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Interview with Henry Wilkins, state representative from Pine Bluff, Arkansas, June 16, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: I would like first, Mr. Wilkins, if you'd just tell us a little about your own background and then how you got involved in politics.

Wilkins: Well, I was born here in Arkansas, in Pine Bluff, in the city. And with the exceptions of the time I taught at the University of Pittsburgh and worked at Phelps-Stokes Foundation in New York and the Korean conflict, I've been here. And I've been interested in politics since I was in elementary school and high school and in college. And then I became involved with the Democratic central committee in Jefferson county whenever the committee would allow blacks to participate. And that was approximately 1964. We had a chairman who said no blacks could participate as long as he was alive. And at his demise blacks were able to participate and I was elected to the Democratic central committee. And I worked in several campaigns, Congressional campaigns. I've just been generally involved in politics and community affairs. And then in '72 I was elected to the Arkansas state legislature from district 54, which is [northern west Pine Bluff?].

J.B.: What did your father do here?

Wilkins: My father was a janitor in charge of a building up town.

J.B.: Not at the college?

Wilkins: No. Private building.

Walter De Vries: You did serve in the constitutional convention?

Wilkins: Yes. In 1968 I was elected to the Arkansas 7th constitutional

convention, where I served as vice chairman of the municipal government committee.

J.B.: And then you went to. . . . You teach, you say, part-time, in political science here?

Wilkins: I teach part-time, right. And I work in development [?] about 80% of the time.

J.B.: At the college?

Wilkins: Yes. Federal programs and community relations.

J.B.: And you worked for Gov Bumpers in the Senatorial race?

Wilkins: Yes.

J.B.: Have you done any analysis of precinct returns from that race?

Wilkins: Just in Pine Bluff. I haven't done a state wide. I'm going to do that. But in our county we carried practically all the black precincts except one as I remember it. And that's one I'm going to investigate because it always turns up different from the other precincts. And talking with the governor Monday. They've done an analysis and as I understand it we did [carry the?] precincts all over. And he didn't spend a quarter. Didn't spend any money. I was particularly incensed in this campaign because there was an attempt made to buy the black vote. This practice has been going on for several years except it was accelerated during Rockefeller's first try for office in '64. He recruited a lot of blacks and put them on the payroll and made field workers out of them. And on election day money flowed because he had plenty of it. So much per car and this kind of thing. So you get these groups that surface every two years and claim that they can deliver the black vote. We have one such group, the Arkansas Independent Voters Association, comprised primarily of a bunch of preachers that run it. And each year they would--every two years--say we can deliver the black

vote for x number of dollars. And in '72 McClellan employed this group. At that time I couldn't say anything about it because I had my hands full running my own race. And I didn't say anything. This time I did not have opposition and I thought this was an opportunity to strike a death blow and I think that's what we've done. Because they didn't carry the black vote and Mr Fulbright lost by about two to one. So I don't think they're going to be viable anymore. Of course during Rockefeller's, his subsequent election. . . . With his first try in '64 and his subsequent election in '66 he got about 92% of the black vote each time. And generally he employs people the year around. For example, I know a janitor, maintenance man on our campus that all during the year when Rockefeller was governor, he received a check for about \$80 or \$20 a week. And consequently he was certainly in Rockefeller's corner. That's not to say that. . . . Rockefeller did a lot of good for this state and helped change politics and certainly we're appreciative of that. But it sort of did something to the blacks. . . . The kind of money that was being spent in every election. People wanted jobs and wanted money and this kind of thing. So I think in that sense it was real detrimental to us. But I think Mr Bumpers has demonstrated in his three campaigns that you didn't have to have money to win. Although he didn't get the kind of percentage against Rockefeller. . . . It was only of a serious campaign [?]. The '72 campaign was no problem for Gov Bumpers.

W.D.V.: But you think that because Rockefeller was willing to spend all that money it set black political development back in a sense a little bit?

Wilkins: I think so in terms of this matter of deciding on a candidate on the basis of issues. What he can do in solving problems. McClellan

employed. . . . In fact he bought--

W.D.V.: It did work with McClellan?

Wilkins: It worked with McClellan.

W.D.V.: But it didn't work with Bumpers.

Wilkins: No, but for one reason. Number one reason it worked for McClellan is that it's difficult in Arkansas. . . . Over the last 15 years or so I've watched it. It's difficult to get black people out in Arkansas twice in a row. And so when Pryor got into that run off the black vote didn't turn out as it did in the first preferential primary election. And another thing, the McClellan people effectively employed this. They sent people out in the countryside to tell the blacks in eastern Arkansas "the election's over. Don't go out Tuesday." And we didn't have a lot of local run offs. And that helped. That's just one factor, of course, in Mr McClellan's re-election. One would have thought that possibly Bumpers would have had a problem with Fulbright in terms of the black vote. But it didn't materialize.

W.D.V.: Didn't Fulbright spend an awful lot of money on that?

Wilkins: About a million dollars, all told.

W.D.V.: On the black vote.

Wilkins: Oh yes, well, as far as we can see, about \$63,000 up to this point. That's what he has filed now. Of course I'm convinced it's much more than that. But there's no way of proving that because. . . . I know one guy who received \$3,000. He has a public relations firm. And this money didn't show because he got a sub-contract from the regular public relations. So I doubt seriously if that money will ever. . . . Nobody has to know that he got \$3,000 for literature distribution and other things.

J.B.: The black staff member on Fulbright's staff raised an objection about him hiring a white to direct that campaign. Reading the press



accounts of that he seemed to be quite angry the first day. The second day he was less angry but said his objection was to having a white overseer, in effect, but that he felt the use of money was legitimate in terms of carpooling and this sort of stuff.

Wilkins: Yes. I'm familiar with this staff worker and he was on his way out, anyway. And of course one of the reasons that they didn't allow him to handle the money--and I'm partially responsible for that--because during the McGovern campaign. . . . I was running a campaign. The McGovern committee sent money down to me. handling

the finances among blacks for McGovern, the McGovern committee. And subsequently I learned that he didn't bring all the money. In fact he didn't bring half of it. And I went to him later and talked with him about it. Nothing was ever done so I just assured him that he would never handle any finances for any Democratic campaign anymore. And some other people protest. In fact they gave him \$9,000. And we know this. The co-chairman of the McGovern committee told me this. Up until a few months ago he hadn't turned in receipts for. . . full receipts. And this was to help all the black candidates running because certainly we were ~~behind? carrying~~ McGovern in our campaign. And so this was one . So he was on his way out and then they brought this

guy in. And so the night before he made his first apparently they got to him and he changed his mind. But he was

J.B.: How do you assess. . . . How much of the money that is spent on getting the black vote out is legitimate?

Wilkins: Are you referring to a percentage, or what?

J.B.: Any way you want to attack that question.

