would say we're. . . I would identify the Republican party here with some of your more moderates in North Carolina. Jim Holshouser. I've not been around him that much, but I think he would feel at home with many, probably a majority of the Republican party here. You've got . . . one of my good friends. . . you ought to talk with John Ritchie, who had been Gov Holton's administrative assistant in Richmond. Is, I think, a good example. I don't know whether John had been an active Republican, really, but he became very active with the Holton campaign and worked right along with the governor for four years. We ran into one another through the Lamarr Society. It was interesting. . . a number of young Republicans. . . Tom ^{Naylor} ~~Nailer~~ [?] probably be the first to tell you. The Lamarr Society is not overly blessed with Republican support but there are a number of us who are interested in it. In fact, in Alabama, we have a. . . last year organized a state chapter of the Lamarr Society.

But unfortunately it has never done very much. But you've got that interest there. And on this original state board you had three prominent Republicans. Myself, county chairman and member of the state committee from Abalusha [?], Harold Aubrey, a young lawyer. And the state Republican committee woman, Jean Sullivan, who is. . . as Alabama politics go, a moderate.

W.D.V.: What do you say about the assertion though. . . maybe this is a residual. . . the old southern strategy. . . but that the way to win, the way to build the Republican party in this state and the South is to pick up conservative white, Democrat voters, particularly on the race issue and build from there.

Nettles: Well, you see, we haven't been able to do that, if you had that choice, because of the Wallace situation.

W.D.V.: When he leaves the scene, if that's possible.

Nettles: I would disagree with it. I think that's very short range and very short sighted. Jim Martin tried that and was almost successful. He almost beat Lister Hill on that theory. The US Senate race back in '62. But it's a short range proposition. And I don't see how any Republican in a county wide--certainly state wide--position, can win consistently without a good support among the black community. And I think it's. . . . You just can't cut out one large segment of the state. Cut them out almost completely. And then hope to win 2/3rds or 3/4s of the remaining segment. In an area that's traditionally been Democratic. I think that's very short sighted philosophy, basically. And people are more intelligent than that. Your situation has changed. You have got a whole new generation of voters. You've got the old. . . even Wallace himself has mellowed to a great extent, publicly, on the racial

stand.

W.D.V.: On that score, do you think that's a basic change? Is it a real change?

Nettles: Publicly it appears to be. But look at the people the governor surrounds himself with. Strom Thurmond has, I understand, some blacks in his staff. I don't know that the governor has any. In other words, Wallace is a great, masterful politician. Wallace remains Wallace, and he is still the one who made, as his initial inaugural address. . . the most defiant promise ever made I suppose in the last 100 years. . . segregation now and forever. And then he threw the line in the dust. Those were harsh words he spoke there. He's changed and the people around him have changed. I'm sure he's changed somewhat. I'm sure his close brush with death has been a factor there. But you've got to remember basically where his strength is.

W.D.V.: Where is it?

Nettles: His strength lies with the man in the street, the blue collar voter, the rank and file voter who figures. . . these are the people who voted for Big Jim Fulsome. He jousts with the windmills of the establishment and with utilities and what not. And had some good things going. Huey Long, probably is the best example of George Wallace syndrome. I read this book by Harrison Williams, I believe, Huey Long, maybe three or four years ago. And it's excellent. I know George Wallace well. And from reading this book I would say you could put George Wallace and Huey Long right together on just about everything except the racial issue.

J.B.: Except.

W.D.V.: Yeah, except.

J.B.: Except that Huey Long actually. . . you know, had these big

confrontations with the corporations, the corporate interests, the special interests. He put taxes on them. He implemented programs. And he put the taxes on the special interests that had dominated Louisiana. And we've seen no evidence that George Wallace. . . .

W.D.V.: He built hospitals and schools and all the things that his populist rhetoric said he was going to do.

Nettles: Your point is well taken to a great degree. Certainly where the utilities come into play. Wallace makes a big public protest and yet doesn't really fight the utilities.

