

This is an interview with James White, State Senator from Shelby County, Tennessee and Chairman Democratic Party in the State. The interview was held in Memphis, Tennessee on August 19, 1974 by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries and was transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

JACK BASS: Give me just a quick summary of your own political background. You have just become Shelby County Democratic Chairman, right?

White: Yes. I was elected this month as Chairman of the Shelby County Democratic Party. I was elected to the State Senate in November of '72, my first successful election. I ran in a primary up in . I ran the previous year, in '71 for City Council. I got in the run-off and was defeated in the run-off. I ran the year prior to that . . . my first year in 1970 for the house . . . state house against the same gentlemen I eventually beat in the senate. He was in the house and I lost by a narrow margin in November of '71, that was my first venture in politics.

J.B.: What caused you to get in it at that time?

White: Well, I was a newspaper reporter for 12 years prior to becoming a lawyer and I covered just government. I covered City Hall for about seven years and the federal building about four. I covered the legislature a little bit. I never covered anything really except

government. Then when I went to night law school and started practicing law in '69 it gave me even more reason to be interested in politics. I have always been interested in politics. I worked politics as a reporter, and that sort of stayed with me.

J.B.: What is the state of the Democratic party in Shelby County?

White: What is the state of it?

J.B.: Yeah.

White: I think it is probably not in too good a shape right now. We've still got factionalism . . . Memphis has a very large black population and the . . . Memphis was always traditionally Democratic when it was a one party state, and those in the Democratic party who were in control were the conservative . . . well the Democratic party itself was conservative nationwide and as the party became more liberal, a great many of the older politicians in the Democratic party in Shelby County just sort of dropped out - either became independent or became inactive, and they couldn't follow the thinking of the national party, and so alot of those people are tending to come back in I think, now, and realizing whatever might be wrong in their view with the national party is not all roses on the other side. I think Watergate has caused some of that thinking. The old law and order picture of the Republican party is not quite so clear anymore since

we have two . . . three top people in our administration that have been disgraced and a number of staff men disintegrated. Of course, they were the ones hammering at us about law and order, and so I think we will benefit from Watergate.

J.B.: Do you expect the Democrats to maintain control of the legislature?

White: I expect them to increase the margins substantially. . . not so much because of Watergate, but because I think there is general dissatisfaction with the voters because of the economy and things in general. People are looking for a change, and I don't think the change is being the Republican administration. I think the Governor . . . I think we are going to have the Governor and I think we are going to have more Democrats in the house particularly. I think the house margin will go up. It's now . . . it was 51 - 48 . . . It's now 50 - 49 . . . I think it'll be 60 - 40 or better.

J.B.: How much of that will be a result of the reapportionment plan. Republicans contend that lines were drawn to not summarize the number of Democratic seats.

White: I don't think that that's the case. I think the fact that we have a very narrow margin in the house now indicates to me that we couldn't have our way, so to speak, to jarrymander people out of the house. I think it is a case of better candidates. I know it sounds corny,

but I really do think . . . I went to a meeting of the Shelby County house candidates the other day with the Speaker who is in town and he is very impressed, for example with the Shelby County candidates. We've got some bright young people that are running. There is Pamela LaGaie who won the nomination . . . defeated . . . in a district that is 35% black and you know, you take away the Republicans and the blacks that doesn't leave many . . . you know white moderates or white Democrats. So she obviously didn't win with white votes . . . she beat a black candidate, and she beat a former house incumbent and won the nomination.

J.B.: What is her name?

White: Pamela Gaia. She was a psychology major at Memphis State, and these people are talking . . . getting out and talking to people on things, you know, not the old political BS either. I think their concern . . .

J.B.: Was the Democratic party in Shelby County becoming basically a coalition of blacks organized labor, academic community and other liberals?

White: Yes, except you've got some conservatives that I don't know whether they hope to change it, you know, to bring the party back to what they would like to see it or whether they are remaining active to just keep balance or what . . . basically most Democratic votes in Shelby County are black right now, and if they are not

black they are liberal, and then the other people who call themselves Democrats have been calling themselves independents. I think they are finding it less uncomfortable to be a Democrat.

J.B.: What is this going to mean this fall considering the Democratic nominee . . . at least has an image of being conservative . . . pictured that way and is a nominee with less than one-fourth of the vote in the primary?

White: I think he has a tough battle ahead of him. He is conservative, but he is like conservatives, namely Lyndon Johnson, who think he can learn, and I think he has already learned that you don't lose votes by addressing yourself to the needs of the black community, and you still obtain the support you have in the white community, and I think that Blanton can win in a walk if he will do that. But if he just ignores the blacks and figures they have got no where else to go, he is going to be disappointed because 40% of them went with Howard Baker the year before last.

J.B.: We went to a unity meeting . . . I guess that is what it was called . . . the one with all the candidates, just sat in on the press conference . . . when the question was put to him specifically on that question . . . what is he going to do to attract liberals and labor and black who failed to get . . . as much support as most Democrats did last time . . .

White: Yeah.

J.B.: . . . His basic response was that he felt his record showed that he expressed concerns of interest to those groups.

White: Well, I think he is going to have to do more than say I am going to be fair with everyone as the tone of his ads took in the later part of his campaign. I think he is going to have to get specific and talk about some problems and how he would approach them. Of course, I think he made a statement that he would name a black as Chairman and the way that came out, it sounded like tokenism, but I think he is going to have to meet with the blacks and campaign in the black community.

