

This is an interview with Bert Bennett conducted on  
December 17, 1973 by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries.

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J.B.: I guess my first question is to tell us a little about what is your role in North Carolina politics. Everybody that we've talked to and asked who we should talk to about politics in North Carolina and the Democratic Party has mentioned Bert Bennett's name among the first three.

Bert Bennett: Well, I was associated in a campaign in '60, the Sanford campaign, as party chairman, you know, I guess that there is normally just some rub-off. I don't know, to really be honest with you, I'm not in the mainstream as I was. I keep a finger in, I watch it, I like it. You've got to like it, or you wouldn't touch it.

J.B.: Were you active in politics before then?

Bennett: Well, let's see. I've always liked it, I came back as chairman of the party here and then went on as the manager for Sanford, so I've always had an interest. . . my role as such, other than liking it, I can't tell you more. I think I have a pretty good nose for it. I like Walter, he's gifted, I don't know your background as much. I just know you by reputation. A beautiful race you all ran,

that first two rounds. And your latest is the only one I know about, because I haven't kept up with your history. But it was a honey. But I haven't any ambition to run, to be appointed, I like to see good people in, really.

J.B.: How did you become associated with Sanford?

Bennett: Well, of course, I knew him at school, and whenever you take a person that wants to run on a state wide organization, I gather he looks to where, you know, your potential is so limited. You take a man who wants to be governor, he's looking probably for a businessman, as successful as possible, that can give the time. Since he is from the east, you look for some middle of the state type, from a larger county. Other than one about the same age, you would prefer one older, I would assume. But other, than that though. . .I just sort of fit the bill. So, how many did he have to choose from like that? So, this is how I became involved.

Walter De Vries: Had you been involved in a state wide campaign before that?

Bennett: No.

W.D.V.: But you had been to school with him?

Bennett: Yes. And I was chairman of the party here, in my county at the time.

J.B.: How did you conceive Sanford at that time? What did he represent that attracted you? Did you think he would be a good governor for North Carolina?

Bennett: Well, I think the first thing, as far as I look at it, for there are several things and I'm not sure there is any priority. But the first thing I look at, if a fellow has the gut desire. . .I'm talking about in here, more than in here. . .I'd have to say that's the first ingredient. If he has that real gut desire. And you can smell it early. You can tell it if he's eaten up with being whatever he's running for. I'd say that's my first. If you have it, it soon comes out. For example, I think that ya'll's opponent in the last round, Taylor say, I think he spent the first part of his campaign telling people how tired he was. Well, people don't give a damn how tired he was. They could care less, friends more so than enemies or people on the street. They want to know how well it's going, or what he's doing, but not how tired he is. And I think he spent a lot of time telling people how tired he was. It's that gut desire, that's one. Can he win? You don't just throw it out the window, can he win? I've fought losing causes, they're all right for awhile, but it's not a steady diet. You've got to have a winner occassionally. You can't be always on that losing cause side. With the association you have, can you sell him to the people? That's a key. Can you sell him? Does he have the stability, the make-up to be a good office-holder, that which he is seeking. That he's not an embarrassment to where you're trying to push him and shove him. All those things.

W.D.V.: Well, do you find many candidates that meet those standards?

Bennett: Yes. I don't touch them if I don't, let me put them that

way. Or, if you touch them, I know I've got it. I touched Preyor the second round, you know, he had no chance the second round. That's '64, in the second round. I thought he could win the first and he did. I gave out a lot of time, I spent about a year in that, by the way. About a year for Sanford. About six months for Hunt. When you say "spend", well, "basically spend." You sit here, and you don't. . . I sit here more, I don't stay in the mainstream. I've learned, as I said to you, I'm not as much in there as I was in the '60's. Not now. But yes, you find them, you look to that and you look to your alternatives. How deeply do I get involved? And this is the reason you ask the question. . . "What is my role?" I'd have to say my role is. . . there are very few that have state wide connections that stay somewhat active and I have. Winning candidates and losing candidates. But somehow or another, we've pretty well kept. . . I don't say in a group or dedicated, but we've kept in touch. There are not many that you can go to that have a state wide network. And what makes them tick? Your people as well as the opposition. How to manoeuvre politically in a county or any hundred counties. I basically, as you say, like it. Life's been good to me, as I say, I feel I'm gifted, to be honest. I have a lot of confidence politically, I feel I can give some of this back to the right ones, that want it. And under those guidelines, I'll point out three or four things that I watch. I don't want a crook, I don't want somebody to tell me something and

then do another. I want to defend one and know he's the right one to go and the right one to serve if he wins. I've always found that if one lies, he'll lie to another and if you cross one, he'll cross again, you know. So, all of these things add up to. . .my role? My role is sort of free. There's no string attached to it that I would have to be paid off in any way. I have no business with the state. I'm not looking for a damn thing. There's satisfaction. And it is, as you all know. You can package it and manoeuvre it. It's a challenging situation, at best. But nothing will beat it as far as any challenge. Because it's something that is every day different. And to head it, either to indirectly head it or really do it. So, I think you probably, just to be real honest, that it's probably that I'm trying to give back a little bit of that which has been given to me. But I think that I can do better than I could in many other fields. I'm not gifted or talented in brains in other ways, but in this way, I can give.

J.B.: Where in school did you know Sanford?

Bennett: Well, he was at Chapel Hill and I was at Chapel Hill. I happened to be president of the student body there one year, my last year. He was two or three years ahead of me and I sort of liked him at that time. . .

W.D.V.: Who ran your campaign for student body president? Or did you run it?

Bennett: Nobody. It was just a group of people, I can't. . .well,

let's say. . .yeah, there was. Bo Reynolds, I've even forgotten who. But I believe he was. . .I believe I even had co-chairman, but I think I've even forgotten who. That's so far back.

W.D.V.: Did you run for state wide office?

Bennett: No.

W.D.V.: Did you run for any office?

Bennett: I ran one time for the senate here, in '66, maybe? I felt like it might be a pretty good time to serve, that it would bring me into the senate, I thought, where I would have no political obligations and. . .I would not want to serve in the senate, say, if Sanford was governor. Because I'd be looked to to stamp whatever it was. I wouldn't want that role. But then, when Dan Moore. . .I did not support him. I thought this would be a good time, not just to be an enemy, but I thought it would be a good time to serve. And then of course, I got by with no opposition in the primary here and was pretty well, you know, thought I was set to go in. Then, they had this backlash, a real backlash and everybody here was defeated, but one, on the Democratic ticket. So, I got weighed in by, I think, twenty votes or thirty votes, or something. So, I got defeated.