J.B.: Didn't he put a little tax on them and then let them get it back with a rate increase?

Nettles: Yes. And he. . . the pass through feature was added to the legislation and allowed that to be done. [A little confusion.] Wallace has never been for a sales tax increase and yet the big pluses for education that have come about in the last 20 years, since I've been following the scene, have been based on sales tax increase.

J.B.: But he's always given rhetoric against it but then he signs the bill when it passes. Right.

Nettles: Yes. Now Wallace has done this, though. He has really been. . . done a great deal in the vocational school area and building up vocational training schools, the technical--

J.B.: Didn't that really come out of the vocational education act for 196--

Nettles: But he was the one who authored that act.

J.B.: No, I mean the federal. Didn't a lot--

Nettles: No, this came before then. It already. . . . Now a lot of the funds have come from the federal act. But he. . . when he was in

the legislature. . . . It goes back that far. [Unclear.] Wallace is--

J.B.: Of course Strom Thurmond likes to talk about starting trade schools in South Carolina.

Nettles: Yes, but I think Wallace can claim it with more accuracy. What I'm saying is you cannot minimize the fact that he has done many things. I disagree with him. I probably voted against him more than most in the legislature. But he. . . education. . . there have been substantial pluses for education. Even if it was a sales tax, rather than a property tax. You see, we're locked into a very regressive tax structure here in Alabama by virtue of the constitution. 1901. You'll recall, I'm sure, we've had no new constitution written for this state since 1901. And that was a constitution where they came in and the black belt, the old bourbon aristocracy completely dominated that constitutional convention. And that's when the laws were written into, the sections were written into the constitution restricting the rights, right to vote, everything else. And also very restrictive on taxation. You cannot place any additional property. . . you cannot increase the property tax, city, county or state. Without a vote of the people. You cannot increase the income tax--city, county or state--without a vote of the people. The only taxes, then, that you're left that will pass, unless you've got a all out effort, Ruben Askew type effort, would. . . . And even then, in Alabama you've got a little different situation than Florida, where you have south and middle Florida with. . . more readily acceptable to placing a tax on themselves. You've got a situation over here where the only tax area left is sales tax, business taxes such as liquor and cigarette taxes. That type. The regressive type. And as a result our tax structure is heavily regressive. Yet we're locked into it. Until we get a new constitution. And Wallace has not pushed for a

new constitution.

J.B.: That's my point. And you compare him with Huey Long.

Nettles: I'm talking about political savvy.

J.B.: We understand. . . yeah. . . okay. We understand that Wallace, when he started out, when he was in the legislature, genuinely did propose, initiate, work for and push for economically liberal positions in the populist tradition. But that since he's been governor and when he really dominated the state--one of the strongest chief executives in the nation. And with his personal popularity, what it was, and his ability to dominate. That he would have been in a position to have really gone ahead and made those revisions in the constitution if he chose to. But he didn't do it.

W.D.V.: From what we can see, he has the strongest influence with the state legislature, and has since 1962, than any governor anywhere. By the precedents and traditions of selecting the committeemen and so on. Yet never has there been an effort for really executive reorganization. Got one of the largest executive branches. No tax. [Unclear.] Many of the things that have been done in the other southern states or attempted have not been tried.

Nettles: This is the problem.

W.D.V.: The institutional and political power was there to do it.

J.B.: Let me ask a question in following up on that. Is there. . . you said that senator Dominick was one of the reform leaders in the senate. Is there any established Democratic reform leadership in the legislature?

Nettles: Yes, there has been.

J.B.: Is there now?

Nettles: With the new legislature we will have some. . . a sizeable

reform element.

J.B.: Coming in.

Nettles: Coming in.

J.B.: But not established?

Nettles: Some of the old ones. . . some of the house members who have been elected to the senate. Don Stewart from Anniston. Bill King from Huntsville. Bill has Republican opposition, but Bill's probably favored. Ronny Flipppo, who is to some degree. St. John. These are all former house members I served with. And they generally have voted with reform in the past.