J.B.: Do you anticipate the legislature in the upcoming session will again pass a run-off provision?

White: I don't know . . . maybe state-wide run-off law would have a better chance of passing. The trouble with run-off laws is on the one hand the blacks and liberals say that this . . . and with good justification . . . this is designed to keep minorities from holding office, because some minorities will never be able to get a majority on the second go around because the whites will all go down the line . . . hardly true if there were as many blacks as vote white. On the other hand when you have a run-off nobody comes. We had a run-off in the municipal judge election and then only about, I think, 3% of the voters in Shelby County voted in the run-off. Just

nobody voted, so it is just a waste of money, and the idea that a majority . . . that somebody ought to have a majority vote ignores the fact that when you have a run-off on a smaller race, nobody participates in it, but maybe they would in a gubernatorial run-off. So, there is legitimate reason for drawing a distinction between local and state races. The larger the race, the more apt you would be to have interest in them, but what happens in a run-off if nobody comes?

J.B.: In your opinion why did Governor Dunn veto that bill?

White: I have often wondered why he vetoed his bills. Some of his vetoes . . . I don't know.

J.B.: How do you rate him as Governor?

White: Delightfully naive. He is a charming fellow. He means well, he has been refreshing in many ways in that he was not . . . didn't come up to the ranks and didn't have any pre-conceived notions, but I think he surrounded himself with people who were incompetent, and he got some bad advice.

J.B.: Were they more incompetent or more inexperienced?

White: Incompetent in the sense that they were inexperienced. You mean the people around him?

J.B.: Yeah.

White: I think in some cases incompetent. You know, his legal assistant Lee Smith, he could have done better than that. He had some people around him that could have

. . . he could have done better . . . gotten better people.

J.B.: Was his major problem in dealing with the legislature?

White: Right. I think he got some bad advice . . . maybe really he shouldn't have taken the approach of what is the political thing to do . . . maybe you ought to just get in there, stumble around and make mistakes. In one sense I admire him for that. . . like the East Tennessee Medical School thing. He just beat himself over the head on that. I voted with him, but I wasn't Governor, though. I could have handled it better than him. He found with the legislature when he knew he couldn't win on issues that . . . like the Arlington Deaf School . . . they passed that thing three times and he kept vetoing it, and I don't think he has ever really gotten the facts about that . . . the Arlington Deaf School, the need for it in Shelby County. I guess it is a big job and a lot the Governor has to tend to but it does seem that he really . . . you know, when you are getting bad advice, or bad information, your image is affected by that, and so you take a position based on that bad misinformation and you are stuck with it. Sometimes it is uncomfortable to get off of a position . . .

J.B.: What do you plan to do as County Chairman?

White: Try to hold the fort! We've got an interesting ticket here in Memphis . . . black congressman, congressional candidate Harold Ford, has been somewhat of a stormy [petra] ,

. . . a highly successful family, the Ford's, and Ray Blanton who is a proven failure as far as getting black votes in Shelby County is concerned, but that was against Howard Baker who had a good civil rights record as opposed to Lamar Alexander. I don't think that Lamar has a record of any kind. He is just a young unknown factor . . . a very clean cut, nice looking young man. I don't know of any record he has, but I think it'll be all together different. Of course, he's got the possibility of a U. S. Senate race, which could further weaken or strengthen the Democratic party . . . you know, ^{if} Senator Howard Baker was appointed Vice President, then the Assembly would have an election this fall for the U. S. Senate. If John Hooker were the candidate, or Dick Fulton were the candidate, or even Butcher, it would be an interesting November assuming that Winfield Dunn were the Republican candidate.

J.B.: How would the Democratic candidate be selected, I mean in a special primary or by the State Executive Committee?

White: Well there is kind of a ^[provision] in the law as to how you do it after the primary, but presumably the State Executive Committee would certify that someone has the nominee, that's all I can make of it, and there is talk of an Alexander - Dunn ticket . . . Dunn running for U. S. Senator as opposed to Hooker - Blanton, that would be an interesting race. Dunn is weak in East Tennessee because

of his medical school position, and Blanton is weak in urban areas because of the black situation, whereas Hooker is very strong in the black areas, but he is weak in many white areas because of his chicken situation still living with him I guess. You remember that?

J.B.: Right. How significant was the Supreme Court race this year . . . was it significant in a symbolic sense and that's it, or was it more than that?

White: I think it is very significant. Not only in terms of the kind of court we are going to have, because I think we are going to have an excellent court . . . the best in the nation . . . we have got some fine minds on that court, and I think that I am not being partisan when I say that they were head and shoulders above the three Republicans. I am just really impressed with the court. As you know, there is a political ramification in the Supreme Court too, because they do appoint the Attorney General, and the Attorney General is a member of the building commission. The State Building Commission does have a lot of patronage power in terms of architects, etc.

J.B.: Who else is on the building commission?

White: The Governor, Chairman of Finance Administration, and the Attorney General, and the Comptroller . . . there are five . . . I'm not sure . . .

J.B.: How many are elected by the legislature?

White: I think both Speakers are on the building commission.

J.B.: And the Comptroller is elected by the legislature.

White: We elect , but they are not all on there. I don't really know . . .

J.B.: So it is likely then to be a Democratic majority.

