

This is an interview with Jimmy Bentley, former Controller General of Georgia, and unsuccessful candidate for Republican nomination for governor in 1970. Interview conducted in Atlanta, Georgia on April 29, 1974 by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries. Transcribed by Sarah Geer.

Jack Bass: I guess really I'd like for you to summarize very quickly your own background in Georgia politics.

Jimmy Bentley: Well, my background is a rather mixy one, family-wise and personal. My father was a member of the state legislature in Georgia for, I guess, twelve years. He as a close friend and associate of Gene Talmadge and came along with Herman Talmadge, and then I got acquainted, more closely acquainted, with Herman Talmadge when he was running for governor the first time. I was in law school at the University of Georgia. But my appetite for politics developed as a kid, really, paging in the legislature. I participated either as a page, doorkeeper or in some official capacity around the General Assembly for about twenty. . . I think twenty-six consecutive sessions of the Georgia legislature. My family has been interested in government, Georgia government, and politics for several generations. My first ancestor in Georgia, Major Charles Abercrombie, wrote Georgia's first constitution in 1788. So we've been, down through the years, been quite active in Georgia politics. Primarily at the local level. One or two congressmen - two congressmen, and county commissioners and sheriffs, legislators and such. I was executive secretary to Herman Talmadge

after I left law school at the University of Georgia. I came down to Atlanta at about the age of twenty-two. I think I was twenty-three when I was appointed executive secretary. And then participated in several businesses, helped put two or three business activities together and put Talmadge's campaign for the United States Senate together, what little there was after Senator George withdrew. We had very little campaign work, really, to do, except just to roll up as big a majority as possible. But I coordinated that campaign. And then, that was '56. I guess I had an accident then and was crippled for several years. In '62 I was elected controller general of the state, defeated a fellow, Zack Kraizy (?) who was one of the old patriarchs of the old Talmadge organization.

J.B.: Was that your first race?

Bentley: It was my first campaign, yeah. And the first time that an incumbent, and one of the major incumbents in the state house, had been defeated in, I guess, twenty-five or thirty years. So we had structured a pretty strong campaign of young people, and I was able to align myself with some of the. . . cut into the Kraizy, my opponent was Zack Kraizy who's the controller - had been the controller for about twenty years. We were able to cut into his support rather substantially and draw up from a lot of the older Talmadge organizations. And part of my political legacy was the younger Talmadge organization, and a rather substantial cross-section of black votes in the state. We put together a rather effective campaign. Wound up carrying 156 of the 159 counties. Lost the other. . . two of the others we lost by less than twenty votes. So it was a rather decisive sort of campaign. I served. . . was re-elected,

defeated the same fellow again four years from then, served another four years time as controller general. Controller in this state is also insurance commissioner, finance commissioner, fire commissioner and serves on the various pension boards, Department of Public Safety, Board of Trustees, Depository Board, and has a . . . I guess it's about the second strongest office in state government. I held the office for eight years, and then ran for governor. And I rather . . . made a rather ridiculous political decision by joining the Republican party. And ran for governor as a Republican and was defeated rather decisively. And since that time I've been out here in the jungle of private life, building and developing real estate.

J.B.: What was the year you switched parties?

Bentley: Let's see, it must have been. . . it was the year of the Chicago convention. That would have been '68. It was in about October of 1968. Several of us, the group of us in the state capitol at that time who had come generally out of the Talmadge organization into our own elective offices, some of us had helped to maneuver the appointment and election of others. There were five of us, the commissioner of agriculture, the state treasurer, my job as controller general, and two members of the Georgia Public Service Commission. Five of us there in the state capitol who had had several confrontations with the governor and - it was Carl Sanders at that time, and then Lester Maddox - we had several confrontations with the governor over legislative appropriations, various planks, and generally concerning the political strength and control of the state government, I guess you could say without exaggerating it. We had several confrontations,

successful confrontations, with the governor. And came to be known in the cartoons as the "Capitol Clique," and the "Wiregrass Mafia," and sundry nicknames of that sort. Three of those four of my associates, the other four of my associates, went to the Democratic National Convention in 1968, and there they were spat upon and ridiculed, cartooned, harpooned, and it was a real orgy in Chicago. They came home grossly indignant about the entire situation. And threatened to join the Republican party.

J.B.: Did they walk out of the convention over that question of seating delegates involving the Georgia delegation?

Bentley: I don't recall whether they walked or not. I know that several of the Georgia delegates did, and I believe that all four of my associates walked out and came home, maybe a couple of days early, from the convention. I believe they left the Georgia delegation, primarily in control of young Ben Brown, a young black legislator, and maybe Julian Bond and, I don't know. Well, Bond wasn't a member of the delegation, though, I don't believe. Anyway, I didn't go to Chicago. I had not cared about going. I'd been to several of the national political conventions, and this one had looked like it might turn into somewhat of a debacle, and I just wasn't interested in going. I remained at home. But I had given thought to the idea of structuring a re-alignment of personalities in the state, where you had political primaries becoming a mandatory sort of a thing requiring people to choose between Republican or Democrat and vote in either Democrat or Republican primaries. They were holding them on the same day. And creating left and right sort of attitudes and philosophy in much of the activities in the state government. I saw an opportunity, really, to pull together

the middle of the road, the so-called silent majority, I guess it's come to be known in more recent years. Saw an opportunity, I thought, to pull together the middle of the road people, and people to the right of center in the state, and build a real solid political structure. I talked to a lot of people about it, including Senator Talmadge. Gestured about it and chatted about it, as we had over a period of two or three years. But I was. . . when my friends came home from Chicago, they just came home hell-bent to leave the Democratic party, and announced that they would. I just made a decision in a couple of weeks time to go along with them. And we joined. We all switched. It was just almost an overnight circumstance. They were just thread-bare with the party. They had all served long periods of time in state government, were eligible for retirement. They had no particular economic concern in the years ahead. Their kids were all out of college, for the most part. They had pretty good retirement coming in and decided to make a. . . . just make a. . . . go out of office, I suppose, or at least go out of the Democratic party at that particular time. And attempt to give the Republicans some background and professional thrust here. The Republicans in that primary, that summer - or two summers after that, the summer of '70 - the Republicans grew rather miffed with me because I announced. . . well, at the outset I was visited by a substantial delegation of Republicans who were somewhat indignant because we had not announced, not consulted Republican leadership before we joined the Republican party. . . before we resigned from the Democratic party and announced that we'd be voting Republican in the next campaigns. Which was somewhat

of a twist. There was generally a rather complimentary outpouring of telegrams and telephone conversations, but some of the leadership was actually apprehensive that here some of these professionals at the state capitol had joined the Republican party without consulting them. I remember the candidate Frank Miller, who was ultimately the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor, was grossly indignant. He said, "You didn't say a damn word to me before you joined the Republican party." This should have been some indication to me that the sledding would be pretty rough. Then ^{Bo}~~Ben~~ Callaway, who was at that time the Republican National Committeeman, without my solicitation or invitation, advised me that he was ready to endorse my candidacy for. . . . He decided he wouldn't run for governor himself, and he'd endorse my candidacy for the Republican nomination. And he did and it made the top banner headlines on Sunday morning's paper. And I caught hell from a majority of the Republican leadership from that point on, who resented Callaway's endorsement. They called it a take-over by him. They thought he should have been impartial as National Committeeman, and must have been a thousand reasons that a thousand different key Republicans who resented his endorsement of me. . . .