J.B.: Do you see this, then, reform element in the legislature. . . . When a new legislature comes in, this new group that's going to be majority newcomers, do you see them working actively for reform and being successful in it?

Nettles: Yes.

J.B.: This is more or less what happened in Florida.

Nettles: I think they can be successful. In Florida you had this big situation. . . quite different. And I'd be the first to admit it. Kirk gave the Florida legislature no other choice. He was a Republican governor, to begin with. The legislature suddenly asserted itself and said "We don't want a Republican running the legislature or running state government. The legislature's got to be independent of the governor and we've got to keep the Republicans from cleaning out Tallahassee and the state government generally." And Kirk, by his very nature, was his own worst enemy. He even. . . ended up that the sizeable number of Republicans in the legislature. . . . They had a one-third veto control of the legislature. Ended up with the reform movement because of Kirk's hard

and fast position against any type of reform. I've talked with Pettigrew

and Terrell ^{Sessions} ~~Secrets~~ and others. And the stories they tell! Just tremendous what they did. But they had. . . . It was not only a vacuum. But they were almost forced into a position of reform. Now here you've got a strong governor and a strong lieutenant governor and others who are building for the future who are playing the old game of keep the legislature weak. They can talk legislative reform all they want to, but there's been no serious effort. Wallace could have got annual sessions passed by just lifting one little finger. By making one statement: "I'm for annual sessions of the legislature." But he allowed that constitutional amendment to be defeated at the state wide vote, primarily by advertising campaign sponsored by the chamber of commerce on one hand and the Farm Bureau on the other hand. This was back in '71, December of '71. That was the biggest reform we've pushed. Now Wallace, in my way of thinking, has never, since he's been governor, done anything in the cause of legislative reform that he wasn't absolutely forced into. He has had several hard brushes with the legislature and we have defeated him on several things.

W.D.V.: Would it be true to say this, as you look ahead, not only in the next four years but let's say eight years, that Wallace--suppose he leaves the scene in '78. . . wide open primary of the Democrats and so on. Plus you've got single member districts. You've got a whole lot of new people coming in. Young people and so on. And that the era of reform may be four years to eight years ahead in this state in terms of the legislature. That it will assert its independence. Become a stronger branch.

Nettles: Except. . . . I think it's an overstatement because I think it's going to come quicker than that. I foresee Wallace in the

next two years very busy on the national scene. Plus Wallace has his health problems. And I think the legislature is going to continue to be somewhat. . . to fend for itself as long as it doesn't get into areas of real importance to Wallace. And I think there's a real possibility we'll see some major reform accomplished during the next four years. But certainly the impetus for further reform will be there from '78 on.

W.D.V.: Certainly greater in this decade than say in the past decade.

Nettles: Yes, yes. By tradition. . . and you know this from any cursory study of Alabama politics. . . the governor has the marbles in Alabama. Control of the highway department is the number one thing, probably. And yet we forced a highway budget bill through. It's been sort of a [two-fisted?] tiger. But--

J.B.: Does he appoint the highway commission?

Nettles: Yes. There's a cabinet member. There's not a highway commission. There's a director of the highway department and an assistant director.

J.B.: They're named by the governor.

Nettles: They're named by the governor to serve at his pleasure. Not confirmed by the senate or anything like that.

J.B.: Do you see Republicans in the legislature in effect forming an active coalition as part of the reform movement?

Nettles: Yes, I would certainly think so. It's one of the main reasons I'm running again for re-election.

J.B.: How about blacks? Do you see that?

Nettles: Blacks generally I think will be in the reform area plus many independent Democrats. You've got--

J.B.: What's your relationship with the blacks from this area who are elected to the legislature, the new ones?

Nettles: I know two. . . well, there are three who have been nominated. Only one of whom has Republican opposition, a black running against the Democrat nominee, in a black area.

J.B.: A black Republican?