W.D.V.: How much is used for carpooling and legitimate election day activities and how much is just pocketed in some place?

Wilkins: Well, on the basis of my experience with these organizations, especially this one organization, Arkansas Independent Voters Association, I doubt seriously whether 35% of the money actually gets. . . are legitimate election day expenses. Most of it's left hip pocket money. And I think their performance this time demonstrates. It didn't take much to. . . . Well, they built their reputation during Mr Rockefeller. It didn't take much to sell Mr Rockefeller to black people. Especially some of the candidates that were running against him. So that wasn't really no accomplishment. And most of these ministers, they've been discredited anyway, you know. They just don't have a reputation. Because they're self-seeking and it's generally known. So I would say about 35%, especially with this particular group that's been in the business of selling votes since '64.

J.B.: Did they hurt themselves in the McClellan situation?

Wilkins: That's one fact. I considered that but as I look at the people who were so-called black leaders who were supporting Fulbright, I have some serious doubts as to whether this hurt them very much. And I didn't see any evidence of it and I didn't hear any comments. And I got around the state for Bumpers. Didn't seem that this was held against them.

[Interruption on tape.]

J.B.: The question I'm really driving at. I'm really just trying to understand the black vote in Arkansas. How it responds to money as opposed to issues and candidates and how much the two are related?

Wilkins: Well, I think that this, in this past election, we had more response to the issues and the candidate and his program than in previous elections. There are several factors now. There wasn't much of a change I don't think since '72, since McClellan race in '72. However, we've had a lot of union activity. We've had more blacks hired in the last

four, six years in responsible positions in private business, in some of your other industries, railroads, and this kind of thing. Some of them are already unionized. So you have more of a response, I think, to issues and this kind of thing rather than back to the time when it didn't make much difference who a black voted for, what candidate. He wasn't going to get anything out of it so the idea was, you know, something on election day. And this was it. Because I'm not going to go to him for favors. I'm not in any business. He's not going to help me. You know, this was the general attitude. And so I think we've seen a change. And then during the McClellan campaign nobody spoke out and tried to oppose these groups that were selling votes. And I think that the fact that I was a state representative, then I was joined by some others, that this, you know, carried some weight. We had a press conference and they carried it on the tv. They [carried] it in the newspapers. Then again, too, can't escape. . . . Mr Bumpers hadn't done anything directly for blacks as such. But his program and so forth has been geared toward poor people and includes blacks of course and education, this kind of thing. So I'm sure that this helps, and the governor has a lot of charisma.

J.B.: Basically, the black vote was divided.

Wilkins: Yeah.

J.B.: And Bumpers spent very little you say in so far as even carpool money and this sort of thing?

Wilkins: That's right. Any carpool money was done by private individuals who were interested in governor's support and paid it out of their pocket, not out of the campaign committee money. That was very little in this county, I know.

J.B.: Was that from white sources or black?

Wilkins: Yes, white. I had several people. . . . I think my own

experiences years ago, traveling different places. And I had several other people. At our own expense. We didn't get any reimbursement on anything. From the governor's office. He had two, one field man black and a lady to work in the office, a black lady. Maybe just paid her salary and expenses. But other than that, no group was . I did notice one thing that so many professional vote sellers who've been involved in this business supporting Fulbright because that's where the money was. And you had your black, some of your black, I would say a majority of your black intellectual, some of your middle class blacks supporting Fulbright. Of course this was generally true across the state in terms of white people. Any county you'd go into, the white power structure, the bankers and financial institutions were supporting him and many of your officials. . . as I remember at the last count out of 135 legislators there were only six of us who were for Gov Bumpers, you know. We spoke of it publicly, anyway. So this might tell you something about. . . . And they were soundly beaten. So this might portend good things for the state in the future.

W.D.V.: Since you've been involved in politics in this state, what have been the major changes?

Wilkins: You mean in terms of. . . .

W.D.V.: Political changes.

Wilkins: Political changes? Obviously, most black participation and a willingness of the white Democratic party workers and so forth to accept blacks and to try to get some programs that will be beneficial.

W.D.V.: When did that start?

Wilkins: I would say this started about 1970. Probably 1970, '72. Get a lot of emphasis in this direction.

W.D.V.: So it's just been recent then.

Wilkins: Just recent, right. Of course when Rockefeller was governor

he appointed a number of blacks to boards and commissions and brought them into his office. But here I'm referring to, in terms of Democratic politics. It's just recent. Because Gov Faubus, he did play to the redneck vote and this kind of thing. Although I don't think he's that kind of person. I've never known him to be. I kind of think he cares, you know, whether he's black or white. He was a demagogue politician so. . . .

J.B.: Well, it wasn't until what, 1970, that you had the first. . . when did the first black get in the state legislature?

Wilkins: '72. And this was because of reapportionment.

J.B.: And all four of you got in at the same time.

Wilkins: Right. And I'm the only black outside of Pulaski county. The other three are from Pulaski county.

J.B.: Do you see much growth in that in the next six years?

Wilkins: Yes, I see. . . . I know now that we have about ten house districts that we have a majority of black voters. And possibly excluding Dr Jewell's seat, two others over in eastern Arkansas. One other in eastern Arkansas that I know of and another in south Arkansas down in Chico county.

J.B.: Why do you think there was no increase this time in the number of black legislators?

Wilkins: Well again, this sort of fragmentation of the blacks during the Rockefeller tenure going over to the Republican party. And we had some blacks that possibly could have won. . . . Some more blacks in '72. But they were running on the Republican ticket and I don't see any Republican winning, even in a majority black district. Not in '72, not in '74.

J.B.: Were there [any/many] blacks running as Republicans in '74?

Wilkins: Not in '74. In '72.

J.B.: Hasn't it steadily decreased since 1970?

Wilkins: It certainly has, right. Because of financing trouble.

J.B.: But why? [Unclear.]

Wilkins: Yeah. Rockefeller, he was putting a lot of money into. . . .

J.B.: These other seven districts with black majority or at least very close to 50%. Why do you think there was no increase there this year?

Wilkins: Well, one, the Democratic party in Arkansas will not finance any candidates. Just as I told you a while back in raising that money.

And most of it came out of my left hip pocket and I spent \$9,000. \$3,000 in the primary. [And they tried to get me in the election.??]

And I spent another 6 [of record/over Rickert?]. And in the meantime my Republican opponent and other Republican candidates were getting materials printed free. Almost at cost. And they were getting all kinds of money to finance the campaign, plus the Republican organization carried them on election day. And in the Democratic primary nobody carried you.