J.B.: What caused that backlash?

Bennett: Oh Lord, I don't know. But it really hit here and in several of the Piedmont counties.

J.B.: Guilford and Person?

Bennett: Yeah. It really took them all, just wiped out everything.

Sheriff, Clerk of Courts, just anything that was running on the Republican ticket won during that backlash. I don't know what it all was, just a backlash.

J.B.: Was this backlash in part a southern reaction to the Johnson administration?

Bennett: I think that was some, no question about it. You just name it, you know.

J.B.: Looking back through this whole twenty-five year period that we're covering, what has been the major changes in North Carolina politics that you can point out. . .1948 to now?

Bennett: Well, I wasn't active in '48. I was just a bystander until 1959. So, really, I not equipped to say back in there.

J.B.: Well, let me ask you this question then, about the Sanford administration? What do you think has been the most significant contribution of that administration? And also, what has been the lasting impact of it?

Bennett: Well, I'd have to say probably in the field of education where, as you know, there have been many innovations. Community colleges, technical colleges, two or three of these things like the Advancement Schools, the School of the Arts, the Governor's School. These innovations in education. He was known for education, and I think lived up to it. He got the support of them, I'd have to say that there's no question that that's where he was known best and liked best and admired best. They still, I think, speak of him

as the start of a better educational system in this state. And I'd have to say that this is it. And particularly these community colleges and technical schools that have really blossomed. And I think that he did a hell of a lot in that field.

W.D.V.: Well, how about the impact of his administration on the politics of this state. Whenever we go someplace to talk to people, we hear from people who were identified with his campaign or his his administration, and they still maintain contacts. Maybe the contacts that you have are the same, but why is it that from that period of time these contacts lasted and these people are still involved in politics, where you don't find that with Dan Moore or even Bob Scott?

Bennett: That's correct. Well, I think Sanford is by nature, like so many of them, he loves it. And he works at it. And he had that knack and at the time to bring a tremendous amount of people around him that were never involved. The war was over, the ten years to make money or to be into something. It wasn't like '45, '46 or '48, you know, to be running when the war was not really settled. A whole group of people, as you are talking about, that he got involved, and I think that's probably it. He got so many people involved. And his great love for it, and he has a good nose for it. But it's true that they have kept their involvement and every time you look or talk to somebody today, it seems they were involved in the Sanford administration, or his campaign.

W.D.V.: What is there about Sanford that does that? We don't find that with any other governor.

Bennett: Well, I think he likes it better. I don't say that he likes it better than, say, Scott. But I think that Sanford's make-up is different. Well, I can't give you. . . he just works at it. And I think that he's worked somewhat at keeping his ties since then. If you would question it, say, his running against Wallace for that office, I would say that I think that hurt bad.

W.D.V.: Can we go back to that? Why did he do that?

Bennett: I don't know. Wanted to be President. The longest shot on earth, but he was really willing to take it, I gather.

J.B.: We get the impression that almost every one of his old advisors that he turned to said, "Don't do it."

Bennett: This is always the case when you lose. I don't know how many would have told you that if he had won. By some chance, if he had been President, you wouldn't have found many to say that. I want to say that I think this is generally true. It's like when you lose a campaign, my God, you can find. . . there's nothing better than those Monday morning quarterbacks. And everyone has a different theory why.

J.B.: This wouldn't have been the case, say, with Richardson Preyer when he was running for governor. He wasn't running against the advice of people, his close supporters?

Bennett: No, and of course the difference there, you can tell a lot of them over in the Richardson Preyer campaign why he lost. You know,

you get how he could have won. The question really was why. . .I can't tell really. I think that Terry Sanford had in mind that long shot possibility and he was willing to take it. I personally think it was wrong, but who am I to say. I wasn't out there, I'm not on that Washington scene, etc.

J.B.: Did it hurt the Democratic Party in North Carolina?

Bennett: I think possibly so. I don't think it helped anybody. Most of all, I could care less about anything else except Sanford himself. I felt personally felt like at that time, Sanford was probably North Carolina's most influential Democrat. I didn't feel like in any camp, faction of the Democratic Party, wherever. . .Muskie, Humphrey, or wherever, that Sanford wasn't the one that you would contact for North Carolina or the south, or what. And I think he had so much going for him and what he wanted in the future, I couldn't say. . .I don't think he particularly had plans. But this such a long shot. It wasn't worth the gamble. As he know, in my conversation on several occasions.

J.B.: Do you think the fact that he was sort of the symbol of North Carolina Democrats and then running against George Wallace in the primary helped break loose eastern North Carolina, Wallace country, to the Republicans in the general election?

Bennett: Possibly so. I don't know whether if Terry had to do it all over again he would take the same steps. I'm not sure. I'm not

sure he visualized Wallace running, at the time he made his decision. I'm not even sure he visualized that, a head to head confrontation. With no others in it. I don't think he could have ever made his decision thinking he had a fair chance of losing North Carolina. I don't see how anybody could do that. So, I say that I'm not sure that with the sequence of events, if he had to do it over again, if he would do the same. I hate to see it, I don't think that he lost his friendship with a number of people, they all like him, they admire him, he's a nice person. Really, he's a genuinely nice person. He likes people and he likes to help people. He's got a heart of gold. God knows how much he did of his own. So many times, every Tom, Dick and Harry would. . .well, he basically has a heart of gold. I don't think there's any question about that. With the limelight and all these other things, somehow or another, he's still remained that with that human touch of kindness. He's still got in his heart to listen to people, pouring out their troubles and he'll see what he can do for people. And I think they sense that, like you do with any other people, I think that's kept people around him. That's why I think he's maintained his ~~his~~ role as such and probably could do the same thing tomorrow.

W.D.V.: You mean that the same people that have believed in him, a part of the so-called Sanford organization are. . .in other words, it still hasn't really hurt him?

Bennett: I don't believe so. I believe that if there is a reason, now

they didn't crank up on that Presidential. . .they worried about it. . .