Nettles: Yes, but he's got an uphill battle. Of the three, I know two quite well and certainly can work with them and have worked with them in the past. One of the. . . well, really, might say nominee-elect because he has no opposition. Jay Cooper's older brother, Gary, who is a very, very attractive fellow. Retired. You should talk with him. He's a retired marine. . . not retired, I think he's been head of the marine unit here in Mobile. Just been very influential with the black community, very well accepted by them.

J.B.: Are he and Jay pretty much alike, politically and philosophically?

Nettles: No, I think philosophically Gary, the older one, is more of a Republican and probably would have run on the Republican ticket if he felt like he could have gotten elected. Jay is younger and, I think, more of a Democrat. I'm talking about national philosophical basis now. Jay is. . . . I think Gary's got his feet more on the ground than Jay.

J.B.: Do you plan to run for minority leader?

Nettles: [Yes?] Hale and I have a good working relationship and I would assume there would be no problem there. And with the idea that the two of us would. . . . The fact that neither of us ran for the senate this time. . . . Felt like we had the best prospect of getting house members elected and we could have a sizeable group to work with.

J.B.: Do you see the Florida legislature as sort of the model that you would like to work toward?

Nettles: Yes.

J.B.: How about sunshine law? What do they have in the way of that here?

Nettles: We have a law that prohibits closed door meetings of any state agency. There are a few exceptions to it. But generally everything. . . except where the good name of a man or woman has been discussed.

J.B.: How about recorded votes in the legislative committees?

Nettles: We haven't had that in the past very much. We'll be probably be getting more to it. I think it will be a good thing.

J.B.: How about campaign reporting?

Nettles: This was the bill that was introduced. . . the Common Cause bill by Doug Hale this last time. It never got out of committee. But I think we've got to do more for that bill. Bill Baxley is very-- hope you talk to Baxley--a real comer and has really tightened down on the old law we have this time and is enforcing even some of the unpalatable segments of the old campaign finance reporting.

J.B.: We sort of have a cursory impression that the level of political reporting in Alabama is pretty weak. Is that correct?

Nettles: It's very weak in Mobile. We have one political reporter who plays favorites.

J.B.: Is it weak in Montgomery?

Nettles: Yes. Where it's strong really. . . by comparison. . . it's nothing like Atlanta. What you have in Louisiana with the New Orleans papers. Birmingham. You've got some good reporters. I don't want to. . . .

I've always gotten along well with all but the one here. But yet they. . . in the papers. . . . You have to say this, the news media have done a terrific job, I suppose, generally, in fighting Wallace. But they've always been unsuccessful. Like the Birmingham News, the largest state paper, is very conservative as far as its stand with. . . it takes the chamber of commerce position on most tax issues and things like that, although they. . . . Most of the newspapers do. . . . Did you happen to talk with Jim Boone in Tuscaloosa, who owns and publishes the Tuscaloosa News and has several other newspapers. He and I are close friends and classmates. David Matthews, University of--

J.B.: He was gone. We'd written him--

W.D.V.: Gone to China.

Nettles: Oh yes. But you've got some young, aggressive newspaper people coming up. Jim Boone already owns the Tuscaloosa, Selma, those two dailies and a number of weeklies around the state, biweeklies. He's very. . . well, on the Alabama scene, you would say he's very moderate, progressive type. Very responsible. But generally, the newspapers have let us down and Mobile is a prime example.

J.B.: Who owns these papers? Are they locally owned?

Nettles: Sam Newhouse. Yes sir. And it's the saddest situation in the world.

W.D.V.: I only looked at the editorial page one day and that was pretty bad.

Nettles: It's every. . . every. . . very seldom. . .

W.D.V.: Typical Newhouse paper.

Nettles: Well, I don't. . . it's the type of thing. . . . Newhouse owns the Huntsville newspapers, owns the Birmingham News, he prints

the Birmingham Post-Herald and he owns the two Mobile papers. The only

big, influential papers he does not own or control in some way would be the Montgomery papers. And it scares us to death because eventually he'll get them all. Now he allows local control. In Mobile that's certainly the case. I wish it were not true here, because you've got one man here who is just. . . . It's almost an impossible situation. And very, very regressive, conservative, establishment. . . . I say establishment, I--

J.B.: So all your major newspapers in Alabama are owned out of state. Have out of state ownership.