White: Yeah, I would think so. Even if Lamar Alexander wins, we'll have a Democratic majority . . . well, it's certain, unless the Supreme Court appoints a Republican to the Attorney General post, and they are not going to do that assuming there is a qualified Democrat.

J.B.: What is the political significance of it beyond that in the broader sense of the state where both the U. S. Senators and the Governor are all Republican. Many people think the Republican is favored to win the Governor's office.

White: I am not sure I understand your question. You mean the fact that they won and even though the state is apparently Republican . . .

J.B.: No I wouldn't say that the state is necessarily primarily Republican, but in recent years Republicans have had the biggest success in state-wide races. What does it mean in terms . . . does it mean anything insofar as Democratic party unity, Democratic party coming back together, more awareness within the Democratic party of the need for unity . . . are any of those factors in this thing.

White: Possibly, I think so. Of course, they ran as a ticket, and they campaigned, and I think they were just head and shoulders above the Republicans and most of them . . . all

but one had been on the bench, and had Court experience. None of the Republicans did. Joe Henry the one who has never been on the bench other than just sitting specially, is known all over the state. He's a highly colorful and competent lawyer. He is a very able writer. He's the President of the Tennessee Bar Association. They were just head and shoulders above the other Republican candidates. I think that was the significance of it . . . it was a partial victory for them and the way the campaign was running.

J.B.: Is there any chance that the Democratic party as a party taking a greater role in the future in trying to select candidates for state-wide office as a result of the Supreme Court thing?

White: What?

J.B.: In some states . . . I don't *any in* the South, there are states that say the party itself will recommend or endorse a candidate in a primary.

White: In a primary? Oh no, I am opposed to that. That wasn't a primary race though.

J.B.: Right, I realize that.

White: I don't think the party ought to ever endorse a candidate in the primary. If I were running against an incumbent Democrat that I thought ought to go, he had outlived his usefulness, I would resent the hell out of the fact that he was . . . because he was an incumbent and has connections with the established . . . that he'd get the

support of the party against me. It would tend to make me say to hell with the party.

J.B.: What do you think is the effect insofar as the Democratic party is concerned of the decision of not renominating the Chief Justice?

White: Do I think that hurt the party?

J.B.: Did it hurt it or help it?

White: Well, I don't know that it did either one. I don't think that most people know you on the Supreme Court, and I am sure it didn't help him with the people close to Chief Justice , but I just think that it is wrong to assume that an incumbent is necessarily more qualified than somebody else, and when we have a situation when the party has to nominate either an incumbent or somebody challenging him, then I think they ought to be weighed in the balance, and he was *[less qualified]* I think. Everybody on that court was more qualified than he is.

J.B.: Would you mind explaining . . . it's going to take a few minutes, but explaining just what happened at that whole procedure beginning with squabble over the medical school, and its relationship through the Supreme Court election. I want to make sure I understand that because I'm not sure . . .

White: I'm not sure what the medical school has to do with it?

J.B.: Well my understanding . . .

White: Everybody said that there was a deal made that if you would vote for the East Tennessee Medical School, I'll

vote to repeal the Missouri Plan. Well, I voted against the East Tennessee Medical School and I voted to repeal the Missouri Plan too. So I obviously didn't make a deal.

J.B.: No the deal, as I understand it, was with some Republicans. [Interruption]

White: To begin with, I had . . . in my campaign and in statements since I got elected publicly stated that I liked the concept of the Missouri Plan. The idea that someone can run on their record. They put pressure on me in the '73 to try to get me to change my vote and vote against the Missouri Plan and I refused to do so. I must confess that I really didn't understand the Missouri Plan, but all along I thought it was a case of where you ran on your record . . . that you ran for election the first time, if there was an election. The only time that you would be appointed is when there was a vacancy by death or resignation, or impeachment, but as it drew toward the end of the past courts term there was suddenly talk of the Governor appointing three members of the Supreme Court for a full eight year term, and I said what is this about appointing people for an eight year term . . . that's the way it is done under the Missouri plan. So I found out that under the modified Missouri Plan you don't have an election at the end of the eight years. If someone elects not to run for re-election, I assumed that they would have an election and then after their eight years they could run on their record, and so I said well, I am not for that kind of Plan, I'm for a straight

out Missouri Plan. Well I learned out a lot about it later as I got into it, and so I first . . .

J.B.: Well is the straight out Missouri Plan, does a vacancy occur . . .

White: Alright, I'll tell you . . . you are on the Supreme Court, you die on the Governor and there is a year left on your term, I would appoint a successor to you, but at the end of that one year, there would be an election. You wouldn't just run on your record or people vote yes or no. There would be an election for . . . So on the situation where you take office . . .

J.B.: That's the way it has been in Missouri?