J.B.: Had you talked to Callaway before the party switch?

Bentley: Twice, yes. He knew that we were, and he came by my office twice. One time to say that, "I've heard some talk in this direction, and would like to encourage it. We need professional leadership. We need some people already in office. This is the kind of thing that will make the Republican party in the state of Georgia." And I really

think that if the Republicans had nominated me, I'm sure that I would have won the governor ship. All my political surveys and analytical material showed us in good shape as compared to Jimmy Carter, who was ultimately the nominee of the Democratic party. The Republican leadership, they put together about eight or ten of their former Republican state chairmen, some of the former Republican National Committeemen. Just a pretty impressive hodge-podge of the Republican - former Republican leadership, really, in the state - and endorsed my opponent, who had hardly been in the state capitol, you know, more than a dozen times. A television announcer for WSB-TV. And a very smooth glib-tongued sort of a fellow, but a person of no economic nor political nor leadership substance whatsoever. But he did have an impressive tongue, he had a rather impressive war record. He'd had a leg blown off in World War Two. And the Republicans rallied around him and came to rather bitterly resent me. And gave him the nomination rather substantially and that was the end of it. He ran a very poor. . . a very modest sort of a campaign. Didn't really have the dedicated support of the Republican party. Once I was defeated, most of them considered that sufficient and then retired to the wayside and watched the Democrats elect a governor again. I think we would have been elected had we gotten into the general election, though. Then we could have really turned the course of history in this state.

J.B.: What was Callaway's role in the switch? Did he talk to all five of you?

Bentley: I'm sure that he talked to the others. I know that he talked to two or three of them. I met with him, he came by and extended a hand,

as I said, of welcome, good wishes and just. . . .

J.B.: He was what, Republican National Committeeman?

Bentley: Republican National Committeeman. He was quite interested in seeing the Republican party grow. Very dedicated, very sincerely interested. Callaway had been an appointee of ours to the Board of Regents when I was over to the state capitol with Talmadge. He was hardly more than a kid out of West Point. . . .

J.B.: Let's see, you were what when Talmadge was governor, again?

Bentley: I was executive secretary to Herman Talmadge. Callaway had been. . . his father had been on the state Board of Regents, and decided to step down. We made a deal with him that we'd appoint his son if he stepped down and gave Beau the slot on the Board of Regents. He served there and was quite outspoken and active on common sense issues in state government. And then he decided to run for congress and decided to run as a Republican and began building a Republican organization in this state. He was elected to congress and then chose to run for governor and ran a sort of a stainless steel type campaign, you know. Cold and impersonal. That's where Maddox forced him in to the legislature, and the general assembly being over-whelmingly Democratic. And rather short-sighted, I think, chose Lester Maddox to be governor of the state.

J.B.: Why do you think it was short sighted?

Bentley: Well, Callaway had the background, the capacity, the intellect, the experience, the decision-making knowhow, to make a good governor. Maddox hadn't had thirty seconds experience in government. He had no knowledge of power pockets and the economics. . . political economics,

no governmental economics. He didn't know what the hell might bounce up on the end of the rope when he pulled a lever. And he came into the office, totally naive and totally green, yet rather bull-headed. And so we spent the four years that he was governor, most of us in Georgia spent that period of time just watching him train himself to be governor. Which is, I think, a rather gross waste of time. This state has a whale of a lot of economic momentum and enjoys, I think, a position of respect and leadership among the states across the nation. And consequently, Lester didn't drag us backwards, but he didn't increase, at any rate, our momentum particularly, while he was governor. No fault of. . . no particular wilful negligence on his part, he just didn't know. He'd never been the governor's. . . .

J.B.: Well, several people have told us that Lester Maddox being elected governor, and the circumstances under which he was elected, that the legislature itself took on much more. . . assumed a much greater role in state government in setting policy.

Bentley: Oh, I don't think there's any question about that. The legislature. . . it was necessary for the legislature to assume the role. Somebody had to make decisions. Somebody had to appropriate money and Lester had very little staff that knew what the hell to do. With some major exceptions. He had a very excellent, impressive director of the State Department of Commerce, General Louis Truman. Had a remarkably fine individual in the State Revenue Commission, which is a rather strategic, key slot. He had, by and large, good appointments to the Board of Regents. He appointed a very fine gentleman, Jock Portain, to the appeals board, the Board of Pardon and Paroles, which is another very vital slot in state government. He made some excellent appointments,

but by and large, his immediate staff just didn't. . . didn't know the system of government. Had no capacity for communicating with, getting along with, the General Assembly. Yet there was the obligation to pass appropriations acts, delegate authority to agencies and boards and bureaus and the legislature just assumed that authority. I was controller at the time, and had numerous visits with the governor. I guess he visited my office just for personal chats and little social visits as much as I visited his. And we were good friends. We still are good friends. But I just think that Lester was, you know. . . . If you're going to appoint a governor, Lester. . . that's the last person you would have appointed in those days. And I guess about the last person I would appoint today, if I were going to appoint a governor, although I'm very fond of him. He's quite an entertaining sort of a person. I look at politics and government, really, in the same context that I do as a religion. You must believe in your government. We must support it. It's all psychology. We. . . it's a matter of faith, you know, this American system of government and Georgia's system of politics. It's a matter of faith and respect and belief. And without faith in it it gets awfully screwed up. I think this Watergate situation and the frustration that has come from it, and paralysis that we're suffering from in our society today is a strong indication of the need for strong confidence and a real heavy stimulated interest in government, what's going on. I feel very strongly about, you know, a professional attitude toward government. Responsible men, men of know-how, men of means, men with the guts to make decisions, the

ability and the guts to make decisions. Leadership is a tough business, and it's a lonely business most of the time. And you need people who are capable of strong leadership in government. It's the biggest factor in our lives. And I just think that this fellow was not that strong a person.

J.B.: How significant was Callaway's influence in talking to him? I take it from what you said that you gained the impression that you'd always be very welcome in the Republican party.