Nettles: Yes. Of the four largest cities that's true. Tuscaloosa, Anniston, Decatur, Gadston. See those, you're getting into your second area. Those are locally owned. But again, they're not state wide papers. Area papers. But the major cities, the four major cities, all of those are owned by out of state.

W.D.V.: What's your assessment of the overall impact of George Wallace on this state's political development?

Nettles: Bad. If one word had to characterize it. He's done some good things. Can't help but admire him. I've been around him a good bit. He's stronger now, of course, than he was before the assassination attempt. He had some real problems going after the Brewer campaign. He had much trouble with the '71 legislature. He was really not himself. His health condition now. . . I'm not really familiar with. . . but he's got more of a handle on the state, politically, now than he did back in 1970. And where he's going with it I don't know. I just can not visualize George Wallace in an influential position in Washington, and yet I hear him being talked up all over the state as a possible vice presidential nominee. All over the country, I mean. You know, the

dream ticket: Kennedy and Wallace. I'm very much opposed to Kennedy.

To me it's just impossible to think you can have a marriage of the far left and the far right and have it work out properly. And yet. . . this is the sad thing, the newspapers by and large endorse Wallace in his candidacy for re-election. Papers that had fought him all along.

J.B.: When the Birmingham newspapers endorsed Wallace for re-election, didn't that pretty much. . . wasn't that as telling as anything about Wallace being a liberal?

Nettles: Yes.

J.B.: Can you imagine--

Nettles: Well, the Birmingham News. The Birmingham Post-Herald opposed him. But of course you know the Post-Herald has shifted in recent years under Stewart Legrand. Stewart Legrand is probably the most liberal. . . he and Randy Aires. . . are probably the most liberal newspaper publishers we've ever had.

W.D.V.: Yeah, but even the Alabama Journal. Did they endorse Wallace?

Nettles: Ray Jenkins did?

J.B.: No.

Nettles: I don't believe they did.

J.B.: They endorsed ^{Folsom}~~Fulsome~~. [Discussion-confused.] No, they endorsed Fulsome. They couldn't endorse Wallace and they looked up McLean's record. I think they weren't particularly impressed with him. So they just went ahead and endorsed Fulsome.

Nettles: You'd have to show me Ray's editorial. He would have left the paper before they would have endorsed. . . Wallace.

J.B.: They didn't endorse Wallace.

W.D.V.: Where did I. . . . Did the other paper do it?

Nettles: . . . lieutenant governor's race. I don't think the

Advertiser took a position.

W.D.V.: But the point is, there was no significant opposition in the state to his renomination.

Nettles: And Gene McLean did everything he could. But Gene, again, his background, his record, is not all that outstanding. He talked a good game, you know, but nobody felt like he could do it.

J.B.: Why did the Republicans not make a major challenge to Wallace this year?

Nettles: Who do we have? One of the Congressmen? Kind of important up in Washington in keeping what toehold we have.

J.B.: Was the reason because there were no candidates?

Nettles: No candidates. We have a candidate who's running who is certainly. . . there's been some problems there with him. He just jumped in himself. The idea was not to field any candidate. Concentrate on the legislature. The art of the possible. That's politics. It would take a million dollars and a viable state wide candidate to have a real chance against Wallace. And we don't have a million dollars and we don't have the viable state wide candidate.

J.B.: Wouldn't there have been a potential, though, for building a strong coalition with blacks with an attractive candidate?

Nettles: Yes, I think there would have been. But again, we're speaking of hypotheticals there. Because the basic ingredient on a campaign like that. . . and you can go and talk with Ruben Phillips in Mississippi and he tried that. He had a pretty well funded campaign. This was several years ago. He ran for governor on that kind of coalition. And again, there was disappointment. The blacks. . . . Well, look at the blacks! They're endorsing Wallace. They're pragmatists.