J.B.: How about in the '76 Presidential campaign. . .you know, the primary then?

Bennett: I don't believe so, to be honest. Because I think that he's lost the bid once in the Wallace thing and I don't see anything that has changed, basically, to give him much position in '76 than there was in '72.

J.B.: Then, you don't see any great enthusiasm building?

Bennett: I don't, no. And I don't know whether he will try it or seek it, but I don't. I think it would be hard for him to get even his people, our people, however you want to speak about it, to get them enthused again.

J.B.: Is part of the problem that these are the same people who are going to be active in North Carolina political campaigns and you've got a governor's race and so forth going and that's where the energy should be spent?

Bennett: I think that part of it, the main thing is that they can't see the reason for it. It's such a long shot. If their talents are going to be used, maybe they can be used differently. So many of them did go down the road for him last time, they just can't go down again. It doesn't lessen their respect or love for him, but I doubt if they would do it.

W.D.V.: Well, as you say, yeah, without them, he really can't do it.

Bennett: I don't think so.

J.B.: Now, if he wanted to run for governor again, say, just hypothetically, do you think that whole group would come back and support him on something like that?

Bennett: Well, I think it depends. . .

J.B.: Or senator?

Bennett: I think it depends on which one. Because, it would be harder, because he's given no indication of moving in either of those directions. And so many of those people have gotten involved, in one way or another, in other candidates or potential candidates and so forth. It would be harder, it would complicate it, it would make it difficult, it may lay out, be embarrassing, but I would say that it would be rather difficult for him to move into the senator or the governor's race, just by the nature of his not being involved at a state level. And he has given, I gather, no indication that he is interested at the state level, other than building a good party, stronger base for whatever the future might be. Not necessarily for him.

W.D.V.: Yet, he is interested in the Presidency?

Bennett: I don't think there would be any question about that.

I don't. . .you mean in '76? I would think so, if you looked at it in '72, you would certainly think that with the Nixon downfall and the McGovern downfall, why not him as a possible darkhorse. I would say he probably does.

W.D.V.: Well, unless he mobilizes that former organizational support fairly soon, it'll all be gone by '76.

Bennett: I think that's correct.

J.B.: These '72 elections in North Carolina, where the Republicans won the governorship and the senate seat for the first time in this century, do you view that as a fluke or does that represent a significant shift in North Carolina politics?

Bennett: I don't think it's a fluke. And I think that it's a . . . we in North Carolina, it's a two party system. I think so many of the so-called Democrats of the past, that we've had a solid base type, a lot of that base is more or less Republican orientated to start with. Then with all the rise of labor and the blacks, really, I think, so many of the Democratic base that were looking for somewhere to go but yet didn't want to be called Republicans, maybe. I don't know. So, to answer, yes, I think it's here. I don't think it's a fluke and I think there will be hard races every single time. Primaries as well as general elections. I don't look to any twenty or thirty or even eight or as the Republicans just holding to. I think that the odds will be against them in '76.

J.B.: What do you think the Democrats are going to have to do to come back?

Bennett: Well, you're talking about in North Carolina. Well, it's, I think unfortunately, and I'm not sure anything can be done about it, but you really need today what you call a strong leader. You're

really not sure what direction the party is going today. Though I think personally, just sitting on the side watching, I believe the leadership is doing a good job, from what I can see, of trying to raise some money and being involved. And a number of different things. I think they're doing well. I do feel like, however, that the person that is head of a party or group is for one person or faction, if he is, and somewhat the people who are seeking office and look to that, they have a tendency to shy away a little bit, thinking that all they are doing is building up that faction for opposition in the future. I don't know if there is anything that can be done about it. I think that is probably just the name of the game. I don't think there is any question that we just can't have the image of McGovern type, regardless of what one thinks of McGovern, I don't think that there is any question that we just can't win with that in North Carolina. And you say moving back to whatever it is, black quotas, broader base, I don't think you can get rid of the blacks, you know, just as such. It's a hell of a hat to wear, when you want all that under one hat, you know, and try to move with it and make them all happy. With the blacks and the labor. . . I don't know. It's tough.

J.B.: Do you see any individual putting the party bak together? Do you see any individual emerging as party leader in North Carolina?

Bennett: Not necessarily, and as far as I'm personally concerned, this again is one person, I personally, on Skipper, I don't see that there's anything wrong Skipper's interests. And I hope he continues,

because I think he likes it.' I can't think of a better person to sort of head the party than Skipper as such, today. I do feel like that if one like Skipper, say, decides to run again and has made his mind up to run again, I think he ought to probably step aside and let it take its course and not try to use the party as such to build his own thing. And this would be true of any candidate. I'm not saying that I don't think he should run again, I think if he does decide to, I think he would be wise in getting out of the role of the so-called leader of the party.

J.B.: We've had one person describe the North Carolina Democratic Party as being like a "bird with no head and no body, but with many, many wings, all flapping at the same time."

Bennett: I think when you lose, that's true. I don't think it will always be that way when you lose. And you have a Republican governor for the first time. But I can't give you any better alternatives than what is more or less going on. Hell, I. . .if I was sitting there running it, I'm not sure how much I would do differently.

J.B.: Do you see what political role you may have in the future in the Democratic Party.

Bennett: No, I wouldn't. . .you're talking about. . .well, for instance, let's just assume that they said, "Well, how about you're taking it over?" I think that would be an error for the Democratic Party and I wouldn't accept it, the chairmanship, say. Because of my role last time with Jim Hunt, it would have to be assumed that I

would be in that corner in the future. And whatever I would do would be viewed as for the Democrats as a whole, and I don't think that would be fair. And I think I'm labeled as such, and I don't think that would be good to lead the party and take hold of it and so forth. So, I wouldn't accept it and it would be wrong of them to offer it, under any conditions, I think that would be an error.

J.B.: Do you think that in 1976 there is likely to be a large number of candidates for governor in the Democratic primary?

Bennett: Well, you say large, you are talking about more than four, say?

J.B.: I'm thinking of more than three, anyway.

Bennett: I doubt it. If it's more than three, I'm not sure that it would make a lot of difference, I may be wrong.

J.B.: What do you think is now the effect of race on politics in North Carolina?

Bennett: Well, not like it was, by any means. But it's there.