White: I don't know that that is done strictly in Missouri, but in some states that's the way it is done. In other words I would be for a concept of not having a judge ever appointed unless he is appointed to fill an interim, and only that interim. I would also be for the concept of having him run for election the first time . . . the only beauty of the Missouri Plan is that a person runs on his record. I see no efficacy in letting the Governor make the political decision of who the three will be for a full eight year term as opposed to the people, and the people can judge him for his record . . . so, I buy that concept and right now, I introduced a bill at the same time I agreed to a repeal to the Missouri Plan . . . the modified Missouri Plan, I introduced a bill which would call

for the straight out Missouri Plan would provide that . . . like in these three cases there was an election for the three vacancies and the three gentlemen that were not going to run again . . . there would have been an election at the end of the eight years. They would run on their record just like everybody else. If those three had resigned or died in the middle of the term the Governor would have appointed them until the end of the term and then there would be an election and thereafter they would run on their record, but I got no support for my bill because there are plenty of people up there that don't think that someone should ever run on their record, that they ought to have to face the voters, and you can argue it both ways because the people that say there ought to be an election, they don't even know who is on the court anyway, and so that is an argument against both systems. There is no real good system for electing judges that I can think of. I think you are just as likely to have political hacks if they are elected by . . . if they are appointed by the Governor especially because he can keep rejecting all three names and get three more until he gets down to the one man he is going to put on there.

J.B.: He doesn't have to . . .

White: He can reject without any reason three more. So, if you had a nominating commission which was antagonistic to the Governor, which I can't foresee, he could still

them by continuing to reject their nominations.

J.B.: The background of this though . . . this modified Missouri Plan is a relatively new procedure for Tennessee.

White: Right.

J.B.: Involved what, a three member nominating commission?

White: I don't know how many members it has.

J.B.: A nominating commission who is appointed by whom?

White: Well, that part has been part of a law suite, originally the legislature was on it. I am not familiar with the make-up of the thing. I think there was about five members appointed by the Governor.

J.B.: And they in effect serve as a screening committee?

White: Right.

J.B.: Alright, then three vacancies occurred on the court, or would be occurring, is that what the situation was?

White: Of the five members on the court, three of them had elected not to run for re-election. So under that modified Missouri Plan, by the first week in June, you had to notify the Governor whether or not you are going to run for re-election and if you are not going to run for re-election, then that triggers the nominating procedure and the Governor appoints, let's say all five members of the court decided they didn't want to run for re-election. On June 1, they would either have to notify the Governor or it becomes vacant. In other words either way they have got to say I am going to run again or else he takes over.

J.B.: Three said no in this case?

White: Right, and theoretically he could appoint the whole Supreme Court . . . one man. A lame duck Governor at that could do that. So I don't see any good in that, but I still would like to see us adopt a straight out Missouri Plan.

J.B.: But under that plan that existed, there was no advice, dodge and consent function of the senate?

White: No.

J.B.: Then the Governor waited too late to make the appointment . . . is that basically what happened? That is one of the points that I am not quite clear on.

White: No that didn't involve . . . you are talking about the Phone's situation when Phone's was appointed. Let's see Phones would be running for re-election this year. The Taylor Turley thing is what you are talking about.

J.B.: Right.

White: The Turley thing. That is when Taylor and Turley were vying for that thing. Turley was Dunn's original appointment and Taylor said he won by write-in and the Supreme Court held that neither one of them won it. These were three people that did retire that would not have run for re-election under the Missouri plan the Governor could appoint not only interim appointments, but full eight year terms. He could appoint five friends of his who are all sons of his relatives who just passed the bar by just rejecting all the other lawyers in Tennessee until they

procedurally got to them.

J.B.: Does the Lieutenant Governor play any active political role?

White: He better, he should, yes. He certainly is in a powerful position to do so. We have, I think, the only Lieutenant Governor elected by the senate. He is also the only Lieutenant Governor . . . one of the few who presides over the senate. I wouldn't . . . I think we ought to have an elected Lieutenant Governor, but he ought not be the Speaker of the Senate. He ought to be like the Vice-President . . . well, the Vice-President presides over the senate, but I think we ought to elect our own speaker and the Governor ought to have a Lieutenant Governor who would succeed to him in the event that something happened. In other words, like in our present situation, with a Democratic Lieutenant Governor, the people elected a Republican Governor, I think that if Winfield Dunn had been killed in a plane crash he ought to have had . . . the party ought to have their man to take over, which they wouldn't have had, we would have had a Democratic Governor. By the same token, if Blanton is successful and something happened to him, there should be a Lieutenant Governor to take over. Of course, there will be . . . I feel confident, there won't be any change in the Democratic control of the senate. We've got better control than the house has anyway.

J.B.: To what extent is party discipline imposed in the legislature?

White: I suppose it is different in both houses. I think there is more control in the house than there is in the senate primarily because you've got a . . . in the senate, you've got a lot of older people that nobody is going to control them. You can't tell them anything. For example, we had a situation where three or four of them bolted in the caucus and the nomination ^{for me} controller, [and I] know about that situation. I, for example, voted for Bill Snodgrass in the caucus. Snodgrass lost and ^{Keplant} ~~Caphart~~ was the nominee so I went in the general meeting and . . . voted in the general caucus and voted for Snodgrass, I mean, for ^{Keplant} ~~Caphart~~, but three or four of them didn't. So that's . . .

J.B.: And the fact that several of those were Committee Chairman, weren't they?

White: 29 Committee Chairman, and that hasn't helped Wilder at all . . . they did that.

J.B.: Is that likely to be an issue in the next time the Lieutenant Governor is nominated?

White: I think it's an issue, but it is just about a foregone conclusion that Wilder will be re-elected and he has no serious threat. I don't think that Crouch is a threat to him.

J.B.: Does ^{McWhorter} ~~McCurder~~ have a serious threat?

White: Yeah, I would think so.

J.B.: What is the issue involved in that house speakership?