November general election I received some money from the McGovern committee, but other than that. . . and a few friends, but other than that

there was no organized effort on the part of the Democratic party. For example this year the Republicans want to field some black candidates

in these districts we just mentioned. But in my own district, the Republican candidate that ran against me in '72, they told him they

could only pay his filing fee, which is two twenty five. And he said

"No dice." So this is one factor. Then, another factor. In these

districts here in eastern Arkansas we have a large number of black Muslim blacks. And down in south Arkansas, one county, Chico county

has had more black registered voters--that's in April of 1966--black registration exceeded the white registration. That was in '66. The

county juries down there, the appointed county jury was working with me on the Congressional race. That's how I happen to know this. But they haven't been able to elect anybody. One factor is the money and another factor is the level of education and participation. We still have this plantation mentality among a number of blacks. And of course they don't go out to vote. They do in Jefferson county, urban counties, Pulaski and elsewhere. Even over in Sebastian county. So that's one problem. So those two factors I think. . . .

J.B.: When you speak of plantation mentality what do you mean?

Wilkins: Well, I mean that these guys are, most of them are either sharecroppers or descendents of share croppers. And they're still imbued with the idea that they're not going to get anything out of the white. For example, if the person [is a] domestic in Arkansas who might have been rehabilitated from the farm, share cropping, etc. She would figure. . . . Somebody come out and say "Let's vote." After she went to work. Got up probably six o'clock and went out to the kitchen to work. And somebody came by when she got up at five thirty or six o'clock and says "Let's go out to vote before the polls close." She'd say "What the hell. Why should I go? You know, I'm going back to the same kitchen tomorrow morning." This kind of thing. She can't see a future gain in terms more or better education for her kids or medical care for the working poor or this kind of thing. You know, you can't. . . . she can't visualize that, you see. The past reputation of the candidates, white candidates, etc.

J.B.: Do you see anything changing in those areas of Arkansas?

Wilkins: Yes, I can see with more industrialization, this kind of thing, I can see. . . . and we are locating plants over there. And I can see it in the next, let's say five, six years. I can see a definite



change.

J.B.: [Are] the unions playing a major role in political education?

Wilkins: I don't think so. As you know, we have a right to work law in Arkansas. But some of the plants that locate here have unions. And I don't think the AFL-CIO always done what it could have in terms of educating the blacks. You're still primarily dependent on the minister. But this is fast changing with some black elected officials and this kind of thing.

J.B.: What is the potential for creating an effective state wide organization of elected black officials?

Wilkins: Well, we've discussed that, the four of us. And we think the potential is here. And that's what we're going to work on. Think we'll have a good opportunity. Of course I don't. . . . The blacks are no more unified or monolithic than the white community. You're going to have varying interest. You're not going to get all of these competing groups to unify. But I do feel that we can get a majority of the people that want to see black and white move forward. I think we can get them to an effective organization.

W.D.V.: How important is the church and the ministers in black politics? Or does it differ by section?

Wilkins: It differs by sections.

J.B.: Well, let's take the east.

Wilkins: Yes, ministers still play a great role, because--

J.B.: How? How do they play that role?

Wilkins: In terms of endorsing candidates, allowing them to come to church and speak. And just letting the sisters and brothers know that this would be a good man. And working in community organizations, you

know, these various city [civic?] political organizations. And of course when we had many of the civil rights struggles and so forth in eastern Arkansas. . . involved ministers, you know, leading the way. For example, this Arkansas Independent Voters Association, which hopefully has been discredited, it has. . . practically all of the leaders that were listed in the report from the secretary of the senate, practically all of them were ministers. You know. So although it might be minimal, they're still playing a role because, you know, they got congregations.

[Interruption in tape-phone call.]

J.B.: The least industrialized the most power, impact the minister has?

Wilkins: Yes, I would agree with that.

J.B.: With the reverse being that the more urbanized and industrialized, the less. . .

Wilkins: Right.

W.D.V.: And in that case is the elected playing a more important part than the minister?

Wilkins: I think yes, he is.

W.D.V.: from the church to the elected officials?

Wilkins: Right.

J.B.: Would you say a majority of the rural black ministers fit into the category you described?

Wilkins: No, I couldn't say that. I would say. . . probably you'd have maybe 35-40% perhaps that would fit into that category. You have some that honestly seek to improve the lot of their parishioners and so forth and who are not, you know, just out to get some money. To make a fast buck.

J.B.: But does that category, do they participate in the political process actually?

Wilkins: Some of them. I think a small percentage. But no a majority of them aren't actively engaged. . . whatever the banners. . . they are not actively engaged. In fact you have some of your fundamentalists, Baptists, and that's what most of your blacks in Arkansas are, who don't believe in participating in politics, in tying the church into politics. So many of them are not active. But usually in the church you're going to have some deacon, or some body, you know, who's going to be talking to them. They're not all ministers who exercise this kind of political leadership.

J.B.: But you say regardless of who it is in the church who exercises that political role, about a third, 35%, are in it primarily for the money--

Wilkins: Yes.

J.B.:--and about two thirds are not.

Wilkins: Right. I would say that.

J.B.: The other group. The two-thirds that are looking for the candidate that they think are going to best serve the interests of the people whose votes they can influence.

Wilkins: You want to know what percent of that do I think would be active, involved. Is that your question?

J.B.: Yeah.

Wilkins: May be hard to estimate that, but I would say that probably about half of the remainder would probably be interested in some kind of way. They might not go out and endorse candidates, but they would push voter registration, this kind of thing. Now we've had a lot of those who didn't participate in the past. They would gladly participate in voter registration and some education programs. And they may not tell the black parishioners who to vote for but they would certainly say

"Go out and vote." You know, exercise your right. So I would have to count them as being friendly and helpful.

J.B.: Do they get involved, though, in such activities as carpool arrangements?

Wilkins: Yes. The other group we mentioned, not the last group.

J.B.: I'm talking about the last group.

Wilkins: No. Not the majority of them, no.

W.D.V.: It's our impression that fundamentalist religion in Arkansas has an important impact on politics in the state. You say that most of the blacks are fundamental Baptists.

Wilkins: Right.

W.D.V.: Is there anything in the theology of fundamental Baptists that would have some impact on the way people, the way blacks see politics in this state? I didn't phrase that very well, but maybe you understand what I'm trying to get at.

Wilkins: I know what you're saying but I don't know very much about Baptist. I'm a Methodist and I don't know very much about, you know. . . except that fundamental . . . .

W.D.V.: Let's just say fundamental Protestantism.

Wilkins: Protestantism. Really, I don't know. I think a lot of it is the emphasis is on the other world and politics is evil and this kind of thing. And it's better not to bother with it.

J.B.: But is this changing?

Wilkins: I think so. I think that with these new groups that we mentioned coming in and black incomes rising and working in these factories where you're going, where you're being unionized, you're going to have some discussion in the union about what candidate is more favorable to organized labor. I think this will necessarily

change and is changing.

W.D.V.: The emphasis on otherworldliness is changing as people get more and more mobile.

Wilkins: Right.