J.B.: Was that the key factor in Helms's victory, or not?

Bennett: I would think so. They viewed Helms as going to eliminate the busing, all the government debt, you know, all the things that sound good to most southerners. Just like Wallace sort of talked their language, you know, they liked what they heard. They didn't know Helms as well in the west because they didn't hear WRAL and his, whatever in the hell he called his crap. . .viewpoint, or. . .I've forgotten whatever it was. I used to listen to it. But that reached

the man in the street. He was on the side of, I think, pretty much the vote, the way it goes in this state. Some, as I think it went in this state, to Moore and to Wallace, Helms, there is a . . .you can't argue with it. And what they said and what they preached and how they came across.

J.B.: What do you think the eastern North Carolina voters are going to do in the future? For the first time, it really went Republican last time. In some cases, it was decisive in the state races. Do you think the Democrats will get that vote back or it has pretty much changed over to Republican?

Bennett: I don't think so, necessarily. For what you hear and what you say, with the anti-Nixon feeling, and I really haven't gotten a feeling for the Holshouser thing yet, maybe ya'll can tell me, but I haven't got a real feel on the plus or minus for him. . .but I wouldn't think that it is overwhelmingly plus. That is, you know, a real leader as such and that he has been a real plus in office. Now, I don't know whether that is my own or. . .I sort of have a feeling that he may be status quo, you know? Sort of like Dan Moore. If that prevails in '74 and '76 as it is today, I think that it will probably go pretty well back solid into Democratic control.

J.B.: What do you think will be the key indicator in 1974 elections insofar as North Carolina is concerned? Legislative races, congressional races, the U.S. Senate race, or. . .?

Bennett: I don't think the congressional races will. I don't know

why, but I really feel like the Washington thing will affect very little the congressional races. I may be entirely wrong, I can't tell you why, but I don't believe that there will be any congressmen in a district elected or not elected on the Nixon-Watergate scandal. But I do feel like it will probably have some bearing on legislative, Raleigh races and of course, you'll get a pretty good feel and should have by a year from now, from the senatorial campaign.

J.B.: Would those legislative races next year be a good indicator of Holshouser's public confidence factor?

Bennett: I would think so. I don't know how much he plans to get involved, but if he gets involved as he did in the chairman of the party's race, if he gets to that level of trying to do work to get some Republicans in, it would have to be. He would have put his name on the line and there's no question, if he's successful, it's on the plus side and he'll bring in some of his people, of his influence and a sign of moving in some of his candidates. . .it's got to have a direct bearing on it, I would think.

W.D.V.: How do you personally asses his administration, so far?

Bennett: Well. . .

W.D.V.: You said it was something like Dan Moore's.

Bennett: Well, again, you know, I'm not impressed to be honest. There's an impression that he's sort of a nice fellow, honest, maybe will be able to do the right thing. . .I think that probably still holds true. He's not going to rock the boat very bad. That's why

I say he's still probably on the plus side, as far as ratings go. But the people he has around him, that he's brought in, are very unimpressive. I've seen very little done. You know, one, two, three. In fact, I haven't seen anything done. He's pretty good at giving a grin and lighting the Christmas tree, but there's more to it than that, being governor. I'm not sure he's. . . I think he's pretty much the image of a nice fellow, but he's a ~~damn~~ Republican, he's first and always. I think his total allegiance is there. He's brought up, he knows it, the mountain politics of it, and that's going to come first with him. He's knows it and he's dedicated to it. He's brought up, he's totally a Republican. And I think he'll look at a lot of it as what is best for the Republican Party instead of what is best for the state. I think he would have a tendency to weigh it to the Republicans than he would to the best of the state. Whereas I think that Bowles would have been entirely opposite. I would think that Bowles could have cared less about the so-called Democratic Party as such, if it was not right for the state. Period. And he would have acted accordingly. I don't think that Holshouser will. And I think that Bowles would have brought in Republicans, if they were better people and kept better people as such than Holshouser has in playing the game.

J.B.: Do you think that Holshouser rode in on Jesse Helms's coattails?

Bennett: No. I don't think it hurt him, but I don't think so.

W.D.V.: Can you give us your evaluation of that election? What you

think caused the defeat of Bowles and Galifinakis?

Bennett: Well, on the Galifinakis thing. . .I think you have, like all of you know, I think the Nixon popularity, the Nixon visit. Nick wasn't well known. He was a tremendous campaigner, one on one, the finest in the world. But you <sup>can't</sup> ~~can~~ run a hundred counties on one on one. Lack of money, no organization, practically none. He didn't need it in the primary because his opposition was just about as bad off, plus the age factor and I think that brought him in then. Helped Nick to win. But I'd say that he was just sort of caught up in the swing, somewhat in the fall with the McGovern-Nixon thing. Nick wasn't too well known, Helms was. . .Wallace was talking in the state and with Sanford. . .it was just pretty much that same kind of vote was going for Helms like it did against Nick. I'm not sure that Nick could have done a great deal about it. That's what I'm saying, I think he was beat and I'm not sure that money would have made the difference, if organization would have made a difference or if issues would have. I think he was just caught and he was beat, period. On the Bowles, if I had. . .God, you name it, it's there. Why you lose, and you well know. I'll just have to say that I thought Bowles ran a beautiful race, the first two rounds. Really beautiful. I don't know much he could have done, of course, you never know much you could do differently when you win. But that was a beautiful race from nowhere to where he came. I personally feel like, I'm not sure how deep your role, I just assume, yours and Bowles, I'll have to say that I couldn't find anywhere else. Organization, anything else. Spasmodic, you know

just a little bit here and there. But it was basically Bowles, the money and the lay-out of the campaign as he came over, that won it. There wasn't even a close second, as I saw it. You had all that Nick had going against him, but I do feel like Skipper could have won.