Bentley: Yes, Callaway gave every indication that we would be, and one of the young men, Alva Bateman, who's a state senator and - I don't know, he may still be in the state senate - came down and urged me to join the Republican party on two or three occasions.

Immediately after joining and after getting Callaway's endorsement, Bateman announced that he was going to run for governor himself. The Republicans in this state have a sort of a kamikaze attitude that's. . . . There's a caste system. They keep themselves restricted to small groups and small pockets. They're far more interested in internal Republican politics than in external Republican politics.

I didn't give a damn who the state chairman of the Republican party was, nor the Republican National Committeeman. I wanted to see a hundred Republicans in the state legislature, and a dozen, half-dozen members of the United States Congress from Georgia become Republicans. I wanted to see a governor and a lieutenant governor and some Republican state house offices. I wanted to build a real common sense of - not necessarily. . . not a Strom Thurmond or Mississippi type of Republicanism. I wanted a real aggressive, successful kind of politics in the state

capital, and I would have been that kind of governor. I would have been a pretty effective one. I had the know-how, the experience, to really make one. You know, I wanted to do it and just literally change our history, our political history.

J.B.: Could you discuss. . . .

Bentley: The Republicans just couldn't see that. They never could grasp that vision. They had never had, and still don't, and won't for years, have a real leader in any state house offices. I told them they'd either take over the state government in 1970 or they'd lose it for twenty years, and I think it'll probably be fifteen or twenty years before they really come to their senses and work cohesively. They get scattered off in these little old hate pockets, and, you know, they'd just rather scuttle the ship. It is a kamikaze kind of politics that they practice. They'd rather scuttle the whole organization than to see one of their own kind who they object to, have some, you know, temporary dislike for.

J.B.: Did you ever talk to Senator Talmadge before you switched? You said you had talked to him one time, but. . . .

Bentley: Yes, I talked to him several times, usually early in the mornings. And he very wisely and. . . very wisely advised me to take a long week-end and think it over, to know what I was doing. He said it was rather ridiculous to think about leaving a majority party and joining a minority party, and my thought was that we might ultimately build it into a majority party in this state. Of course, no one at that time could foresee the debacles that have come from Watergate, for instance. We thought at that time that Richard Nixon was appointing

a real stable team of judges to the United States Supreme Court. Not right wingers or John Birchers or Ku Kluxers, but men such as he's appointed, real solid stable men. He was stabilizing the Supreme Court. That's the most sensitive spot in the whole United States government. And stability is the greatest virtue in any government. And he was creating some stability around the United States Supreme Court. He was bringing about peace in Viet Nam. He was moving on all fronts, aggressively. Tremendously impressive, I felt. And it just appeared to me a real wave that could very well sweep the South. And with some leadership it still could. But we sure lost a lot by not really realizing or understanding the vision there in 1970.

J.B.: What do you think will be the effect of Watergate on Republican party development?

Bentley: Well, it will inhibit development, I think, rather drastically down here. It's created so much frustration and loss of momentum and loss of time. Just the time that we've spent fighting in congress and fighting in the courts in New York and orgies that you read every day in the newspaper headlines. The loss of very precious time, and I would think, you know, that for every day we'd lose in momentum right now it'll take ten days to pick it back up somewhere down the road. I think the biggest impact, looking at it at this juncture - this'll. . . your book. . . it won't be. . . we'll know when your book is published - but right now I would think that the veto-proof, absolute control, dominating impact of the United States Congress and Senate is probably one of the most impressive outfalls of the Watergate - political outfalls -

of the Watergate situation. It could be that the selection this year in 1974 will give the Democrats such a control of the United States Congress that they'll control it for the next forty years. It may take, you know. . . it will unquestionably take sixteen to twenty years for the Republicans to gain the majority again, and it may be twice that long. When one party gets almost unanimous control, just normal political attrition will. . . it will take a hell of a lot of normal political attrition to give the other party a balance, and certainly to give the other party control. Of course, the Democrat can always have a Watergate. The way times change now, the way one dramatic truculent event after another in our society, we don't know what the hell will happen next. So the Democrats may have a debacle themselves, or they may get a real lemon in the White House and just all get thrown out.

J.B.: When you announced the party switch, were you thinking at that time of running for governor as a Republican?

Bentley: Yes. I had told Callaway and those half dozen people that I talk to about it, that I would be running for governor. It was my intention.

J.B.: What was your reaction when you got. . . when so much of the Republican leadership reacted adversely?

Bentley: Well, I don't know. It was. . . .

J.B.: Did it come as a surprise?

Bentley: It did come as a surprise, yes. Quite a surprise. It was a sickening sort of a thing. It was a disillusioned sort of a thing, to think that this organization that I had come to, the Republican organization,

had so little hospitality or feeling for me. I felt really nobly about what I could do for Georgia government, and what I could do for the Republican party in this state. My ideas about a new kind of education, real strong strengthening of the system of education, great emphasis on vocational training. This stupid, ridiculous situation where everybody's got to go to college and we train all the kids from first grade up to go to college. It's ridiculous, you know. Just a dab of them need to go to college. We need to train them for these twelve dollar an hour jobs of laying brick, pouring cement, driving nails, mechanical work and electronics.

I have a lot of ideas on the economics of state government. I think I could have done. . . I --could have saved a great deal more money dollar-wise in state government by executive order, than Jimmy Carter has done by his total re-organization of state government where he's created drastic problems for himself. Hasn't created any real economies. He's just changed the name tags over there, that's about all. I knew the government, I'd grown up in it, been around the legislature. I had worked with Talmadge, who's just an absolute political genius. So I had better training than anybody who'd come down the pipe in a long time, to be governor. And I had this very noble feeling about it, you know, that, yeah, I could do a good job. And I was rather disgusted with some of the decisions that had come from guys around the capital and some of the Democratic leadership in various pockets across the state. Not necessarily Democrat, but I just thought, "Here's an opportunity to pick up a torch and change the history of this state." And had I gotten that nomination, it

would have been. . . turned out to be one of the hardest things in America. 'Cause it would have, you know. . . it could have. . . we would have done a good job. It would have changed the face of politics down here. There were several congressmen who had indicated that they were going to join the Republican party, but they waited for us to join to see how the water felt, you know, before they made the decision. I think we could have changed a number of county commissioners and legislators. . . . So it was rather disillusioning, and just a shattering sort of an experience to see that the Republican leadership just had no feel for this external type Republican politics.

J.B.: Did you anticipate a number of legislators that would switch?

Bentley: Oh, I don't believe there's any question but what they would have.

J.B.: Did you expect any to switch after the five of you switched? Before you ran for governor?