J.B.: And also more and more economic resources.

Wilkins: Right. Right. That's what I think.

J.B.: As an institution, though, the fundamental Protestant church for blacks is still extremely important. . . .

Wilkins: Still extremely important, yeah.

J.B.: One, maybe the most important social institution?

Wilkins: I think at this time, yeah. Probably so because of this thing. You can get to a number of whites. . . if I want to talk to some whites I can go to the Lions Club, the Kiwanis Club, or the Club, the Odd Fellows Club and several of the city beautiful clubs. With the majority of blacks, the church would be the place to go. I spent my time, when I started campaigning, making the churches in my district. Because if I could get a large group together and talk with them, and with the exception of a few, you know, fundamentalist ministers, they would allow me some time. They would probably make me wait until near the end of the service--and they hold a service for, oh, a couple of hours--and you got to sit through all this business. And then they might let you say a few words in some cases. Others would, you know, cooperate with you. So for that reason, among blacks, that's a very important institution. You know, get to a large number of them. And we have some fraternities and sororities and the Masons and the Elks and so forth, but you don't have a lot of blacks belonging to those as you would the other Rotary Club, etc. So that's the reason we communicate with them. Public access.

W.D.V.: Following that up, thinking about running a campaign. You're a black running for state representative. Obviously the personal contact is important, churches and so on. Now what about media. Suppose you had the money to put on a campaign in Pine Bluff. Would you buy television or radio or newspapers or direct mailing? How would you communicate?

Wilkins: Radio. This is what I did. Direct mail and very little newspaper. And no tv.

W.D.V.: Why not use the traditional political media, like television and newspapers?

Wilkins: Because in a district with 19,256 people you're wasting money on tv. You can't buy all three channels. You don't have enough money to buy all three channels. And a lot of people are going to switch through it, as many voters do.

W.D.V.: All I'm saying is what if you had the money to do anything you wanted to. Are there media that are more effective in communication to blacks than other mediums.

Wilkins: Yeah, the radio. The black oriented radio stations. If you have a district that's 75% black, like mine, then I would use KCAT, the black oriented station, and a number of blacks listen to the largest station, KOTN, that's where I bought my time. And then I would depend mostly on personal contacts and hand outs at the grocery stores and supermarkets and so on in my district, where the blacks. . . .

J.B.: What percentage of your district is black?

Wilkins: 74.6.

J.B.: How much emphasis in your time do you give to white voters in your community?

Wilkins: Well, to be very frank with you I get more, or just about as many inquiries and requests for on the legislature on

certain issues and so forth from whites, especially during the last session. Perhaps more because including people outside of my district or whites outside of my district. In the last session than I did from blacks. I spend a great deal of my time now with the whites in my district and whites from other districts. You see, we just went to single member districts in '72 and a lot of people still haven't realized and they see that you are a representative and they still think it's the same old way. Well, I can't turn them down because I don't know when they're going to redistrict or when I'm going to run for an office city wide or county wide. Something of this nature. But I do spend a great deal of time with them.

J.B.: Okay, how about in campaign?

Wilkins: Well, during my campaign. . . . As I say, during my primary campaign I didn't have very much money. Or either one. November general election neither. But I had a white candidate who lived in one of my four all white precincts. So I said well, I'm not going to campaign at all out there. And then I had this black lawyer, well known, who's been practicing here for some 30 years. And I had some white Democratic party members who said we're going to talk for you and work. So I didn't bother. I did three or four mailings and I didn't mail anything out there. And I picked up 41% of the vote in the Democratic primary. Then in the November general election I still didn't do very much. I did mail out for them. Direct mail campaign for them. Then I depended upon these white Democratic party members to help me out there. In the meantime--I wasn't aware of it--but my Republican opponent went out and said "Look"--he pulled a clipping from the time 1963 when I was elected state secretary of the NAACP. He said "Look, Wilkins is a member of the NAACP" and has been pushing me. Okay, I see



I carried all of my precinct, all the white vote, three of the white precincts and I almost carried the other. But he got a bigger vote than I anticipated because I expected to get at least 65% of the white vote in the four white precincts. But I found that he had some people working for him. Then he went out himself. Then he came back and told the blacks that I had supported some bigoted candidates. You know, that I was with the white people. So he pulled one on me. But I didn't spend anything. Perhaps that's why I only got 41% of the vote out there first time.

J.B.: But you still got a majority of the white vote?

Wilkins: Yes. In the November general. I got 41% against the gentleman who lived out there. And see, that area has been considered a white citizen council, Ku Klux Klan area. The school district case has been in court longer than any other desegregation case. In fact the federal court still has it under advisement. Under it's jurisdiction. But, there's another factor working in my factor. There are a lot of labor people out there, too, and they were helping. I had support from organized labor because of my stand in the constitutional convention and this kind of thing. So I did have labor support and they did help me out tremendously out there. You have a lot of union people out there.

J.B.: Did you go talk to those union people, yourself?

Wilkins: Yes, I talked to them, the union people. Many of them contacted me ahead of time. And then I talked with them where the meeting is. The trade council. I've made every meeting with the trade council. It's a county wide organization.

J.B.: And that was during the campaign. So you were campaigning actively among whites in the labor movement.

Wilkins: Right.

W.D.V.: What I was getting at with that media sort of thing, is that blacks, I think, tend to trust certain sources of information better than others.

Wilkins: Right.

W.D.V.: What I was trying to get at is television seen as more believable than newspapers or is the church organization more believable than radio? I mean is there any way to kind of rank order that as to which media is most believable by blacks?

Wilkins: On the basis of what we've already said about the church, you know, with the exception of personal contact and what support you get from some ministers, I wouldn't rank it. . . . I'd say the radio. . . . We got excellent results from the radio and also the direct mail campaign. Now I haven't decided which is more important. But I know that during the direct mail campaign I got a lot of response. I found out a lot of my constituents didn't receive any mail from anybody except the bills, or something, you know? And they were. . . . I've heard a lot of comments. I got a letter from Wilkins, you know, and I'm going to vote for him. He sent me a letter. And right now, every day, if anybody gets ill in my district and is admitted to the hospital or somebody in the family dies, I send them a card. Or send them a card from the Wilkins family if it's a death. If somebody is ill, and he's released from the hospital, I send him a get well card, on my stationery. We do that every day. And we catch up on weekends on Monday. For Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And I found that, you know, gotten tremendous results.

J.B.: So you think radio and mail are really the best ways to communicate with blacks.

Wilkins: Right. Definitely.

W.D.V.: Do they trust newspapers?

Wilkins: Yes, we have one black newspaper. . . .

W.D.V.: I'm not talking, I'm talking about the white newspapers.

Wilkins: Well, generally. But. . .

W.D.V.: When it comes to endorsing or recommending candidates and that sort of thing.