Again, I was not in the camp, I do not know, you know, I'm not in the inner circle, so it's really not fair of me, because I do not know all the facts. If you say, that you had called us in, you say, "us, we", I think that we would have played it a lot differently. If you had one thing, I think, other than the Nixon visit, Nixon's popularity, I think the second round probably did you more harm than anything else. It exposed him, he had to spend the money, he came across, people got a little tired again, I think that probably did more harm than any one thing. It's your second round that you shouldn't have had. There was no reason for it, but it hurt. The spoiler, he spoiled it, there's no question about that. I think he finally beat you in the fall with it. Then, for whatever it was, right or wrong, after the second round, with the victory, then you had a number of Democratic candidates all the way up and down the line, Council of State, Congress, etc. For whatever it's worth, you had the Taylor crowd, but somehow, they all by and large, got the feeling that Bowles was going to run his campaign, period. Now, I'm not saying that you ought to have embraced McGovern or what. But somehow or another, they felt no leadership, no guidance, nothing except that they were not wanted. And I think enough of this, and it doesn't take a lot when you have a hell of a swing

anyhow, that you can't afford. . .I think that Bowles figured that he had it won. There was no way for him to be beat. And as such, he didn't need to do anything, anywhere, except pick up money. And basically, that's what I picked up. Money, and forget any other thing. Five minutes, a thousand dollars. . .all that rubbed off. It didn't set well.

(end of side A of tape)

Bennett: . . .there was no enthusiasm, none. Now, I don't think that was purposefully done on Bowles, because he's not that way by nature. But his people, evidently, left the impression pretty much around the state, "give us your money, it might be just the calling card for you if you need something. The bigger the donation. . .we might open your letters and if bigger, you may even get a personal interview. But everything else, forget, we don't need more or less your vote, your help, we've got it won." Now, I think that probably was the key.

W.D.V.: So, essentially, it was his relationship with the party. . .

Bennett: Not the party.

W.D.V.: The people who had really not supported him in the first and second primary.

Bennett: Not necessarily. Because people were running themselves and people were supporting other candidates like Nick, Hunt or , you name it. There's a lot more candidates than just the governor.

W.D.V.: Well, if that's the case, he's built up an animosity that will make it extremely difficult for him to get the nomination again, wouldn't

it?

Bennett: Yes.

W.D.V.: Unless that's somehow papered over.

Bennett: Yes.

W.D.V.: I don't think you. . .

Bennett: And that's right. You asked the question, but I think that it would be in error for you in any consultation work. . .you know in my conversation, if you want me to be honest with you and give it to you as I see it, I would not want this type of conversation used.

W.D.V.: I'm not a consultant to anybody.

Bennett: Well, you know, I. . .

W.D.V.: Well, no, what we were trying to get at is an assessment. Because that's a reoccurring theme that we come across.

Bennett: There's no question. . .and right or wrong, I can't guess what you people want to know. . .I told Skipper for instance, my role and what it would be, on many occasions, must have been four or five different times. What it was going to be. But he knew the facts, whether he agreed with them or not, but he knew where I would be. But what I don't understand, and a lot of people don't, they wondered why, from the second primary to the general election, all he had to do, or his people, was to call. . .I like Skipper. I'd have done anything for Skipper.

W.D.V.: Why weren't you asked to help in that?

Bennett: That's my question. Not one call. In any way, shape or

form. From the second primary to the general election. Yes, excuse me. The Sunday before, he was in South Carolina, getting ready to take the plane to Asheville to make his tour around the state that Monday. He called and wanted to know what I knew. That's the first call I got. I didn't know anything then. The bird had flown, the horse was out of the barn. I knew nothing, said, "Hell, just forget it." But I thought we could have done him a lot of good. Because I watched this thing. The animosity building up, the "not give a damn, I've got it won attitude." Not only with politicians and Taylor supporters, but other supporters, people who really wanted to. I found a lot of them with Scott, a lot with Taylor, and a lot with Hunt, a lot of them with Sanford. In fact, by and large, he was running a race, not against Holshouser, but anybody who had been a part of the organization, or the office or what. I don't know what. But right or wrong, the impression was left. So, when you have enough of that, it sort of build up and it doesn't take much when it's close to know it off.

J.B.: Do you think this results in a [stay-at-home] vote, in view of the presidential election not being a contest. . .there was a definite fall off in the North Carolina vote that was much more of a fall off than the national fall off, or the south-wide fall off.

Bennett: Oh, I think so. I think it's a difference whether you win or lose. And I think that type, whether you sit at home or you do not give enthusiastically. . .you know. . .

J.B.: Well, there was a lot of this. . .what is sometimes referred to as the "courthouse crowd", the group of people who don't control politics anymore in North Carolina, but do make some contribution and do get out some votes.

Bennett: Well, you'd always rather have them with you than against you, more or less, particularly in the general election.

J.B.: And did that group just sort of sit on their hands and. . .?

Bennett: No question, in my opinion. Now, of course, I'm not sure of just one, you can name it. . .gosh, no. But when all that is accumulated, and after doing so well, I think they look for a leader as such, with his hat in his hand. . .and a politician is a sensitive person. Skipper is not a politician. He hasn't the nose of a politician and he hasn't the feeling of a politician. He really doesn't know what makes them tick. And he will never have that feeling, like a Sanford. Sanford knows how to handle them, grab their arm, or pull them aside, or make the call. He has the nose and he'll always have it and Skipper will never acquire it. And Skipper to this day, doesn't really know what in the hell happened. Well, what happened. . .there's no question in my mind. . .instead of his hat in his hand and going to Taylor and his people and talking and going the last mile. . .and that's all these people want to do, not to be ignored. Why they, and I'm not talking about Bert Bennett, but they knew of my history and my relationship with Skipper Bowles and they'd say, "Have you heard from Skipper?" Well, what was I going to tell them, except, "No."

I wasn't going to say anything more than, "No, I haven't." So, what do you hear? "Well, I don't know." But I continued to pick up that his people felt like it was best not to get Bert Bennett involved. It might hurt them. Well, as a fellow told him one time, it didn't hurt Hunt.

J.B.: What kind of a politician is Hunt? We haven't really interviewed him yet.

Bennett: I think he has the ingredients that I just told you about.

W.D.V.: The kind of ingredients that you listed that you looked for?

Bennett: Yes.

J.B.: You mean that he is electable as the Democratic candidate for governor?

Bennett: Yes.

W.D.V.: Do you think that he can take anybody in the primary?

Bennett: Uh-huh.

W.D.V.: In '76?