White: I don't know. I have never served in the house,

I haven't served in the senate that long but I think generally it is a matter of style and approach and there is philosophical difference between the two.

J.B.: What is the philosophical difference?

White: ~~McCurder~~ ^{McWhorter} is a much more conservative candidate than McKinney, but he is also more pliable I think and probably can deal with people better, whereas McKinney has a reputation generally of being pretty heavy handed.

J.B.: How effective are the black legislators?

White: In what way? In the legislation they are getting passed?

J.B.: In the legislation they are getting passed.

White: I don't think they are too effective with legislation. They prevent legislation from being passed, and they carry the balance of power in a lot of legislation. They are certainly effective to that extent, they caucus and tend to stay together on issues that are important to them. So I guess they are effective to that extent . . . moreso than any other block of votes in the house today.

J.B.: Is there a single leader in that group?

White: I don't know, I doubt it. They all tend to be sort of ~~primadonas~~ ^{primadonnas} in their own way . . . like whites are. Murphy is influential. I think Pruitt is . . . Lois Dederry is fast becoming a very effective legislator.

J.B.: What kind of a role does Avon Williams play? Is he effective or not?

White: I am a great admirer of him myself. I had heard that he was ~~in~~ⁱⁿtractable, demanding, over-sensitive, and everything else. I found him to be a real capable nice fellow. I like him. He's got guts. I understand that he has changed a lot. He certainly has been effective since I've been up there.

J.B.: Changed a lot in what ways?

White: Well I think he has become less sensitive and emotional and ~~equipped~~^{quick} to anger and ~~equipped~~^{quick} to defend himself. He could still do it well, but I mean he gets around and talks to the legislator and to the other senators, and he takes defeat gracefully, doesn't get sensitive about it and keeps coming back doggedly, and he has got some good legislation passed.

J.B.: Such as?

White: Last year . . . I mean year before last, an important housing bill. The Governor came out with a bill to enable low cost housing be built . . . his bill sort of compliments that to provide loans for refurbishing housing as opposed to building new low cost housing. He passed a very good sovereign ~~annuity~~^{immunity} bill in the senate, which of all places passed in the senate failed in the house.

opposed to it, which more or less did away completely with the idea of sovereign immunity for losses against the city. I can't think of . . . it won't come to my mind right away, I've just noted that he seems to be more effective as the day goes on. I think he

is one of our more conscientious legislators now.

J.B.: How about the Ford family. Where do they fit in in terms of black politics in Shelby County?

White: Someone said all they've got are votes, but they are apparently to be reckoned with in Shelby County . . . black politics were a long time to come.

J.B.: What is it three brothers?

White: Three brothers and they are all in office. Emmett was nominated to take over Harold's seat, Harold, as expected, won the Eighth District nomination, and John the real big surprise just widdled his . He gets all kinds of wild publicity all the time that seems to help him.

J.B.: What kind of wild publicity? I am not that familiar with it.

White: Well, one night he was arrested by the city police . . . he's on the city council and the police said he was going about 70 or 80 miles per hour down Second or Third Street right in the urban area, and he wouldn't get out of the car according to the police. They drew guns on him and he made a public statement saying that the police were out to kill him and things like that. He's been involved in a number of situations where he has been sued for a check that wasn't good. He's always battling on the council. He was charged recently with making phone calls . . . personal phone calls on the city card. He's just always in the news for things like that. People talk about

antics of the Ford family . . . Harold, he assumed some national hotel reliable slander and said that the manager had accused him of running an unkept place, that his wife was having men friends while he was gone. I know his wife and am sure there is no substance at all to it, but I know I wouldn't have sued either. My wife said to me "if some hotel manager accused me of that, I'd kill you if you sued." But there is always somebody that says there must be something to that. But they thrive on this kind of publicity apparently. The first time I ever met John was when I was running for city council, he was also running for city council. He was telling me how he was going to take it with no problem and the they got the incumbent Reverand , and I thought to myself, well that braggard he's done a lot of talking, and he does the same kind of talking against J. L. Patterson, it's a cinch. He doesn't even live in the district apparently and Patterson tried to make the most of that but didn't even answer him. He just said that Patterson was probably out sleeping or drinking, and he won.

J.B.: What is the secret of their success?

White: I don't know. It may indicate that the black politician ought to adopt the Ford plan. You may have more and more black politicians taking that approach, just make as much noise as you can.

J.B.: How was Harold in the legislature?

White: Harold? I think he was very effective. He's

conscientious. In many ways Harold is much quieter and subdued as a person than his brother John. He's a . . .

J.B.: Is he a viable candidate for Congress?

White: Well as a nominee in a district that is over 40% black, I think any black candidate would be a viable candidate in a situation like that. I'd hate to think that if I were black and I was the nominee, and I had over 40% black in my district that I didn't even have a chance running against a man who has just been a rubber stamp for the administration, and that's all he's been. He's open to attack from other areas too. He's one of ~~those~~ ^{those} the Ford's that voted against even having the impeachment hearings . . . inquiry to see if there were ^{grounds} . Had a noose . . . a rope fashioned into a noose accusing the house of representatives of conducting a lynching. A ^{lynch} mob by even voting to set up a judiciary committee . . . now he's saying all along I would have . . . I was waiting to see what the facts . . . came in before I decided how to vote, I never did say I wouldn't vote for impeachment, but he did vote against even looking into it. I think that in a situation like that, that he's viable.