Bentley: Yes, they would have, had we been received more enthusiastically by the other Republicans. And certainly there would have been switching after the general election, had we been elected. See, when the Republicans wound up nominating this young fellow who was a T.V. announcer, I think they became a joke to a great extent. Lester Maddox had seriously considered, contemplated joining the Republican party during that '68 to '70 interim. Many people across the state had seriously contemplated it. They took us seriously. Senator Russell said to me, Senator Richard Russell who was living at that time, said, "I wouldn't have done it had I been in your place, but I can understand why you did it." He could see the potential for building and, you know,

for shifting. It was a dramatic sort of a thing, had it worked out. There were any number of members of the legislature. . . now, there were four members of the United States Congress who took us very seriously and were contemplating the possibility of a change. The White House was giving real serious consideration to making certain overtures to southern congressmen, after the 1970 general election campaign, if they could've come within half a dozen congressmen, representatives, of controlling the United States House of Representatives. They were seriously contemplating overtures and incentives to congressmen that would've given the Republicans control of the House of Representatives. Several of our United States Senators were approached, from the South, various sections. WWere approached with the idea of joining the Republican party. This thing had substance, there, for about twenty-four months, but when Republicans in this state just slashed it to the ground, all of my old friends out in the state, in courthouses, in city halls, who had taken it seriously, you know, that maybe the kid knows what he's talking about. They were waiting to see. And I never did even get to first base, and a telephone announcer was given a job. It became somewhat of a joke, I mean, in the eyes of a lot of people. They quit taking the Republicans seriously after '70 until Fletcher Thompson's campaign in '72. And then they caught old Fletcher padding his postage stamp account, and made a great big issue of, you know, a fellow stealing stamps. Average Georgian can't understand, they can't conceive of a man stealing a pot full of gold, but they can conceive of a fellow swiping postage stamps. Little petty, icky politics such as that. Fletcher's campaign

just didn't come off as a very real sort of a campaign. And I think it's pretty well shattered the Republicans in this state for some years to come.

J.B.: Someone said that Thompson's campaign. . . someone told us they felt that Thompson's campaign was based on running against Gambrell, and when Gambrell didn't get the nomination that the folks that managed Thompson's campaign weren't flexible enough to change. They ran a campaign that was aimed ^{at} Gambrell, but they weren't running against Gambrell. Did you see it that way?

Bentley: Well, there is a lot of substance to it. I don't recall seeing it that way. I didn't pay, really, a great deal of attention to that campaign. Fletcher, you know, was an exceedingly rigid sort of a person. He had strongly resented my joining the Republican party, when, you know, there was a great opportunity for him to have real allies in the state capital. He endorsed Hal Suit, my opponent, and was quite antagonistic towards me because. . . I think it was a matter that he hated to see - maybe not conscious. A subconscious sort of a thing - politicians very frequently are petty and short-sighted thinkers, and I think Fletcher was short sighted in his thinking, I think he was exceeding rigid and inflexible and unimaginative. He didn't know what the hell to do.

J.B.: Where was Mike Egan in this?

Bentley: Oh, right across the railroad over here in Brookwood. He was playing softball with his kids and pretty well relaxing, getting re-elected himself. He wasn't particularly excited over Fletcher's campaign.

J.B.: No, I meant in the governor's race.

Bentley: He supported me. Rather vigorously.

J.B.: How do you read him as minority leader in the house?

Bentley: Oh, I rate Mike Egan as a very intelligent and very competent young person, a person with - I use the word noble again - a person with real noble ambitions. I doubt if he'll ever get very far on a statewide basis in this state, because he is from Atlanta and he is somewhat of a blueblood or aristocratic type. He did project the image of an aristocrat. He doesn't come through quite as well as one would need to to get the votes south of Atlanta. But I'd rate him 4.0 in virtually every respect. Integrity and intelligence, energy, ambition.

J.B.: Philosophically and ideologically, isn't he pretty much to the left of most of the Republicans in the state? He's a Rockefeller man in '68. . . .

Bentley: Yes, I would say that he's to the left of a majority of Republicans. I'd say his philosophy and mine might be slightly. . . he'd be to the left of me, but not a great deal. I think he's a pragmatist, he's a realist.

J.B.: How does he get. . . . Why do the Republicans in the legislature, most of whom are more conservative than he is, elect him as minority leader? Simply a respect for ability?

Bentley: He's intelligent and he's a leader. He has the stuff to make decisions and he's an excellent political strategist. And it's a damn shame we don't have more like him in the Republican party. He can see to the end of, you know, the Republicans some day dominating the South.

And he knows that his own thinking is somewhat to the left of the masses of the Republicans here, but he doesn't speak out on the more moderate, more liberal sentiments he has. He expresses his feelings, those feelings that he has that are in common with the masses. He's more inclined to emphasize, and expresses himself, on those issues. There's a lot to be said for a fellow, you know, knowing what to say and when to say it and how to say it.

J.B.: What has been the effect of re-apportionment in Georgia, politically?

Bentley: Oh, I think it's by and large been helpful. Certainly it's been helpful to the city of Atlanta. There was a time all of us in our little antics and mimicing sessions in politics remember the story of Gene Talmadge saying that he didn't want to carry a county that had streetcars. In the old days, the post-Depression days, he made that kind of remarks. "And if you ever see the Atlanta newspapers bragging on me, you'll know I've sold you out, boys." That kind of jazz. Atlanta's now come to be a respected and accepted and gradually taking a position of real leadership in the state, because the voters here have the power and the strength to command and demand this kind of respect, and receive this kind of respect. I think re-apportionment has, by the same token, created some real problems. I'm not sure that we've improved the calibre of leadership in the state legislature.

In the old days, you had three members of the state legislature, house of representatives, and one member of the state senate from Atlanta, and they could ride to breakfast with the mayor in the morning and make decisions on the direction for legislative matters for the city. And

it wasn't really a bad deal. It was a tight control of the legislative representation. Now, there must be three dozen senators and legislators combined from the Atlanta community here, and they seldom ever are together on anything. There's a rather substantial amount of bickering. There's some exceedingly mediocre legislators. Mediocre members of the Atlanta delegation in the legislature. I think this mediocrity in the legislature has come primarily from the metropolitan area here.

J.B.: The rural force in the legislature is still predominant, though. Isn't that basically so?

Bentley: I suppose that they dominate. I haven't been closely observant in the last four years. But I. . . certainly the rural forces are a tremendous factor. They don't dominate. . . if they don't dominate, they are a very decisive balance of power over there.

J.B.: How much longer do you think they will dominate?