Bennett: Today. If he can get out of these things. . .he might fall in a pit hole, through no fault of his own or what. You know how these things go. Maybe initially he's labeled or. . .but today. . . just like I thought that probably Muskie was, I didn't see how anybody could overtake Muskie really, looking at it, and I wasn't in the middle, but I'm talking about as an outsider. I just didn't see how Muskie could be beat, but he did get beat. Today, I don't see how Hunt can, but he could, I'm not saying that. And he might fool some

of us that he might not be, under pressure, the leader and all the things that are down the road. He's getting the test now, he's going to know the hurdles and he'll know more by the time he gets ready. Hell, as of this day, he is, but he's got a lot of hurdles to go over and the people will have a lot of look at him. People, politicians, other candidates.

J.B.: What do you see as the role of organized labor in the future of politics in North Carolina?

Bennett: Not a great deal. I don't know why their candidate had to run last time, that to me is a poor way for him to be a head of it, to me. Maybe that's what they wanted, but I doubt it. I'm not sure that he utilized the best efforts of labor. I'm not sure that he didn't put himself first and labor second, that's what I'm saying. I think they can, I think they are more influential now than they were ten years ago.

J.B.: Why?

Bennett: Well, I think they are more politically active, I don't think that it's the stigma that it was ten years ago. My God, if you had labor with you and with any money, it was about like the kiss of death. But I gather that most candidates today, if there was a thousand donation or something, it would not be necessarily a stigma, you know, that it was just about impossible to list it, or be in that corner. You preferred for them not to endorse you.

J.B.: You think that day is gone?

Bennett: I do. Yeah, I don't think it's that significant. It's more so than having a black on your campaign staff and etc., you know, whereas you used to hide them, but it's not true today.

J.B.: Where do campaign contributions come from in North Carolina? Who pays for political campaigns?

Bennett: Well, the only three that I can just tell you about, well let's take back in Sanford's. That was a broad base of support. There was just no one basic group or person or thing. It was broad.

J.B.: You ran that campaign. Were quarters set up in every county for fund raising?

Bennett: No question.

J.B.: Was that the way it was done?

Bennett: That's the way it was done.

J.B.: Did you have a fund raiser in each county to head that up?

Bennett: The best you could, yeah.

J.B.: But that was a departure from the past, am I correct?

Bennett: I assume so.

J.B.: Has it been that way since?

Bennett: Yes. No, I would say that Bowles didn't have much of that. I may be wrong. I don't think that he got a great deal out of county quotas. But 99% of Hunt's came from county quotas. I would assume probably. . .

J.B.: Within the counties, are banks still the major source of campaign funds?

Bennett: No. That's way over-rated.

J.B.: How about industry?

Bennett: No, that's way over-rated. Let me put it this way. . .or rather I haven't seen it.

J.B.: Well, is it usually the same people? And is it usually people who give to a number of candidates?

Bennett: Well, I think there's some of that, but I would say that Scott, probably 90% of his came from counties. Sanford's, probably 95, Preyor, probably 90. . .now, Preyor had money, so he had some family that would give him money, like five or ten thousand dollars, which would get him off to some sort of a start. Then, your home area is an important base. A lot of them in your home town, home county, that's a fairly good base, if you have the right set-up, you can get a pretty good hunk there. And that's always good. Or family. This was Bowles's case and it was the same in Preyor's case. Not true of Sanford and Scott, and say Hunt. Of the course the raising the money, it follows so closely his ability to win. So close to his ability to win. If you think you've got a winner and the public doesn't, or the politicians or the giver, you have to get that money and you put that out front to show them that you've got a winner. Then, the money usually comes in. Unless you've got some dedication, it's difficult to raise money when you haven't got a winner.

J.B.: What do you consider a large giver in North Carolina?

Bennett: In the governor's race? Well, a thousand dollars.

J.B.: Will many people give a thousand dollars and above if they haven't actually met the candidate personally and talked to him?

Bennett: I don't think so.

J.B.: So, a lot of it is the candidate selling himself, is that right? Am I correct on that?

Bennett: Yes. There's exceptions, but by and large a thousand dollar giver, they want to eyeball him. Then, I think the candidate ought to eyeball them, to see what's behind the thousand, you know.

W.D.V.: In the fourteen years that you've been in North Carolina politics, have you seen any major changes in campaigns? The way things are done? Are things done differently now?

Bennett: Yeah, I think this last go around with Bowles was radically different. He took the media and money and won it in a primary. Without money, I don't think he would have had a chance on earth, and without the right media, I don't think he would have had a chance on earth. And I say the right media, I'm not sure that the same could have been done for Johnny Walker and won. . . the man that ran in the lieutenant governor's race. I don't believe, because he spent a lot of money and I don't think that money paid off. So, it's just not money and the media, you've got to have, you've got to be in tune with the candidate saying and doing and coming across. At the same time, you know.

J.B.: Do you think that type of politics is here to stay?

Bennett: Yes, I do. By all means. More so than the organization, the courthouse crowd. More so than ever before and more independents and less party. You talk to these young ones today, you really can't explain to them about party. It makes absolutely no sense. The independent is what makes sense, is what I feel it today. That is, with the coming generation. I think they feel like the primary is sort of a waste of time. Why shouldn't you vote for whoever you want to regardless of whatever election it is?

J.B.: Is that a failure of the educational system?

Bennett: Yes. But I think that we've had a good system, basically. But I'm not sure, because I'm not familiar with the thing, how much of that's done in school. But I'm not sure if a poll, I think that if you had a poll among young people of 17 to 18, the 25, 26, 27, 28 year old type, they could care less about party. If you asked right, they would all give the independent type of thinking rather than merit to party.

J.B.: What did you do in World War II?

Bennett: I was in the navy. On a LST, that's a landing craft. I was in Europe for two years.

J.B.: I want to ask you this question, because it's one that somewhat intrigues me, before World War II, the south as an area had pretty much stagnation politically, culturally, socially. World War II came along and an awful lot of people in your generation throughout

the south, emerged five or ten years later in politics and are still very active. I can see the same thing in South Carolina, John West, Fritz Hollings, Bob McNair, Terry Sanford, the people who came along after Sanford. . . what was the impact of World War II and its experience on your generation, really? In political terms? Was there any conscious feeling when you came back that you should change things to bring the south into the modern era?