J.B.: Is he making that an issue in the campaign?

White: Rubber stamp? Yeah, that and the economy.

J.B.: What is Ford's professional background?

White: They are all sons of a well known, long established funeral director N. J. Ford and Sons.

J.B.: Where they in the business themselves?

White: Yes, they've all been involved in the business, Sons of the owner. I don't know of any other business they have been in. . .

J.B.: What . . . one of the traditional active mortician politicians?

White: I think so, yeah.

J.B.: Where is labor moving insofar as black political leadership? We heard one theory that the future political black leaders are going to be coming out of the labor movement in another five years.

White: I think that is true. We've got some evidence of that in Memphis already. ~~Raymond~~ ^{Leamon} Hood is becoming more and more influential all the time. Leon Lynch, they are a couple of people you ought to talk to, if you haven't already. Leon Lynch and ~~Raymond~~ ^{Leamon} Hood, they are both . . . Lynch is involved with A. Phillip Randolph Institute, and Raymond Hood . . .

J.B.: What is Lynch's first name?

White: Leon Lynch, and Leamon Hood. They are involved with AFSCME, American Federation State County Municipal Employees, and that union is bring about about what you are talking about. That is one of the fastest growing unions in the world as you know.

J.B.: Are they expanding elsewhere in Tennessee?

White: I don't know.

J.B.: Do you see them or others like them as potential candidates in the future?

White: I see them as being influential, and I think Leamon Hood would be a very viable candidate if he wanted to be.

J.B.: What is the role of the Randolph Institute here?

White: I don't know. I am not very knowledgeable about that. Henry Sutton, who probably has better contacts with the black than any other white man in Memphis, one of my associates here . . . you may want to talk to him, he can fill you in, but I just don't know what they do. I know it's involved in votes, getting registration . . . what the scope of their work is, I don't know, it's black labor.

J.B.: The

White: I am just a fighting politics.

J.B.: How . . . is white labor in Tennessee ready yet to move into active coalition with black labor? I am talking about on the voter level, not the leadership level.

White: I guess the problem in labor is the same problem the Democratic party has . . . whites and blacks tend to . . . in the Democratic party tend to fight over the deficits rather than coalesce around common goals. I am sure that . . .

J.B.: Is that changing at all?

White: I guess I still like saying it better. I don't see any great evidence of it. It seems to me that the black

political labor leaders are becoming more powerful than the white labor leaders for the simple reason that the whites . . . they are having the same kind of control that the white labor leader had 30 years ago, or 40 or 50 years ago, because what does a labor leader offer now to the laboring man. He's . . . the bread and butter gut issues aren't as important to him as they are to the blacks, whereas they were to the whites a long time ago. So, Leamon Hood says we have got to elect Jim White, elect so and so . . . they translate that in terms of whether we are going to get a decent livable wage, or whether we are even going to have running water in our house. They don't tend to support the labor ticket and get out and work, and when they give them a ballot, they'll take that ballot and vote it . . . that AFSCME ballot, operation big vote, that's what they call it. It's very effective . . . endorsement to have. The AFL-CIO labor ballot doesn't mean a hill of beans . . . it doesn't mean a lot, but the labor people just ignore it. Did they support Davis? I don't know.

J.B.: Is Richard Fulton perceived as a state-wide candidate when you get outside of his congressional district? Can the Democrats in Shelby County look at him as a strong potential candidate for the U. S. Senate?

White: I would view him as just about the strongest.

J.B.: Is he also the most . . .

White: Hooker . . . he would all the advantages that Hooker has as far as . . . in other words he's liberal. He is more liberal than Gore. His record is more liberal than Gore's, and so I can only compare him say with Hooker and Gore. He doesn't have Hooker's . . . whatever drawbacks or disadvantages Hooker has. He is probably not as articulate as Hooker either, but I think he could get the black votes, and he would be a real tough candidate [Interruption]

[Begin side 2, tape 1]

. . . bow out at a time when most people thought the nomination would be his for the asking. He just stepped aside, and I think he is in a position now to set anybody except Fulton. He could certainly sit up to Butcher. I stepped aside now and I'd like to be able to support , and I think that he's been in a strong position.

J.B.: The impression that we have gotten so far in talking to people is that the single most unifying force on the horizon for the Democratic party in Tennessee is Bill Brock.

White: Yes.

J.B.: I mean that he is a stronger negative force to unification than he is any real positive force within the Democratic party.

White: Probably so. I'd hate to . . . change the subject a little bit about Hooker and Fulton . . . I guess one thing

that might swing me on that, is that I would hate to see us lose Fulton in the Fifth District and that seat he is in. We've got another man who could . . . I would hope that would resolve that some way, but I could strongly support either one of them. If Brock is a negative force that inspired us all.

J.B.: Is that primarily because of the nature of the campaign he ran against Gore? Or, is it Brock's voting record?

White: I think it is his voting record and the campaign plus a general feeling of distrust to the man as though he is cold and calm and he has a almost disdain for a . . . I don't know how to put it . . . he just doesn't inspire any warmth at all. He is a very cold person. Of course nobody really forgives him for beating Gore either, and I think he's not a . . . either.

J.B.: Well is it his defeat of Gore, or the way he defeated Gore that creates the most response?

White: No, I think most people think that Gore defeated himself.

J.B.: In what way?