Wilkins: When the Commercial endorsed me that helped me out tremendously in the black community. But because of the intelligence level a lot of mine, they're not going to read the editorial page. They don't read. Okay, daily newspaper. I think when I worked at the newspaper 15 years ago we did a survey and only 15% of the blacks subscribed to the Commercial. So I would say now there's probably no more than 40% if that high. So obviously, you couldn't get a lot of mileage out of that. 'Cause you see some of the homes are [anti-voting?] I have a lot of old people and I have a lot of poor people in my district. And so the newspaper wouldn't be the best way. Now we reach some of them through the black newspaper. But there's limited circulation there.

W.D.V.: Do you get a lot of letters or communications from blacks outside this district?

Wilkins: Yes, all the time. Mostly telephone calls to help somebody in some way. Jobs or something they're interested in something like that. They haven't had time to learn, even the whites, about district lines and so forth. So I go ahead and honor anything I can do. For example, I got more calls from whites on the circuit breaker law we passed in the last session of the legislative tax exemption for people 65 and over on the home stead. I got more calls from whites. . . . And I had a girl to help them fill them out. . . . Than I did from blacks. And this was all over, not just in my district. I had it put on the radio

as a public service announcement because a lot of people, black and white, weren't applying. And also put out some hand bills in the grocery stores and churches, so that they would be aware of the circuit breaker law. In fact, we didn't have very many people apply state wide so they set up the deadline from May 15 to November 15 because of this fact. So I would say yes, they tend to ignore district lines. My biggest problem is I get a lot of calls that I have nothing, that aren't in my bailiwick. For example, like city services. And sometimes I try to solve those or turn them over to somebody that can. I told them they got a black alderman. You know, Carl Hemmitt. They call me. And then you know you have difficulty explaining this to them. It's not my bailiwick. But we try to do whatever we can for them. And also in terms of these ministers. In my district I've maintained close contact with the majority of them. I have approximately 15 churches and 10 of them are good sized churches. You know, 100 or over. I don't think I have but about one minister that is probably not friendly to me. I have some others that are sort of marginal. But I've also. . . . They've worked in the community, so what I've done with these older guys who worked in the community, I've gotten citations from the legislature for them. That made them feel good. You know, something to go up on the wall. This kind of thing. So I think we're in pretty good shape with them. That's one of the reasons we didn't have an opponent this time. Neither in the Democratic primary nor in the general election.

W.D.V.: When you went to Little Rock to serve in that legislature for the first time, did it turn out the way you thought it was going to turn out?

Wilkins: Yes, basically, because, you know, I was familiar with the legislative process and each semester I'd carry my students up when the

legislature was in session. You know, to observe them. Course I didn't have much of a problem because most of the legislators, I already knew them. Had worked in Democratic party, had served on the state rules committee, which I'm still serving on, and worked in various campaigns. At one time or another I'd bumped into practically all, at least 75% of them. So I didn't have any, you know, I didn't have any problem. It was just that I couldn't get some of my legislation through. Especially one major piece of legislation: that was ward election of alderman. But other than that I got every bill that I sponsored or co-sponsored through. That was the only bill that I didn't get through. I either sponsored or co-sponsored about seven or eight bills, so. . . .

J.B.: How do you assess Bumpers as governor?

Wilkins: I think he was a good governor. I think his administration was good and he helped implement the reorganization plan that Rockefeller had started. Of course a lot of the things he advocated, Rockefeller advocated, he couldn't get them through because a Republican governor and a Democratic legislature. But overall, I'd have to assess his performance as good, you know, very good. One of the things that impressed me with him. . . . I didn't particularly like him at first, when he first ran. But one thing that impressed me with him is that when the cities and counties were clammering for 7% of the general revenue. They wanted a fixed percent in the budget. He stood up to them. He had the county juries and all these city officials descending on him and he held his ground. And when they wanted to put a lot of money in the buildings and ignore human needs. . . . And I remember one day he said "I wouldn't give a damn whether I'm the next US Senator or a country lawyer in Charleston or re-elected to the governorship, I'm not going to stand idle by and see them rape the treasury." He said

buildings are fine but human needs are more important. And he stuck to that and he advocated a whole lot of things dealing with human needs. I'm high on human needs, so for that reason I think he. . . .

J.B.: Were you satisfied with his level of sensitivity toward blacks and the needs of blacks?

Wilkins: No, no, I haven't been. But we talked about it during the last session. We talk about it all the time, but after the election he is probably aware of                      and he is going to place women, blacks and women in that order on boards and commissions. I have a list of everything I carried up to him that's going to become vacant between now and December 31. He's going to emphasize that. Now of course I can understand. He didn't get very much of the black vote when he was first elected. Rockefeller had, as I say, about 92%. And because he's from an area where there might be one or two black families. He was depending on other people. And there were some people in his administration in terms of appointments and this kind of thing that demonstrated they'd been anti-black when they worked in other capacities. And I think this was one factor. Obviously a governor can't tend to all the appointments. And I'm sure that his people had made a lot of promises. But with the black vote he got this time, I don't doubt that he's going to be sensitive. That's what he's promises, you know. So far I've found him to be a man of his word. So I don't doubt that he's going to make us a good Senator and he's going to be sensitive to the needs of blacks.

W.D.V.: How about the charge that he didn't place any blacks in significant positions in the executive office. There's one black in the governor's office and he's in the basement.

Wilkins: That's true. I'd have to say that's true and I don't know, you



know, why.

J.B.: Do you think that will change--

Wilkins: Now that's not true. He has another. McHenry added another one early this year. He has [Eggers?] and he has a black lady who will probably work with him in his new capacity as Senator, in his office.

W.D.V: What does she do?

Wilkins: She's in charge of education generally. Aid for education.

W.D.V.: But you think there's going to be a whole lot of appointment activity for blacks and women in the next seven or eight months?

Wilkins: Yes. In the next, what, six months. Then we've talked to the governor elect, or Democratic nominee. And he's going to follow the same policy.

J.B.: Have you talked to him

[End of side of tape.]

Wilkins: I got it through the house but it was gutted in the senate and it was mainly because the other black representatives and the senator wouldn't listen to me, take my advice. They wanted subpoena power. At that time no other state board or commission had subpoena power. And the governor said he wouldn't make it a part of his administrative package if we removed it. And they outvoted me three to one. And then it was gutted. I knew what was going to happen, but I'm a firm believer in a foot in the door. And then we could have come back two years later and justified why we needed subpoena power.

J.B.: That's what they did in South Carolina. [They] set it up without subpoena power and then added it later.

Wilkins: Yeah, right. I talked to one of the representatives from over in South Carolina. One from Sumter.



J.B.: Ernest Finney?

Wilkins: No, that's not his name--Finney! Yes. I talked with--beg pardon?

J.B.: Sharp.