The Tuskegee mayor. Several others. Evers in Mississippi. You know,

they see Wallace as a winner. They want to win. And let the future take care of the future. Winning's the name of the game, you see. This is why Republicans. . . . I'm not arguing your thesis, because I think the man who does get elected governor of Alabama as a Republican. . . . And this will be done, sometime, in the '80s or maybe, hopefully, before then. Is going to be elected with a sizeable amount of black votes. But he's going to have to put together a winning coalition. He's going to have to have a real solid base to run from. Where do you build that base? In the legislature or in Congress. The problem about going to Congress, you get Washington oriented and you have to have a pocket of strength. But then you have the other areas of the state in which you're not well known. But if you could build a solid base in the legislature and get elected to a state wide office. . . . Like Chris Barne did in Missouri. Then you've got a shot at it. But build to have a platform to run on, a name, be able to attract some money. And the problem in attracting money is that the traditional money sources in this state come from your establishment. Your utilities, your big manufacturers, road builders, other groups like that who are not all that interested in seeing a change. And that's the most discouraging thing for the fellow that doesn't have a private fortune for a successful career in state wide politics. If he wants to have a moderate, progressive record or at least a platform to run on.

J.B.: One of the impressions I've sort of gotten here in that Republicans in Alabama are sort of laying back waiting for Wallace. . . sort of dormant, waiting for Wallace to leave the scene in so far as moving state wide. Is that correct?

Nettles: Well, we don't have the real dynamic type leadership that

we could possibly be doing a lot more with that. Dick Bennett is not a dynamic leader. He's a good, solid well meaning type. But if we had a moderate type Clark Reed, say. More people in the legislature. That's something else. People are pretty well burned out, too. We've had some hard fights and we've lost them all, just about. Other than the congressional races. Talking about on a state wide basis. I'm trying to recup, pay off my campaign debts from '72 and support my family. And most Republicans who have gotten out and worked at it hard seem to. . . . Not saying I'm burned out, I'm just sort of holding back a little bit, re-establishing myself. Hopefully there will be some other people coming along, getting elected to the legislature, who can move on up the ladder on their own. And maybe some of us can have a little role in pushing them forward.

J.B.: With single member districts, though, am I correct, that you would anticipate that ?Republicans can continue to gain seats?

Nettles: Yes. It's going to be difficult, again, because the voters now are very independent and they're going to vote for the candidate they like the most whether it's Republican or Democrat or independent. We don't have the quality candidates in all the races that I'd like to see. As a result, we're not going to pick up nearly as many seats as we had opportunity to do. And I think some of that falls back on Watergate. The only real noticeable Watergate influence would be on the fact that it severely curtailed the quality of candidates we were able to offer this time. Because right about the time we were. . . right in the beginning of the recruiting stage and getting a lot of people interested. This is the time to make your entry into Republican politics. You'll get elected as a Republican from single member district.

Boo. All of this other. People saying "Well. . . ." It turns them off

politics completely or, number two, they think it's going to have an adverse effect on their chances of being elected. The polls we've taken show it won't. . . local race. But it's too late. Qualifying time is behind us.

J.B.: How much has Watergate done to retard the growth of the Republican party in the South and in Alabama?

Nettles: Well, primarily it's going to be a pause. . . it's not a real major stumbling block because people don't relate Watergate to local Republicans. But it's cut us severely in loss of leadership and loss of attractive candidates. People who were about ready to make their jump and then pulled back. It's not an auspicious time to--

J.B.: What would happen if a Republican Congressman voted for impeachment? In the South. Would it hurt him?

Nettles: Yes.

J.B.: In the long run?