White: I think Gore operated under the theory throughout his life that you get elected, you do a good job, and even though people disagree with you, they are going to re-elect you if you do the statesmanlike thing, and they think you are honest, and that's not the case. So he

didn't stoop to little trivial things of keeping people happy here and there.

J.B.: Wasn't Gore's voting record to really provide adequate constituent service?

White: Well, I think that added constituent service would have overcome his voting record, is what I am saying. Even his . . . I would have never even cast that second vote. After having voted against ~~Hainesworth~~ ^{Haynsworth} (?), there was probably more reason to vote for him, than Carswell, and so I guess he was in a real bind, and I think he voted against him, surely he can't vote for this dumb dumb, but I think the political thing to do at that point was to vote for him and he didn't, and I think he could have gotten by with that if he had spent a little more I guess a good example . . . I don't think he was a good politician Albert Gore. I remember in '58, I was a reporter and I was sent to Washington with the mid-south Spelling Bee Champion and one of the thrills of the little boy was to have lunch with Senator Gore. So we rode the railway across and in the Senate dining room he was talking to this young man and he says "Douglas," his name was Douglas Packloy, "I admire you, I never was much good at spelling," he said "for example why there are certain words I just have a real problem with like pill, I always want to spell it with one l," Douglas said, "Well Senator, it is spelled with one l," so I was writing this down and as we were leaving, Gore

called me aside and said "would you please not use that about pill." I said "why, I think it's revealing, and it is heartwarming," and he said "I just hate for anybody to know I can't spell, he said please don't mention it." He got real serious about it. To me that would have just endear him to people . . . everybody that can't spell pill, and even the ones who could spell it wouldn't have looked . . .

J.B.: That human quality.

White: That human quality that Senator, it is with one l. He just . . . he was just . . . he just wasn't a warm person, and he didn't know how to politic. I think you can get by with a lot if you have political charisma and Gore didn't have any.

J.B.: [Interruption] ^{What role does} . . . Shelby County play in state politics?

White: Well it is one-fifth of the state. It elected the Governor last time. I think it is becoming the key in any state-wide race because when you have a state where there are ninety-five counties, and ninety-four of them have 80% of the vote, and the ninety-fifth one has 20%, then obviously you can meet more voters per minute of campaigning in Shelby County than in any other county in the State. So, when you cover one-fifth of the state by being in one county, then mathematically, it is important, and the person who can get in here and get this Memphis vote is way ahead of the game.

J.B.: How do you evaluate the quality of the capital press corps? You are now really in a unique position to do that.

White: Well, they are like anybody else who is on a bureau, or on a beat. You tend to get in a rut. I think if I were an editor, I would change it very often because they tend to write the same stories, and I think it is not as fresh as it could be. It is a criticism of newspapers in general, but I think they tend to write gee whiz controversial stuff, or ignore a lot of reporting about meaningful things that are going on. Of course, the argument of the paper is we print what people want to hear, and I think they tend to belittle the legislature, moreso than they do any other [group] that needs belittling, but I mean some of it is exaggerated and unfair. I think the general impression of the legislature among the voters is that it is a group of guys who are getting away from their wives for a big party and the wine and the money and the whiskey and the girls are everywhere and nobody really gives a damn what is going on and nobody works, they are just staying up for all night parties, and no that is not the case. A lot of hard work goes on up there. A lot of thoughtful deliberation . . . there is a hell of a lot wrong, but I am sure there is a hell of a lot wrong with all of us, but maybe more so at that level, but I don't think that is a good balance of reporting.

J.B.: Is there a need for more investigative reporting?

White: Yes, I think so.

J.B.: So you fault them both on the lack of investigative reporting and also for lack of just reporting on substantive issues?

White: Right. For example . . .

J.B.: Making government understandable . . .

White: . . . That vocational educational bill, I don't think there has been much at all written about that, and that is going to be a far reaching thing, I think.

J.B.: Do you see Tennessee ever inacting the income tax?

White: Yes.

J.B.: Is that a coming issue? Why did nobody in the Governor's race this time make that an issue?

White: Political fear, because they know that the average citizen thinks of an income tax as an additional tax over and above what they are having to pay and they don't want to pay anymore; everybody wants service, but they don't want to pay for it. So you have people criticizing the spending record of the incumbent and saying he hasn't done enough, and telling you what he is going to do.

J.B.: How are you going to have an income tax unless there is some leadership to educate the public on it?

White: I am for an unlimited convention, and I've been telling the legislators that I have been talking with, you

know you don't hurt yourself by saying "we're willing to let . . . to have an unlimited convention to let a convention explore all possible tax ramifications, and then present it to the people," but you have a strong sentiment against even allowing a convention to consider an income tax. If you don't, we are just going to dry up.

J.B.: Is that sentiment changing at all?

White: I don't know, I don't think so. I doubt though that we will have an open convention.

J.B.: So it is a long ways off?

White: Well I think we have got to start to set it up by next year though. I think we have got to start to pass the resolutions in the fall of this coming year, I think.

J.B.: But the way it looks now . . . will be blended.

White: It does look that way.

J.B.: Would the Governor's leadership be a key factor in that . . . whoever the Governor is? In other words if the Governor, whoever he is, took a strong position on an unlimited call, would that make a substantial difference in the legislature?

White: Yeah.

J.B.: Take people off the hook.

White: Right.