Wilkins: Yeah, sharp. Lawyer. I'm sure that Gov Pryor will make that a part of his administration because I'm going to, I think I'll do it myself this time. A bill without the subpoena power. And see if we can't get an equal rights commission established. But the other time, you see, we had a few problems. I think I'd gotten enough after it came back from the senate near the end of the session. I went around personally and talked with them. *[I had been]* involved in this business a long time, others had not. You know, in the senate. . . . Dr Jewell just thought that he could put his bill up, you know, and they would vote for it. That's not the way it's done. You go backwards. I went over and talked to some of the senators and they said well he hasn't said anything to me about it, you know. And they like to be asked, anyway. Because some guy might not give a damn one way or the other, but if you don't ask him and it come up, he's going to vote against it. So I have the practice of going around and asking all of them. Then we have Johnston. And that's another case. He's a white guy but he's from the same district Mays and *Jewell* are from. He beat back some strong challenges this time. He beat back some conservative Democratic opponent in '72 and a conservative Republican opponent. These guys were black but they were more conservative than Johnston. And he got the black vote. He beat them. Anyway. A number of the legislators didn't particularly like Johnston because he's *[liberal]* in terms of social issues and this kind of thing. And just about the time I thought I'd gotten the bill, it had been returned from the senate for

us to approve amendments. And Johnson got up and made a speech and they started. . . they got all riled up and they just killed that effort. So we didn't get any kind of a bill.

J.B.: Is there a literacy requirement to register to vote in Arkansas?

Wilkins: No. We had the poll tax. Arkansas has always been--excepting of course the period during the white primaries--a state that has been sort of lenient in terms of requirements for voting. Almost anybody could buy a poll tax, you know. It has a history of being liberal in terms of. . . . So we never had a literacy requirement at all.

J.B.: Are there any figures or reliable estimates as to the percentage of blacks that are registered to vote ?

Wilkins: Ye. . .ah. I don't know. Since we don't keep it by race. The Arkansas council on human relations has been doing some work in this area. And as I remember, the last figures, I think they said that there were about 150,000 blacks that were eligible in terms of age and this kind of thing. And there were 225,000 me figures are correct. But I think about 150,000 in the voter education project--

J.B.: Are registered.

Wilkins: Yeah.

J.B.: Out of 225,000.

Wilkins: Yeah, right.

J.B.: Are there any efforts being made, or likely to be made, to begin sort of a massive registration of the remainder?

Wilkins: We have an embryonic kind of thing. We have a voter education project out of Atlanta. We have a field man here and he's working on voter education . . . voter education and registration. But so far they haven't put any money in, you know, to hire people to go out and make these trips. So far they haven't put a lot of money in it to do so, but

I suspect that prior to the 1976 presidential election you'll get a push in that direction. I would hope so, anyway.

W.D.V.: How do you feel about Charles Evers' statement about George Wallace?

Wilkins: Well. . . I, of course, don't particularly like Mr Wallace's views and this kind of thing, but as a practical politician, if it was necessary to get a Democratic president in 1976, I could live with Mr Wallace on the ticket. Now I don't know whether I would say that, but if I'm a delegate, as I was in '72. . . I probably would if that would be necessary to assure the election of a Democratic president. I think he's an opportunist and I don't feel much for him. Although I don't like his past I'm not going to hold him responsible for all of those things forever, you know. People change with the times I think. So Mr Evers' statement might hurt him down there. But generally I could tolerate him. I don't think I'd go out and advocate him on the ticket because I really would like to see Mr Bumpers on the ticket with a Kennedy-Bumpers ticket. And the next man you interview, or whenever you get ready to see Mr Henson. . . . One of the reasons, I think, that they were so gungho for Fulbright. . . some of this group, the Wallacites. . . that they don't want Bumpers to win the election because they see him as a threat to Wallace's position on second spot on the ticket in '76. Because I know they don't like Fulbright and they never have. But they went out gungho for him.

J.B.: Some of them said that was exactly it.

Wilkins: Right.

W.D.V.: Do you think Wallace has undergone a basic attitude change?

Wilkins: Well, if he hasn't undergone a basic attitude change he certainly has changed his tactics. And I don't think it makes much difference.

If he's going to deliver on some issues for poor people, black people, I don't give a damn what his attitude. In his public position, if he's going to advocate things for the black and human needs, so forth, I wouldn't give a damn what he felt in his heart or in his attitude. You know, what his damn attitude was as long as his public policy was directed toward these groups. You know. Same thing about desegregation. You know, I don't care about what somebody has in his heart. If he doesn't want to go to school with blacks. If he's a school superintendent or teacher [and he] doesn't want to teach them, he can go home and throw all the plates up against the wall, you know, so long as his public behavior is correct, I wouldn't give a damn, you know. I'm not one to believe about this change in people's hearts and this kind of business. You got to wait for that. I don't see it, anyway.

J.B.: How long have you known Gov Bumpers?

Wilkins: Since he first ran in 1970.

J.B.: Have you gotten to know him better since you've been in the legislature?

Wilkins: Yes, uhuh, much better, right.

J.B.: So in the two years that you've been in the legislature and really got to deal with him in a more [official] capacity have you seen any change in his attitude or sensitivity?

Wilkins: I would have to say yes. I think so. You know, he's appointed some blacks to boards and commissions and he's made some good appointments I think. We asked him about appointing a black University of Arkansas board of trustees and he's done that. And we asked him for some other appointments. So I think I've seen him become more sensitive in terms of appointments and this kind of thing. And he certainly was accessible, you know, to blacks, this kind of thing.

W.D.V.: Why do you think he'll make a good vice presidential candidate?

Wilkins: Well, if his record as governor is any indicator. . . plus, he's from the South. And if you get a Kennedy or somebody from the East I think he would balance the ticket. Plus he has a whole lot of respect among. . . well, all over the United States in terms of the governors and others that he's worked with. He was chairman of the governors' conference one time. And I think it would balance off the ticket. And he has that charisma. Can't leave that out. I think it would be a first class ticket.

W.D.V.: What's wrong with him?

Wilkins: Wrong with whom?

W.D.V.: Bumpers? What's his weakness?

Wilkins: Oh, what's his weakness?

W.D.V.: Sorry, I phrased that wrong?

Wilkins: Well, one weakness that the newspapers point out is his indecisiveness. He's almost pretty sure before he makes a move and he sort of dilly dally. You might have seen it since you've been in the state. You know, concerning pay raises for state employees. I guess that would be. . . .

J.B.: Well is he really indecisive or is he slow to make up his mind?