Bennett: Well, I. . . yes. I think people like me, and I think a lot of them, more or less the south and its attitude toward the black, that was one of the things that you tried to correct. It was a tough label in the fifties, the sixties, God knows, just about the kiss of death. It's not a real stigma, as we mentioned while ago. . . but I think that some of us always kept in mind, that you know, that the attitude of. . . what we saw in the war and the southern attitude, or what image we in the south had toward the black, of trying to do something about that. And I think we did. Of making the black's road a little easier in his coming about. And it was a tough road, as you know, particularly in the south. But it's just a different atmosphere today.

J.B.: Well, can you see it though in terms of sort of freeing the south from the politics of race, from pre-occupation with race?

Bennett: I'd say that was one, not necessarily all. I think involvement of people. I think a lot of people want to be involved in politics. I think it fascinates a lot of people.

J.B.: Yeah, but for what end?

Bennett: Well, some. . . God knows, you name it. You know, some social, some economically, it's just all kinds that want to be involved politically. And it's trying to get them involved. It's the same basic thing. All these people want to be involved, really, deeply. You take Bowles's campaign in the fall. . . but with the bastion of the family union, they felt they were not wanted. And it was very obviously, I thought. Not just the highest echelon, like Taylor, but the lower ones. And just a real. . . I just don't understand why.

J.B.: Was there a feeling that it was just a question of arrogance involved?

Bennett: He had it made. The cake was in the corner and there wasn't room enough for anybody else around the table. Basically, that was it. Why get involved with any strings in any way, shape or form?

J.B.: Did you ever hear the "white meat, dark meat" story?

Bennett: Yes.

J.B.: Was that repeated. . .

Bennett: I haven't the slightest idea. But it rang a bell with most that read it. I don't know whether it was right or wrong or not. But it's really immaterial, because most of them thought it. The attitude was such that you didn't have to say it. When you win a primary, more is required of you, not less. And it's the same

thing, the more successful, the more darts they shoot at you. We would have tried to take it in an entirely different tone of what he had. Not to take away, because, God, it was beautiful. But it just. . .not trying that "white meat, dark meat" sort of things. That's what beat him. And it's a shame too, because he would have been a good governor. He'd have made a lot of changes and the right changes and I think he would have helped North Carolina and he was. . . as I say, he would have been a good governor. Where he got this advice, because it's not by him by nature, I can't tell you. But it wasn't from us. Because the first thing to do is to get your opposition for you, because your friends will understand.

J.B.: That's just sort of a basic political rule there, right? He violated it.

Bennett: But he's never had the political nose and he'll never acquire it. He has a lot of great assets as a candidate as such, but as a politician and what makes them tick, he really has never been able to sense what makes them tick.

J.B.: How big a factor in North Carolina politics. . .

W.D.V.: Let's pursue this effort just a minute, **Jack**. Is there any way to acquire that trait? I mean, if you don't have it, is there a way to acquire it?

Bennett: No, but it's no difference from the business you run. I don't know anything about that computer back here, but I'm not going to try to run it, but I'm going to get me a computer man. And

nine-tenths of the time, it's to assess your assets and liabilities and sort of knowing that if you do not have it, to go to some that do have it. And he's in a political race, not a computer, he's in a political race and it's so sensitive to do things politically right. And a Sanford type could have given him that ingredient that he needed so badly in the fall. Not Scott, necessarily, though Scott is not a bad politician. But I think they were too deeply divided. I'm not sure that he could have trusted Scott, say. But he could have a Sanford type, in my opinion. To have tried to cultivate, not me necessarily, just a Sanford type. They could have got it for him.

J.B.: You're saying that he didn't perceive this weakness in himself?

Bennett: I would say that and if he didn't have it, he couldn't have acquired it and he should have hired it. Or sought some in that angle.

W.D.V.: And you said earlier that you don't think he's got it now.

Bennett: No.

W.D.V.: He doesn't perceive it now.

Bennett: No, I don't.

J.B.: What role do you see of religion playing in North Carolina politics?

Bennett: Not major, in regards. . .you mean on account of the liquor vote?

J.B.: No, I wasn't thinking in terms of that so much as say, in terms of Billy Graham, when he gives one of his endorsements by the

methods that he does endorse people, how big a factor is that?

Bennett: Well, I don't think it hurts, but I don't think it's the difference in whether you win or lose, necessarily. Maybe a close one, if you're sitting on the mountain top, it could tilt it.

J.B.: Walter, do you have anything else?

W.D.V.: Yeah. What changes would you make in North Carolina politics? Say in campaigning, or the way the elections are run, to make it better?

Bennett: Well, I would hope someday that we eliminate as soon as possible second primaries. I really think it's bad for the party, I think it's bad for the state, it's bad for the candidates. I can think of really nothing good in second primaries. And I would love to see, and have always been against them, not because I've been involved in winning and losing some, but I'd love to see them eliminated. I think that when you have a two party system as such, that the second primary goes so against the grain, it's a hard time to recover, money, the bitterness, all the things. . . I don't think you can afford a second primary, when you are in a party. I can't think of anything real good, except certain minorities, the tail trying to wag the dog, in the second primaries. In manoeuvring, buying off, taking up debts, all the crap that goes along with it. So, I'd love to see that eliminated. And take my chances on that. As far as money, you mentioned, I think in the future, with all the complications of Watergate and etc., I think we ought to have a real reporting of where it's coming from, the five hundred, the five thousand, whatever

it is, accountability and probably the candidates accountability of his assets and liability, you know, to know what he's got involved and where. I think it's wrong for a candidate, by and large, to have to rely so much on money that he gets himself directly or indirectly tied up with some string that shouldn't have been there. It's sort of hard to cut. So, I hope it takes less money and I think when you do that, and you have full scale reporting and the laws are right tough, I don't think you are going to have a great deal of violations. Because, money. . . people are reluctant to give if it's against the law. They will do anything, but they don't want to take any chance of being convicted. And that will eliminate or dry up the money. It did last time, I think. Other than that, no, I can't say a lot. I hope that we can continue a two party system and I hope we have good candidates and a strong party that will win next time. I'm not impressed with Holshouser, nor his people, nor his One Anderson type. But I'm not sure of how much of a role I'll have in there. You know of some, but I've lost a lot of the interest. I haven't that gut desire. It's hard for me not to have gone all out for Skipper, and it's hard for me to have told Terry that I couldn't go with him in that bid, but you know, it was tough. And he called eventually to say, "I've got bad news for you. " I said, "You mean you're going to run?" He said, "Yes." Well, he knew it was bad news. And I thought it was an error, still do. . . for someone of his talents, disposition, ability. I hated to see him hit that

stump. And I thought it was a stump he couldn't move.