Bentley: Oh, probably another ten years. It's a gradual sort of a thing. I think that it's not so much a question of rural forcing - forces - dominating the legislature in just sheer numbers. I think the philosophy. . . (Interruption in recording. Side two.) . . . is changing drastically out in the state. Many of the smaller counties that. . . well, let's take the wet/dry issue, for instance. As long as five years, ten years ago, we had twenty-five, twenty-seven, I believe, wet counties in the state. I expect there are forty-five or fifty today. The very small counties are calling liquor elections and voting the county wet. There's a practical approach to this. It's a more flexible, more sophisticated attitude, and I think the attitudes and philosophies are generally changing in our small counties.

They're becoming more sophisticated, urbanized. Television has had a massive impact on the teaching, the attitudes of our people. Transportation, the interstate highway system, years of communication. All of this has served to change attitudes rather substantially so that many of our so-called rural legislators don't consider themselves "rural" legislators. They damn well don't consider themselves country-men, country boys, any more. They come to Atlanta with a rather sophisticated attitude, so that I think the rural-urban line will become less and less noticeable in the years ahead. You may identify one person from a rural area simply because of. . . because that's his district. But the chances are that's going to be pretty well sophisticated.

J.B.: How do you compare the role of organized labor with, say, ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, and where do you see it heading?

Bentley: Well, it's not a great deal stronger here in Georgia than it was ten or fifteen or even twenty years ago. Organized labor is. . . Georgians are rather individualistic people. They follow the personality far more than they follow the organization. And this is particularly true, I think, with organized labor. Not just Georgians in general, but the working man. He would vote in a second for a colorful, picturesque character like Lester Maddox, than he would some sophisticated, hair-sprayed, cuff linked young fellow like Carl Sanders. It's. . . when Sanders may very well be the more qualified individual. Nevertheless, this working man sees himself as he relates to the individual rather than the organization. Labor leaders, probably endorsing Sanders. Labor membership voting for Lester Maddox, is the point I'm making. They just

are too individualistic. Now, there is some indication that organized labor will be more emphatic in its leadership and the coordination of its membership. This conversation, now, about telephone - intensive telephone campaigns, to build a little esprit de corps among the organized labor membership. It's going to take a little organizational effort with the members themselves. You just don't dictate to these working men how they should vote. They're going to have to develop some. . . they're going to have to relate more closely to their own labor organization.

J.B.: Has the biggest change in Georgia politics in the last twenty-five years been that of the role of blacks, participating in politics?

Bentley: Well, I guess the participation of blacks in politics and the changing in the county-unit system. . . the county-unit system has had a staggering impact, really, on. . . I think it's had a tremendous impact on change of politics in the state. It's given so much stronger voice to the metropolitan areas, the large and the medium sized communities. It brought about a great deal, just coupled with re-apportionment generally. It brought in such an influx of new personalities. That, coupled with the participation of the black voter in the state. I think we'll probably see the real impact of the black people this year, this year 1974, really, for the first time. I can remember the old A. T. Walden days, when there were 30,000, 40,000 black voters, '48, '50, '52, '54, when you had 20,000, 30,000 to 50,000 black voters and Judge A. T. Walden downtown here in Atlanta usually passed the word, passed out a ticket a night

or so before the election, and got the word over the whole state, and the blacks voted in one solid bloc. Blacks are about as split up and busted up now as white people, and they vote in fragments, and they have excellent leadership and they have mediocre leadership. And it's coming around. But there is a whole of a heavy registration of blacks now. And by and large the blacks are not going to vote for a person who stands up and says, "I am a segregationist." And Lester has said that a time or so in the last twelve months. I just got an idea that Lester's. . . . We'll see a remarkable. . . well, you've already seen it. Lester has, since that time, has fairly come to his senses somewhat, and begun, I understand, courting the black vote in a lot of communities. He's going to have to do it to make a creditable showing. And I think that the blacks'll make. . . the role of the black voter will be a rather impressive one in this 1974 campaign.

J.B.: Were you surprised at the flexibility that Herman Talmadge showed in racial matters?

Bentley: No, not really. I attended a dinner last night in Cedartown, Georgia for a young fellow, Robert Parks. Testimonial dinner in his home community. It was presided over by W. T. . . . W. D. Tripp, who is the top banker in that little rural community. And I can remember when. . . I remember the days when Tripp referred to Robert Parks as "that little nigger friend of yours out here." He called me up and talked about that little nigger friend of yours out here. Well, he presided at a testimonial dinner for Parks last night in Cedartown, and a fund-raising program for one of the black orphanages in the state. Parks came to Talmadge and. . . in that senate campaign in

1956, with a vision and a feel that the blacks ought to be participating more actively in politics in the state. And that there was a place for the black voter. There was a logic to the black supporter, black voter, to support Talmadge. And he began then and he put together a whole of a black following for Talmadge. Did it almost privately, that summer of 1956. I was coordinating that campaign and saw it all come together. I had seen Talmadge along about that same time call for a modification of the Georgia county unit system. It made blazing headlines in all the papers across the state. Talmadge was a visionary. A very practical person, but he looks ahead. And he can anticipate changes and I've seen him time and time again anticipate change and attempt to gear himself to that change. And gear the thinking of the people to that change. Had they modified the county unit system at that time, it might have lasted another eight or ten years, or longer, but he was met with a strong criticism at that time. I don't think that it was any shock that he did gear and begin thinking in broader terms. He was looking at the future. His thinking is about from ten to twenty years ahead of the average voter in the state of Georgia.

J.B.: Does Talmadge. . . is he considered, at least by knowledgeable politicians, as somebody who performs the traditional role of "bringing home the bacon" for the state? I mean, is he the key man in the delegation insofar as getting projects approved that people think their state needs, this sort of thing?

Bentley: He works at projects. He responds to his mail with research and inquiries and hell-raising. He can kick a member of the cabinet in

the butt if it's necessary to get a project that is needed back home. But to the extent that Dick Russell went with just carpeting the state with military bases, Talmadge has never been quite that materialistic in his politics. He hasn't brought that kind of bacon home. His has been more of a philosophical relationship to the people. More of a national. . . well, not more of a national sort of leadership than Dick Russell, but he's taken a broad, sweeping look at it. His leadership in agricultural programs, of course, has been for the whole spectrum of agriculture. But Georgia has tremendously benefitted by it because Georgia is still primarily an agricultural economy. I think Talmadge has worked hard at his politics, but his is a matter of exposing. . . his is a matter of personal politics rather than just dumping chunks of bacon around over the state.

J.B.: Am I correct that he is generally considered to be politically untouchable in Georgia?