Nettles: Long run probably not. You've got some courageous southern Congressmen up there. You've got some good ones. Jack Edwards, I think, is quite good. How he's going to vote, I don't know. But the immediate, short range, Jack could be re-elected. One thing, he doesn't have any solid Democrat opposition. You take a fellow like John Buchanan. John's probably very worried about this. I mean. . . he's very worried not from the standpoint. . . . He's very concerned about what's been going on. Background as minister. And yet he's in an area where there are many hard core types, Nixon supporters. Nixon support. You've got a hard core there who would turn on him in a minute. And they've got a viable alternative who would be picking up a lot of solid Democrat votes anyway with this lady. It's a very uncomfortable position that

they're thrust into. I'm sure this has probably led to Rhodes and some of the others calling on the president to resign. To get them off that box. Because, with Buchanan, he's probably a prime example of damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. And he's going to have to vote on it at a critical time. In August, early September. That's of course why he's been--

W.D.V.: -- the school house resolution?

Nettles: [Haha.] Well, yes. It's amazing. People will. . . . I have found. . . . It's an interesting thing that you have a number of green stamps with your supporters. People who elect you. No one expects you, no reasonable person--the rank and file I'm speaking of, the general type voter--doesn't expect you to agree with him 100% of the time. When you try to convince him that you do, he doesn't believe you and he begins to doubt you. You lose credibility with them. But as long as he respects you, you can vote contrary to what he thinks and you can live with it. I doubt that when I voted like I did. . . the local Republican leadership. . . . One's a federal judge, who was county chairman, was my campaign manager for re-election. But he did it heavy hearted, thinking I had beaten myself. And I could not get re-elected. And it was a dirty campaign and we had to put out some, bring out some facts on the other candidate. Previous police record. Many people believe the only reason I got re-elected was because he had a bad record, the other candidate did. But I don't think that was it. But the point is, that people--I found this in my case, certainly true--that if they think that you are trying to be honest, and that even though they disagree with you, they're going to support you as long as you, not on too many issues, don't get too way out. I doubt that a McGovern type could win in Mobile

county, where you just on almost every issue take a very liberal position. But this is what I call the green stamp theory. That you've got a member there and you can call on this one and they'll forgive you for that and go on and work for you and vote for you and just put you down as being, you know, well, he's, he just feels strongly on that issue. I'm strongly for ERA. And my district, no question in my mind but it's strongly opposed to it. 60-40 at the minimum. Probably 75-25. But I don't think. . . . I think that's not going to be an issue. If it is, I think I can still win with it, in my particular district. Because. . . as long as people think I'm for, that I've got a solid basis for voting the way I do and I'm being consistent and maintaining that credibility. And this is the problem that Gene McLean had. I suppose he didn't have that basic credibility over the news media from his record in the legislature. He'd been one of Wallace's chief supporters in the '71 session. It's interesting.

J.B.: How would you define your own concept of the role of leadership of someone in political office?

Nettles: Maintain credibility. I suppose. . . [my father?] told me when I got elected. . . best advice I've ever had. . . was inform yourself the best you can on every issue, major issue and try to get the best information from both sides. Then vote your conscience. That's the main thing to do. I don't think people elect. . . . These computer read outs types, fellows who try to vote exactly the way their constituents think. They get into a problem then because sometimes you might misread how your constituents. . . . The Edmund Burke theory of people elected to legislature, to public office, to deal with problems in the way they think best, reasonably consistent with the views of the people whom they represent. It's what I've tried to do. I've made a

number of mistakes and I'm sure we all do. But the main thing is that you stay in there and keep trying. You're always available for comment. And that you're not afraid to make decisions. I find. . . the hottest places in hell surely are reserved, I think, for those who are afraid to take a stand. I've seen many a legislator defeated, terribly embarrassed, because he didn't vote on an issue. And that makes him unpopular with everybody. Or where he refuses to take a stand right up until the very last and then he has all this pressure continuing to tear at him and people getting madder than if he had come out and declared initially. This is the way I feel and this is how I'm going to vote. I respect your opinions to the contrary. I trust you respect mine.

W.D.V.: You have anything else?

J.B.: No. Anything else you wanted to add?

Nettles: Just very interested and I hope you'll leave my name on your list of persons. . . as far as when you publish a book--

[End of interview.]