Wilkins: I think he might. . . the newspapers may be wrong, he's just slow to make up his mind. I think he just wants to be sure. For example, I know this to be a fact. . . . He wasn't sure he was going to run for the Senate until that weekend. You know, he toyed with the idea. And because if he had he should have been out trying to sew up supporters. But he wasn't out doing that. You know, Fulbright had contacted practically all the establishment people. He started early. Some people were holding off on the fence and they started putting the pressure on. Said "Now it's going to be too late to get on it afterward." But he didn't, you know. So I think you're probably correct, slow to

make up his mind rather than being just indecisive. [Something about the media saying he's indecisive.]

W.D.V.: Anything else?

Wilkins; No, not unless. . . I think it's a strength. He might be hardheaded once he makes a decision. That's it. It could be an advantage and sometimes might be a disadvantage. Because they put everything on him about that 7%. And they pulled something else on him and he wouldn't back down not one bit. Wouldn't compromise it at all.

W.D.V.: How do you assess Rockefeller as a governor?

Wilkins: I think he did really. . . . He improved the climate, but in terms of being an administrator, this kind of thing, he wasn't. He had a lot of good people around him. Dr Max Mime [?] whom you probably know and others. But. . . he had this patrician attitude. For example, he would have people wait for him for hours. And he might show up with his head smoking. And before one session he kept the legislators from all of southeast Arkansas waiting out at the country club. Scheduled to get there about nine. He got there after eleven and a bunch of them had gone home. Said the hell with it. And he didn't have this knack for pulling people in, you know. Pulling different legislators in and saying "Look, this is my program." He didn't, you know, believe in that. After all, he was a Rockefeller. You don't go around asking people for things, you know. So I think that carried over. He wasn't a very good politician, you know. And both Gov Bumpers and Gov Faubus when he was in they'd have guys in twisting their arms, you know, and talking with them ahead of time. For example, Bumpers invited every legislator to the mansion for dinner before the session. You know, in various groups until he got all of them. And their wives. This kind of



thing. Rockefeller didn't do anything like that. I think that was one of his weaknesses, being able to deal with especially a hostile Democratic legislature.

W.D.V.: But he created a climate? For what?

Wilkins: Better government. The two party system. He made the Democratic party more responsive to certain groups and yet we were able to take it out of the hands of the old guard and so forth. By this, by two successive defeats of the gubernatorial candidate, Democratic gubernatorial candidate. This old coalition of old guard broke up. And finally we were able to come up with a fresh new face like Bumpers. And this kind of thing. So he set the climate. Also set the climate in terms of blacks. By appointing them to boards and commissions and jobs and so forth. And by demonstrating the potency of the black vote, you know.

J.B.: How do you feel about the future of Arkansas politically? In the next decade or two?

Wilkins: If present trends are any indicator of the future, I think we're going to see a turn around. I think Bumpers' election demonstrated that the people who control the financial institution, the old establishment people, that they can no longer hack it. I think we're going to see a more grass roots kind of participation, more grass roots kind of thing in elections. For example, in 1966 was the first time

[Phone interruption.]

In our 4th Congressional district, since the turn of the century you hadn't ever had a person elected to Congress unless the plantation owners, the embryonic manufacturers, such as they were, the financial institution. They always met. Now I happen to know this because we were sponsoring a candidate. I was helping, handling the black vote for



Richard Arnold when he was running for Congress. And they had several meetings. And they would argue. They had three or four, three candidates they wanted to support. And they would have a meeting and have a knock down drag out fight. Then they would come back and have another meeting. And finally they would agree. And this way they haven't lost a candidate since the turn of the century. And this is the kind of thing that has prevailed here for quite some time. And I think this last time, the establishment, Whit Stevens and the others. . . there was only one president of the bank here and that was Lewis Ramsey, the biggest bank. The other financial institutions and banks they were for Fulbright. And it's true in Little Rock. And most of the establishment people, power structure. But this time they got licked, real bad. So I think this might be a good thing. We might see more.

J.B.: But they were all supporting Pryor though, weren't they?

Wilkins: Yeah, and Pryor only won by just a little over 50% of the vote. That's right. They were supporting Pryor and Pryor almost didn't make it. If he'd got into a run off that would have been his butt.

J.B.: You think their support of Pryor hurt him?

Wilkins: Well, I think there was another factor in Pryor's election. I had a number of whites, white businessmen tell me, you know "I just don't trust Pryor because of his labor background." Because of his labor support and this kind of thing. And Sen McClellan pulled all these letters out during the campaign on state wide tv on all the stations. And he had the letters on him. They started back in 1970 grooming him to run. So I think that was one factor. And then Pryor started off so much ahead. It's bad to get out front too soon. You know, everybody said well, he's a winner. So I think maybe his workers so forth slacked up, this kind of thing. So I don't think that . . . the big business

support really hurt him anymore than the labor support, organized labor support.

J.B.: What kind of attitudes do you find among young blacks toward politics now and what sort of trend do you detect, say over the last six years or so?

Wilkins: Certainly more interest, but more emphasis upon, you know, black candidates, this kind of thing. And on the college campuses especially, you know, they say six in one hand, half a dozen in the other, you know. Which is the least bad candidate? This kind of thing. And in our particular section I haven't seen, outside of college campus, I haven't seen a whole lot of activity by young blacks and this kind of thing in campaigns. Now where you have a black running, now that's a different kind of thing in politics. You know, you get some interest there, but not an awful lot in just politics generally.

J.B.: How long do you think it will be before there's a state wide black elected official in Arkansas?

Wilkins: Probably by 1980. Probably would have. . . we're getting a number of blacks. . . haven't been able to ascertain the percentage, number. . . . Getting a lot of blacks that are coming back from Chicago and. . . . Reason I know this is 'cause I see them. And knew them, some of them, before they left. They're coming back from Chicago, Detroit, elsewhere and then by 1980 we're going to have a larger black population from natural growth factor. And also, hopefully, we would have done something about the eastern Arkansas black and the blacks down in the far south Arkansas. More registration and education. At this time I'm stressing more education than registration. Because I don't see much value if you get a guy registered and he doesn't go out to the polls to vote.

J.B.: Have you seen any studies made on reverse migration?

Wilkins: No, no I haven't. In fact I don't think anybody's done any on reverse migration, to my knowledge. I've been looking for them. I think I read a newspaper article but it didn't have anything definitive. Might have been an Associated Press or United Press--

W.D.V.: But the assertion is that it is occurring?

Wilkins: Oh yes, it's occurring. I have no doubt that it's occurring because, you know, I see them and meet them. Over the state; just for example, just in terms of my own family, my wife's family, some of them have come back. From Chicago, from Washington, so forth. In fact we had to find a house for them before they came.

W.D.V.: Why?

Wilkins: A house they could buy. Because they didn't like the environment there in Chicago.

J.B.: How long were they gone?

Wilkins: About ten years or more.

J.B.: So they came back with skills, right?

Wilkins: Right.

J.B.: Find any problem getting jobs here?