Bentley: I would think so. Certainly for this 1974 campaign. He'll have opposition, but it'll be marginal, token opposition. Talmadge is campaigning when those who would oppose him are asleep, or playing golf or drinking liquor or making love or doing something besides organizing and mobilizing opposition. He saturates the state with political memoranda, as well as congressional letters and reports. He saturates to the extent that they use them as public service programs in the TV and the radio stations in the state with tapes that they repeat. Comes home on Lincoln Day, the easter recesses, Thanksgiving, Christmas holidays, and hunts quail all over the state.

He goes to fish fries and quail suppers and possum hunts and coon hunts and just all sorts of exposure, all over the state. He's a tireless sort of a political worker. I mean, he's ubiquitous. He's everywhere. He'll come home for a long week-end and make seven or eight speeches around the state. He's driving, flying from Bainbridge, to Gainesville to Rome to Atlanta. And this kind of exposure is tremendously difficult to confront. In the first place, there are damn few people who have that kind of energy to just get out and campaign tirelessly.

J.B.: How significant was his role in the Fletcher Thompson-Sam Nunn race?

Bentley: :I think it was very significant.

J.B.: Was it decisive?

Bentley: Probably. It probably made the difference. I think it was highly significant. And I think it was a highly practical thing for him to do, to just move in at that particular time. He'd been. . . moved into a position of real strong Democratic leadership in the United States Congress, and it was almost necessary for him to take that position, just for his own political caveat. Had Fletcher been elected, then Talmadge would have been opposed rather strongly this year, by Republicans. Had I been elected the Republican governor, he would have had far less problems down the road. I think we would have lived with him rather than confronted him on every circumstance. I wouldn't have opposed Talmadge. I would have supported him when he ran for re-election. In some way. Not necessarily overtly, but certainly covertly. I saw the opportunity to gradually build the Republican party

in these realistic situations like strong leadership, a person like Talmadge, he's a leader. He knows more about politics and government than any other living person in Georgia, probably any other living person in the South. And consequently he's exceedingly informed on finances. He's very successful and an exceedingly knowledgeable farmer. Those are his main roles - finance and agriculture - in the Senate. Consequently, we need him. Why junk a fellow that's producing like that? That would have been my philosophy had I been a Republican. That's my philosophy today. I think that's overwhelmingly the philosophy of the people of Georgia.

J.B.: Have you remained active in the Republican party?

Bentley: No, I've been out building shopping centers, condominiums, and office buildings, and developing. . . . I had to start from scratch. Build a new career. Then, I've been quite active in doing that. I haven't taken much time to really become involved in any kind of politics. I voted for Sam Nunn, so I voted in the Democratic primary. And I supported Nixon vigorously in his campaign for re-election. I think my attitude towards Georgia politics is pretty consistent with the rank and file Georgian. Every Georgian votes in the Democratic primary, and he votes Republican in the general election. I imagine that's the way I'll be voting for the next several years.

J.B.: How do you feel now about Nixon in light of events and disclosures?

Bentley: I'm grossly disappointed at Nixon's foot-dragging on the issue of the tapes. He should have kicked the front door and the back door of the White House wide open and said, "There it is. Look at it and take

what you want." Or, he should have called up this old fellow from North Carolina - what's his name, Erwin? He should have called him up and said, "Sam, those tapes are down here and you come down and listen to them, but I've used South Pacific language all the way through there and it ain't no way in the world I can expose the harsh language that I've used on those tapes to the American public. And I ain't even going to release them if it's going to be embarrassing to me and my wife and my family. And you can come down and hear them. Otherwise I'm going to burn them tomorrow morning." He should have burned the damn things. He should have met the issue head on, and then dropped it and taken the consequences. But he's drug his feet at every turn. He's yah-yahed about many other icky aspects of Watergate. And it's been a gross disappointment to me. I think Nixon has been a tremendous leader. Had it not been for the scandal and the smear and the stupidity of Watergate, and his miserable handling of the situation, he would retire as one. . . . He'd be going out of office as one of our really great leaders. Look what he's done on our relationship with the rest of the world. He's created a liaison, a communication, with China, with Russia. He's sent this fellow Kissinger. . . and it hasn't been just Kissinger. Kissinger. . . in the first place, he had to be appointed by someone. He was appointed by Nixon. Nixon understands this finesse of working with other people, turning the other cheek. He's gone to these people and said, "Listen, let's quit arguing and let's get along." And that's the whole concept of, you know, the way to lose an enemy is to. . . the way to whip your enemies is to make friends of them. And that's

what he's done. We mentioned very much earlier on the other side of your tape the. . . what he did for the. . . what he has done for the United States Supreme Court. He demonstrated real leadership in '70 and '71 in the domestic field of economics. He brought inflation, brought the economy, to a good strong solid stance. That '68 and '69 era that was so miserable and wretched, he pulled us out of it, stabilized the system. And now it's shot to hell because he hasn't taken the time. . . hasn't had the time to provide the leadership. I think he has ability, and I think he's demonstrated great ability. The real disappointment is the way he drug his feet in the Watergate there disclosures. If/was enough information on the damn tapes to exonerate him, why the hell doesn't he exonerate himself?

J.B.: That's a good question. Is there anything else on Georgia politics that you wanted to comment on? Anything we didn't discuss?

Bentley: I don't know. I. . . I don't really know what you're attempting to cover in your book. Your. . . .

J.B.: Just sort of a grasp of how the political system works in this state. How does it work, in Georgia, with the legislature and the governor? Who really has power in Georgia?

Bentley: Well, the power is rather fragmented in the state now. Talmadge has always had this philosophy that he would not involve himself in anybody else's race. He didn't, except in Sam Nunn and Fletcher Thompson. He's never involved himself. He didn't involve himself when he was in state government. He didn't get involved in national senatorial and congressional campaigns. Now, from Washington he remains absolutely aloof from gubernatorial politics down here.

He made the point once that. . . . he'd supported Marvin Griffin for governor, and then he supported Ernie ~~Vander~~^{Vandiver} for governor, and he made the point once that he'd supported. . . he'd elected one rascal and one idiot, and he thought that was enough. And he hadn't. . . and he hasn't participated in state politics since that time.

J.B.: Did he take any role at all in the decision on Maddox versus Callaway?

Bentley: To my knowledge, he didn't lift a finger. He didn't speak a word to anyone.

J.B.: Not even privately?

Bentley: Even privately. I think that he probably. . . I think that he quietly giggled and rejoiced that Ellis Arnall had been defeated and had been defeated by, of all people, Lester Maddox. Because Herman has a long memory and a very deep respect for his father. But he didn't carry that. . . . that was just a rather poetic sort of settlement of the issue. Ellis Arnall had whipped Gene Talmadge, Herman's father, at one time. I am sure that he giggled quietly at the fact that Ellis had been defeated and had been defeated by, of all people, Lester Maddox. Beyond that, he said nothing. He still doesn't involve himself in politics. When there were these five of us in the state capital, we rather aggressively got involved in. . . too much involved in other races. We elected a member of the Public Service Commission, state treasurer, those old "Wiregrass Mafia," the "Capitol Clique" boys helped me to get elected and whipped the first incumbent for a long. . . over a long span of years there. . . .