J.B.: Because of Wallace?

Bennett: Well, I thought if the odds, and I don't know what the odds would be if Jimmy the Greek gave it, but even winning the nomination, I didn't think he had a chance of beating Nixon, even if he won the nomination, would he really win? I'm not so sure that he wouldn't have been worse off than Landon against Roosevelt. What was it, he had two states? He might not have carried any.

J.B.: How bad did he hurt himself in staying in that presidential thing after the primary in North Carolina?

Bennett: Well, I got the feeling that people never took him seriously. "What is he up to? What's behind it?" They never seriously conceived really, that he was a serious candidate. It was a throw-away-your-vote type.

J.B.: Well, I'm saying, particularly after the primary defeat in North Carolina. . .

Bennett: That, and then staying in there. Again, they didn't see it.

J.B.: Well, how much more did that cost him in credibility?

Bennett: Well, they wondered what in the hell was going on? Why stay in after that? God, if ever there was a lost cause, that was it. And this is why it would be hard for some of these people who did go into some states, who did go to Miami and so forth and so on, the thirty or fifty or seventy-five dedicated ones, if you called them

down there next week and met on running for President, I'm not sure that half of them wouldn't be "in the men's room" type, you know. Just have to take a powder.

W.D.V.: Well, what happened? He had all this good political sense, this good political nose and here he comes up to the most important political decision to take place, where he would really have valued your advice and others, because he told us that he had had advice from a lot of people, and why? It's just a puzzle to us, with all this advice and all this background and in politics all these years, he makes that decision?

Bennett: I don't know. Except, maybe because it's a high stake in the world and maybe it's worth it to him to throw it all there. And that's why, to me, knowing of his ability, it would be hard to believe that he would want to crank up again on a state level. Because I think that this did away with his being potentially a candidate again in this state. I think it hurt him a great deal.

W.D.V.: Up to that point, he had political predicability in a sense, I mean, he could weigh all the variables and you would know where he would come out. He would assess the situation and. . .

J.B.: Excuse me, there's just one more question and I think you can answer it. . .and that is, why didn't he run against Sam Ervin in '68?

Bennett: That decision was made, I think, when he took the job as President of Duke. I believe. . .wasn't that. . .yeah, that's it.

It was about that time, if I remember correctly. One of the stipulations, I believe I'm correct, was that he would not be a candidate in the next year's election.

W.D.V.: I think that's right, Jack. Because he told us that before he decided to go on the presidential thing, the board had to remove some kind of restriction against him.

Bennett: If I remember correctly, the Duke deal had on it the senatorial campaign, that he was not going to be involved and I believe that it stated that the presidential involvement, his being involved, whether as a candidate or otherwise, that he would not be restricted in the '72 campaign, which he was not.

J.B.: But hadn't he talked before that about running for the senate and running against Ervin?

Bennett: I don't think so. It was talked in the papers and otherwise, but I don't think he ever gave it any consideration, I think, with his commitment to Duke. This was '68.

J.B.: Right, I understand that. But in accepting the Duke position over running against Ervin, that's what. . .

Bennett: Well, now. . .

J.B.: Was it simply a question that the polls showed he couldn't win?

Bennett: No.

J.B.: I've heard that.

Bennett: I don't think so. Again, and I'm not sure of the facts, but when the Duke presidency came up, I think they had seven names,

they narrowed it and sorforth and so on, I don't believe that he ever thought he would ever be a serious contender for the presidency of Duke. I think his life was in politics and would have remained as such. And think over there, the Mary Seaman type really got in behind it and deeply involved and before you know it, I think it was down to two and they got pretty much of a. . .he was more involved than I think he thought. Then, when it got down to it, it was more or less on what conditions he would come in and I think he wrote the conditions as such that he did not think they would accept and I'm not sure what the conditions were. I think there was a long letter and a short letter. The short letter was saying, "No", which I favored, incidentally that he turn it down and stay in politics and we will look at them as they came along, whether '68 or '72 or what, but not at Duke. That didn't hit me as being any great springboard for anything. Of course his being a senator, as a springboard for anything that might come up, but anyhow, the short letter I remember was "No" and the long letter was the conditions. And I found out he sent the long letter. And then they must have come to terms and I understood the terms, more or less, and I can't tell you what his terms were, but one of theirs was that he not be involved in that senatorial campaign, but he could get invokæd in presidential. . .not senatorial forever, but I think the next one, against Sam Ervin. But I think he sort of backed into that more than he thought and he sort of came into it and he didn't know it or realize it until he was so involved with people like Mary Seamans

and others and didn't think they'd accept his terms. But some of us felt like he ought not to have taken it and stayed in the political game and where his love was. I think he felt that this was a greater springboard than it would have been as a practicing lawyer, or whatever, maybe just being ex-governor somewhere. And he may have been right.

J.B.: Well, do you think he would have run against Ervin if he hadn't been. . .

Bennett: I think he would have run against Ervin if it looked right. I don't think he ever would have if it didn't look right and there was no poll or such, to my knowledge, about whether he could beat Ervin or not. Or it might have been against Jordan. I have a feeling that Jordan wouldn't have run if Terry wanted to go. I don't he would have and I don't believe that Helms would have beat Terry. Well, you never know, you're just talking about speculation there. But I had a feeling that Sanford probably would not have run against Ervin with the conditions that existed at that time.

J.B.: What was the situation at that time, what were these conditions?

Bennett: I'd say that the conditions were too damn close, as far as putting his hat in the ring. Ervin might have been a favorite, or close to it, it might not have been worth the gamble to take him on and being beat at that time, when two years later the thing would have come up against Jordan, and to me, that was a cinch. Why take a chance when you've got a cinch maybe two years later, which I think

he could have had.

W.D.V.: You mean four years later, wasn't it?

Bennett: Well, four years, then.

J.B.: Is there anything else you wanted to comment on that we haven't discussed?

Bennett: No, how about you bringing me up to date. You can cut the thing off now, but bring me up to date.

( end of tape )