J.B.: Have either of the candidates given any indication

at all that they consider that, or has that even been an issue?

White: Of the two?

J.B.: Right.

White: I don't know. I haven't heard either one of them say anything about it. Bill Farris indicated that he would make an issue . . . but he didn't stay in as a candidate. I think we have got to have an income tax or else the poor property owners are going to have a mighty high note. The sales tax is going to sore, and we've got the most regressive tax base in the nation . . . Memphis has, for example. Of the twenty-six major cities, ours is the most regressive when you figure our tax which is really a service fee, which is just a tax, and property which is more regressive than income tax. But you have different people calling for income tax now.

J.B.: Who would be the strongest three, or four, or five lobbying groups in Nashville. [Interruption]

White: I'd say the farm bureau, certainly I'd have to mention them.

J.B.: ~~Thanks.~~ Banks.

White: ~~Thanks,~~ Banks, yeah. Of course, you've got different groups of things. The liquor industry.

J.B.: How about insurance?

White: Yeah.

J.B.: How about the trial lawyers?

White: Trial lawyers . . . I don't know that the trial

lawyers organization is powerful as an organization. I think lawyers are a strong lobby in the legislature by virtue of the fact that so many lawyers are in the legislature. For example, I am not a member of the trial lawyers, but I am a lawyer, and I don't think the trial lawyers organization is all that powerful as an organization.

J.B.: Why is the farm bureau so strong, and particularly . . . especially in a state that is predominately no longer ruled state?

White: I don't know. They still have the framework for electing and people because . . . well I have the statistics from . . . had four bills effecting confinement and treatment of animals and mistreatment and so forth, and the Farm Bureau killed them all. Well I got them all passed in the senate but the Farm Bureau went over to the house and just proceeded to get them all killed, and the panic the little girl was handling . . . that little Republican from Shelby and so he finally agreed that he would withdraw his opposition and she would make them all local bills, so she came to me and I amended all of mine to make them all local bills. Now, I am just seeing them work up there. I would just consider them very powerful because the legislature has got so many of them. People up there seem to listen to them.

J.B.: Why?

White: I don't know. I am not a ~~legislator~~ ^{rural} legislator and so

I don't know what role they take . . . play in selecting . . .

J.B.: Apparently they must influence urban legislation because really the majority of the legislature comes from urban areas.

White: Is it? I don't think so. I guess you have to define what is an urban area now. Jackson, Lowell Thomas are an urban senator, but I don't ever think of him that way. He is mighty rural in his thinking to me. They are not as powerful as they think they are.

J.B.: The impression I have from other people is that they are the same way. [Interruption] Is there anything you wanted to add that we haven't covered, that includes a lot of areas?

White: No, you've asked some real tough questions and I can see that you put a lot of thought into it. Your questions tended to lean towards the philosophical aspect of it than I thought they would be, and I really haven't been there that long to form the kinds of opinions and impressions that you are interested in, I think. For example, like the last question I don't really know what . . . why the Farm Bureau is strong, I just know that I hear legislators saying that the Farm Bureau is opposed to this and they are voting the other way, but apparently they are very instrumental in seeing who gets elected.

J.B.: Through campaign contributions, or otherwise?

White: I don't know. I don't know whether it is because

they elect the politicians locally who attempt to elect . . . I always thought that the local county organization in each county just named the state representative and you better consider yourself as an agent of the county organization or you're gone. Apparently the Farm Bureau name them as well.

J.B.; What business is the Farm Bureau into in Tennessee? . . . Insurance business of their own aren't they?

White: Don't know, don't know a thing about the Farm Bureau. I know when I first went up there a new Republican senator who is now the residing elected judge over in Hamilton County, Ken Forder gave me a bill he wanted me to sign, well then he said "this is a Farm Bureau bill about feeding of hogs, you don't have any big farmers in Shelby County, why don't you stick your name on it?" So I stuck my name on it. It was to prevent the feeding of cooked mash, cooked garbage to pigs to cut down on cholera, and so I stuck my name on it. When I got home I caught hell from the Memphis Restaurant Association who was selling that stuff. Since that time I have been a little less eager to put my names on bills that I am not personally interested in, especially when they are not supposed to affect me at all. It turns out that I am all right on the thing because they have had some cholera outbreak on the thing since then down in Mississippi and so

forth.

J.B.: Does the Farm Bureau get involved in legislation that is fairly far removed from farm interest or are they fairly narrow in their interest?

White: I never talked to the lobbyists for them except to say hello.

J.B.: I mean just from observation, hearing other people say that the farm people petitioned.

White: Yeah. I believe I recall that they have you know, taken positions on legislation that wouldn't necessarily be farm matters. Specifically, I can't think of one. For example I think they take positions on no-fault insurance and things like that. They are generally for this or that. They may have taken a position on the ERA, I don't know. I am not one of the Farm Bureau legislators. I guess they don't have much trouble in my district, but I really don't know just what their activities are. I just managed to find the rest room the first year and the second year I learned where the house was, next year I hope to find out how a bill is passed. It is very bewildering and confusing the first year up there. It is still confusing because of the system. You never know whether a bill is passed. If someone called me now and said did you all pass a bill, all I can tell her is that we passed it, I don't know whether the house passed it, or whether the Governor signed it. It didn't come back for a veto, either

it died in the house or he signed it, and they think . . .

[interruption]

End interview with James White.