J.B.: What was that term they used after you all switched? Didn't they

call you something. . . the Five. . . Switching Five, or something like that?

Bentley: I don't know. I had a bunch of cartoons of that era on the wall up in my fish cabin, but it's in the mountains. I don't know what that could have been. I don't remember a nickname that came out of that. I've sort of washed that out of my mind, really. I don't know, I think politics is tremendously fragmented in the state just now. The press doesn't exercise any great influence. It's probably a negative influence. We don't have any real newspaper leadership in this state. Old Ralph McGill could inflame and irritate and antagonize people, and in one sense drive them in the opposite direction. He could elect a governor by negative. . . in a negative sense. Reg Murphy is an absolutely young fellow to sit down and drink a cup of coffee with, or a glass of beer with, but he doesn't have that pizazz that McGill has. Jack Spaulding is probably. . . wins all the blue ribbons for cynicism. He's the editor of the Atlanta Journal. And exercises no leadership. He's sort of a lazy. . . .

J.B.: What's the role of his brother, the lawyer? What's his name?

Bentley: Hughes. He has one brother Hughes, that's in the King and Spaulding firm. He's a bond lawyer, a sophisticated lawyer, a rich lawyer. And a very fine, remarkably fine person.

J.B.: Roy Harris said that he had as much political influence as anybody in Georgia has, if he was exercising it. When he wanted to exercise it.

Bentley: His father did. Mr. Spaulding was quite an impressive old gentleman. And I guess that Hughes has a lot of. . . well, by virtue of his law practice and the wealth that he's exposed to and that he

represents there, he could have a real impact. But he's simply not interested. And I think it's a damn tragedy that people like him, you know, they yawn at the idea of politics, you know. It's a little boring to them, when it should be a full time. . . .

J.B.: How significant do you think it is that in Georgia there is no really experienced political press corps?

Bentley: I think it's a damn shame and really a tragedy that we don't have an experienced press corps. I can remember old Gene running against. . . . There was M. L. St. John for the Constitution, and what was his name? Gregory - his last name was Gregory, for the Atlanta Journal. I guess it was. . . wasn't Cecil Gregory. Something Gregory, for the Atlanta Journal. Old Gene would campaign against St. John and Saint Gregory, and they were professionals and they kept him on his toes. He knew they were watching constantly. Charlie ~~Pieu~~ ^{Pou} was an exceedingly professional political reporter for the Atlanta Journal. Last one they've had around here. He's with an agency of the federal government now. The newspapers pay them, you know, just four and five hundred, maybe six hundred bucks a month, and they bring these kids in virtually off the street and as soon as a young fellow with the newspapers can learn his way around and write enough. . . a fine story or two, he goes to work for some politician as his public relations man. 'Cause you can make more money. I think it's. . . has had a drastic impact on state government. Guys like Charlie Pieu would be digging in underneath. "Why was that decision made? Why do we need to re-organize state government? Why was this fellow fired as head of the mental health program? Why is this purchasing agent

here being so royally entertained in so many directions? Why is he driving around an Oldsmobile 98 instead of a Chevrolet Chevelle?"

He digs in. He would dig in to things like that. And he knew politics and he knew government and he knew people. And he created, in effect, a sort of fear. And I think people behave much better. . . we see that on the highways when we're driving. We behave much better when we're being observed. And the present press corps in the state of Georgia, the press corps we've had in the state of Georgia for about the last four years, has been pretty sophomoric, and sophomores just don't know enough about what's going on to observe closely and keep people on their toes. Consequently, we may have more misbehavior in state government than we realize. The public has no way of knowing. I don't know, 'cause I don't keep up with it. I think we've got some mediocre people over there that ought to be thrown out of office. And I think that a real wise, informed, intelligent press would be very helpful in identifying the mediocrity of some of these people. Pointing it up. Just press interviews. Just stuff about what they're doing, what they're not doing. Some people take the attitude, you know, that the less they do, the less publicity they get. And the less publicity they get, the fewer people know that they're there. Consequently, the less they do, the less opposition they have. The longer they stay in office. And that's the reverse of what it ought to be. And if you don't pay any attention to them, they damn surely stay there forever. I think that politics in Georgia is probably more fragmented today than it's been in my lifetime. The political leadership, at least.

J.B.: Well, this is the impression we've gotten, that Georgia really

is very diffused leadership, politically. That Carter's major problem with the legislature has been a running feud with Maddox as lieutenant governor and Maddox aligned with Hugh ^{Gillis,} ~~Gilles~~, which I understand is a reaction, in part, to Carter's firing his father.

Bentley: Well, Carter is sort of a damn sissy, really. He's. . . .

J.B.: One person told us that Carter politicked the state for three years running for governor, then after he got elected, forgot about the art of politics.

Bentley: Well, I don't think he ever knew the art of politics. He knew the art of shaking hands and stirring around. And people were looking for an alternative to Carl Sanders. I waged my campaign that summer against this guy Hal Suit, rather ignoring him, because I thought he was just a damn TV announcer from WSB. And really, he's been a pretty good friend of mine in years past. And I waged my campaign against him by ignoring him, and really needling Carl Sanders. And I really believe I did about as much as Jimmy Carter during that summer to whip Carl Sanders. And he gave me a nickname, Old Cufflinks, and we kidded a lot about Carl. And Carl is really a fine fellow. He knows government and was a pretty good governor. I served over there with him. But he was an opponent at that time, and we talked about his hairspray and the fact that you couldn't find a single voter in Georgia who had ever seen Sanders sweat. (Laughter.) And you could ask the guys down there on the creek banks if they wanted a man up there who'd never been able to work up a real sweat. But it was just a lot of. . . . that was the fun part of the. . . the stop speaking part of the campaign.

J.B.: How do you rate the people who've been the governor of Georgia since '48?

Bentley: Since '48?

J.B.: I guess that's probably Ellis Arnall.

Bentley: No, Ellis Arnall was governor before '48.

J.B.: I thought it was '46 to '50.