Wilkins: No. In fact my brother-in-law got him a job right away down at the newspaper. You know, before he got here. Then he was on the training course for Prudential Life Insurance Company. Then he got a job at [the cotton mill?] because he could make more money. And she's teaching at the college now. She finished her work. So no problem. when he was in Chicago he was an optical lens specialist working for one of the largest companies in the United States. So no problem.

J.B.: Do you think this is going to develop into a significant trend?

Wilkins: Yeah, I think I do. I definitely see that. In fact I was just up in Chicago and Gary and the University of Michigan to see my son about two weeks ago. And you have a lot of people who are thinking about coming back. Want to buy property and this kind of thing. I have four brothers in Denver and I'm going to sell my brother some of my property out here because he's thinking about. . . he's been there since 1955. He's been in Denver since 1955, so I can see it increasing.

J.B.: And he's thinking of coming back ?

Wilkins: Yes, uhuh.

J.B.: When you go out of state on trips like that do you talk to many people?

Wilkins: Yes.

J.B.: And is there a lot of inquiry about it?

Wilkins: Yes, a lot.

J.B.: What do they ask?

Wilkins: They ask, you know. . . we heard things aren't the same as they were, you know, a few years ago in terms of segregation and this kind of thing, jobs and so forth. That's what they're asking about, and the climate in terms of white vs black, this kind of thing. That's the main thing. And of course about jobs. The opportunity for them.

J.B.: And you hear this from blacks who are not natives of Arkansas or talking about the South in general or most of the people who left Arkansas?

Wilkins: Most of them have left Arkansas. I think you will find it will be according to whatever state. . . . I imagine were I from Alabama I would be associating with the Alabama migrants. Then they would want to know about Alabama.

W.D.V.: When you think back to the early '60s in terms of ten years or so ago, and think of the changes that have occurred, could you have

predicted them at that time?

Wilkins: No. I didn't think. . . . No. Some of the changes I've seen I didn't know it would be in my lifetime that you would have these changes. I wasn't sure. I was very pessimistic concerning. . . .

W.D.V.: What do you think prompted those changes? So rapidly.

Wilkins: I think certainly the civil rights movement and the effect of the media so forth. You know, it's kind of difficult for a person who believes in human beings to see the kinds of things we saw on tv. You know, the hosing people down, bombing little kids, killing little kids in Sunday school. This kind of thing. I think certainly the effect that the media's had is one thing. You know, where you could see it on tv. Just as it had an effect in the Vietnamese war. And then of course Lyndon Johnson's leadership. Civil Rights Act of '64. And the various voting rights acts of 1965 and '67 or '68. This kind of thing. So this desegregation. . . . Back to our other point, our economic point. For example, I've watched the changes in these neighborhoods. You can go out in the neighborhoods in my district. They were poor. You can go out and you see a \$20,000 brick house there. This guy's got him a better job because of the civil rights act. He's making \$16,000 a year where before he might have made \$5,000. You know, working for the railroad. Or if he was teaching he might have made \$6- or \$7,000. So you've got changed attitudes on the part of blacks when they reach a certain economic level.

W.D.V.: Do you detect a noticeable difference between the North and the South on attitudes toward race?

Wilkins: Yes. . . you mean in terms of the whites? Well. . .

W.D.V.: When you talk to blacks up North about relationships with the white race, is it different than here?

Wilkins: I don't think it's that very different. I think in the North

it's just, you know, you're here and we're not going to bother you. You know, in terms of black white relationships. It just seems to be an accepted fact. We don't have much interest in you. I think we got more interest here. For example, when we have--this will certainly bear out what I'm talking about. When we have our chats and we meet on certain things, Jefferson county delegation, senator and somebody else say "Okay, look, Henry can't go for that. Now you know. He got a special kind of constituency. He's got to support and vote for things his constituency wants." And the same they point out something that you got. So, you know, we're not going to fall out. Sometimes I say "I can't go." You know. For example, on that Grant-Cooper thing which you're aware of, which I hope they don't bring up. See only the three blacks in the house voted against the resolution. Well, hell, I wasn't going to vote against that thing. Trustee wardship [?]. Some of my colleagues who live in my district they would have been all down my back. In the first place, I didn't think it was right. And I wasn't going to vote. I mean I think they have a conscious effort on the part of the whites down here. You know, since they've changed. I mean it's not a . . . . Like when I worked in New York, you know, in a restaurant "Have a good day, honey." That's just something they were saying. They didn't give a damn whether I fell down and broke my neck as I walked out. Or anybody else, for that matter. But I think down here, when they changed, they changed for the . . . it was a more sincere kind of thing, you know.

J.B.: But you think there has been a genuine change?

Wilkins: Yes, I think. . . in fact I know there has. Of course you're always going to have, you know, some problem with some certain groups, a certain percentage of them, you know. They can't adjust to it.



J.B.: How about Hensley. How do you react. . . how do you and he interact?

Wilkins: Well, we vote against. . . practically everything I bring up he votes against it and practically everything he. . . . But we go down drinking to the club and have a good time. You know. Basically every recession we go down to the Sheraton and hoist a few. All the time. And we get along fine, except when we get back on the floor of the legislature. And sometimes, you know, we vote together. This type thing. But we usually. . . . Because he's a conservative and I'm not. He's very conservative. A Wallace supporter and so forth.

J.B.: Do you ever talk about Wallace with him?

Wilkins: Yeah, we talk about him. We talk about him sometimes. There are about 25 guys that are real conservative in the house. In other words, they won't vote. . . . For example, I proposed a study to determine the educational qualifications of all law enforcement officers in Arkansas. Just a study by the legislative research council. No cost at all. And do you know that some of these conservatives--"No. We can't sign that." Just a study to determine whether we needed to change the educational qualifications. Because there are not really any, in Arkansas, except some cities--some cities might have qualifications, but other than that. Just on a simple matter like that, you know. So almost anything I bring up Hensley and some of his friends, they would just vote it down. Mays brought it up, you know, they would vote against it. Regardless of what it was. [Ef] we brought up motherhood and apple pie, they might have voted that down, too, as a sinister communist plot or something. But in terms of treatment, I don't think any of the black legislators, you know, could have been treated any better, you know, in terms of personal relationships. There were no bad scenes,



except one time one representative--one of Hensley's very conservative friends--he'd been voting against everything. So some guy--I think I know who he was, one of these liberal whites--took my stationery and wrote on there "Glover, you white hunky son of a bitch, I wish I could get your ass down in Jefferson county. We're going to take care of you." And passed it on. Oh, he was mad. And he thought at first that I had really written it, you know. So he came over and probably if I hadn't realized what was going on, we probably would have had a fight there. Because I have a bad temper myself. So I said "Well, hell, if you think I wrote it" and I just pulled out my desk drawer. Said "Look." He looked at it and said "No, you didn't write it." You know, so it was all over. But that was the nearest thing

[End of interview.]