Bentley: '44 to '46, he was governor. '44 to '46. Then M. E. Thompson served for two years. A heck of a nice fellow, but he was surrounded by a few rascals in his structure over there. And he was thrust in to just a wild sort of political situation. Just a maelstrom of activity around, you know. All the Talmadge organization that had Ellis Arnall in there all during the four years, and they'd elected old Gene. He died before he was sworn in. They were all mad and bitter and they took it out on poor old M. E. So he really didn't have much of a chance. Herman served for two years, and drank a lot of liquor and really was sort of thrust in there. And almost lost his campaign for re-election in '50. Or he could have lost it, if he hadn't come to his senses. But he came to his senses and became a real successful governor. Probably the greatest governor. . . unquestionably to me the strongest governor we've had in my lifetime. My political memory. He was succeeded by Marvin Griffin, who was a jolly, grand old jolly rascal. Not a thief, but he had some thieves in his organization who gave him just a black name that still he hasn't completely lived down. But an absolutely delightful, jolly. . . and a sincere, quite sincere person, himself, personally. Excellent wife and very fine young son. Then there was ~~Vander~~ ^{Vandiver} who, I don't think, was all that dumb. He was just

butt-headed. He was a butt-headed, stubborn mountaineer. And came at a time of great change. The county unit system was thrown out and the schools were. . . integration was. . . well, we were moving toward integration. Integration of the transit system, and some rather noticeable integration was taking place in Vander 's time. He had two or three heart attacks. He couldn't stand the pressure. He was booed when he went down to speak to the Georgia Education Association one evening, and had a heart attack the next day. He just couldn't stand that kind of pressure out there. He was virtually appointed governor by Talmadge. Talmadge campaigned and came home and visited and stirred around the state, in the summer of '57. Everywhere he went people either asked him who he was going to vote for next year, and if they didn't bring up the question of politics, he'd say, "How's Ernie running down here?" So they got the word that he was interested in Ernie. And Ernie became governor. They didn't have much of a campaign then, in the summer of '58 when he ran. But he was average or above average, considering all the circumstances that he faced. Then came Sanders, who was probably the most effective governor second to Talmadge along that sweep of times. I think old Lester just had a good time while he was over there. He wasn't particularly a rascal, he wasn't particularly indecent or crooked. He just didn't really know a lot about going on, and he appeared most of the time not to give a damn about what was going on, if he could get his picture in the paper and if he could control his temper. Lester is hot-headed, too hot-headed. I think that's one of his problems, one of the reasons he maybe defeated this year. He loses his temper and

instead of, when he loses his temper, instead of calling everybody a son of a bitch, as some of us do, he calls them a Communist. (laughter.) And most Georgians would rather be called a son of a bitch than a Communist. He's. . . and now Carter, who's been, I think, pretty much of a sissy in the governor's office. He hasn't really known how to make decisions. And no experience. Doesn't know how to make a decision and follow through. He was elected governor, not so much under his own steam. He was elected governor as an alternative to Carl Sanders. Sanders had projected himself out way too far to the left, and if Georgia people are ever given a choice between a man over here at eleven o'clock and at one o'clock, they're going to vote for the man at one. They'll vote for the man at ten after twelve before they will a man at eleven. To the right of middle is where the Georgia voter, the rank and file voter, is going. And that's been true since. . .it's been true through all this century. They're going to vote to the right of the middle. Now, in a moral situation, where Sanders and Griffin were opposing each other, Sanders was to the left of middle and Griffin was to the right of middle, but Griffin had a moral taint on his reputation because of his brother and some of his staff people over there. And when the moral issue comes up, these Georgians will not go for a rascal.

J.B.: What was Garland Bird's problem in that race?

Bentley: I think one of Garland's problems is that he's. . . his own personal morals around this state. There was a lot of criticism. He'd been an exceedingly promiscuous person, and this was. . . this

sort of everyday talk was household knowledge among housewives and women voters around the state, who by and large resent the hell out of a promiscuous husband. Garland, too, never was able to really project himself. His speeches had a . . . he could make an excellent point, but his delivery had an artificial delivery to it. He'd pronounce words differently from the stump than just from a routine conversation such as this. And that artificial ring came across. And I think that these are the reasons that he was defeated. He didn't have. . . and Garland had had some negative attitudes building up against him for years. I remember an editorial about Bird when he was director of the state Department of Veterans Services in 19. . . around 1950, '48 or '50, he was deputy director, I think. He just used his state expense account there to travel all over Georgia, all over the country. I remember the editorial was headlined "Marco Polo Bird." Little negative needles and jabs like that. They accumulate over a period of time.

J.B.: How about in campaign financing in Georgia? Where does the money come from to finance politics?

Bentley: There's no one big. . . .

J.B.: *[We've heard]* Coca Cola is sort of the nearest thing to it.

Bentley: Coca Cola puts money in campaigns, but they don't give all that much. They get credit, and they accept the credit because they enjoy the credit. But there's never been that sort of just massive unloading of money to finance the whole campaign. We haven't had it in this state as in some states. There's been cases, reportedly, in some states, there's a pretty tough job to finance a campaign in Georgia.

I waged three vigorous campaigns across this state and I came out of each one with a real deficit. Two of them. . . well, yeah, two of those campaigns I was an incumbent insurance and finance commissioner. And if it had been easy to raise money, it should have damn well been easy for me to raise money in the financial community of the state. But it. . . people are just not geared up in Georgia to make a campaign contribution. And we're past those days of real strong personality leadership.

J.B.: I think a factor. . .

Bentley: Politics is probably more monotonous and more boring in Georgia today than it's been in fifty years.

J.B.: What effect has television had?

Bentley: I think it's had a massive effect in Georgia and everywhere. You can make one point in thirty seconds on television requiring you a whole summer of campaigning to do across the state.

J.B.: What would happen if Gene Talmadge suddenly were re-incarnated and re-entered Georgia politics?

Bentley: I think he'd be a very progressive, a very aggressive leader, very much like Herman. Herman got his flexibility from his daddy. And had his daddy been sworn in early in 1947, and spent his four years, '47 through '51, as governor of Georgia, he would've probably been branded by some as a liberal. He was. . . he had the capacity to be a very flexible sort of a person. He had some plans for that four year period of time that would've probably been a hell of a shock to a lot of these old trench fighters they have in this state, these old warriors from past battles.

J.B.: What was he planning to do?

Bentley: Oh, taxes. He'd given a great deal of thought to the sales taxes. Revitalizing the tax structure, much more streamlined road program in the state. Re-vamping the system of education. He had some strong feelings about the penal system, that in the context of the day, looking back, they were. . . we looked. . . his thinking is now rather ordinary. But at that time, it was damned progressive.

J.B.: Is there anything else that we haven't covered?

Bentley: Oh, there must have been millions of things we haven't covered. I'm sure you've got enough there. If I can later on, let me know.

J.B.: Is there anything coming to mind that you wanted to add?

Bentley: Hope this has been some help to you.

J.B: Yes.

(End of interview.)