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This is an interview with L.E. (Tommy) Thomas, Republican state chairman of Florida. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries in Panama City, Florida on May 21, 1974 and was transcribed by Joe Jaros.

Walter De Vries: Well, it's a good base to start with. I think that it's, is it Florida and Georgia that have this?

Tommy Thomas: I can't say about Georgia. But doesn't Texas too?

W.D.V.: Texas too.

Jack Bass: Texas has it.

W.D.V.: What do you think about that? In a sense, it's almost kind of a public subsidy of party organization.

Thomas: Yeah. Well, of course, I don't know how we would do without it, but I think that the way we try to do it is a pretty fair and equitable way. All the candidates who survive the primary, generally speaking, maybe you could find some candidate that didn't get his money back, particularly someone who ran unopposed, you know . . . but since I've been chairman and in the two elections since then, we've tried to give back all the candidates who survive the primary their filing fee. I think that's a pretty fair and reasonable way of doing it. Then, the people who are eliminated and who don't have primary opposition, are paying a filing fee to really support the party. We had a Congressman last year who was unopposed,

Frey, so he donated his filing fee to the party, that's what it amounts to.

W.D.V.: So you think that it is a pretty good idea?

Thomas: Yeah, I think that it is an excellent idea and I don't think yet that we are ready to fly without it. And the party, as I'm sure that Bill Davis told you, we operate on a pretty damn frugal budget. I mean, we don't throw any money away and we don't have any frills and we don't have an oversized staff. We certainly don't spend a whole hell of a lot traveling and intertaining and things like that, we just can't. And of course, I'm unpaid. In the case of the Democratic chairman, you know, he's paid.

W.D.V.: Oh is he?

Thomas: Yeah. I'm sure that he's not paid enough, but I think that he's paid \$15, 000. But he's a part-time chairman just like I am. I probably spend as much or more time at it than he does, but he's an attorney and I can see where . . . I mean, he should be paid, I think. And in all probability, in the next three or four to six years, our state chairman should be paid. He should be full time.

W.D.V.: Can you tell us a little bit about your political background. How did you get involved in all of this?

Thomas: Well, being a Chevrolet dealer in this part of the state, I don't go around carrying a card, you know, telling them with a sign that I'm an ex-Yankee, but I grew up in northern New York, up in the part near Buffalo. And of course, this was before the war and I joined the Marine Corps in 1942 when I was seventeen and in the small town that I lived in, everybody was Republican and the only people who were Democrats were the people who wouldn't work. And this is true. You know, my Daddy thought it a disgrace to be a Democrat. So, I married a girl from Birmingham while I

was in the Marines and was discharged in December of 1945. I had been overseas twice and still wasn't twenty-one. So, when I turned twenty-one in July, I went down to the court-house to register Republican and they didn't know what the hell I was talking about. And they had to find somebody who knew the probate judge, they had to get him and of course, I was very insistent that I was going to register Republican and they said, "Well, you can't. There's no such thing." And this was a nice old fellow and he told me, said, "You know, there's no such thing as a Republican Party." They had to scratch their heads to find, to even think of

W.D.V.: Where was this?

Thomas: In Birmingham. And finally, they said, "Yeah, there is a Republican state chairman and he's the vice-president of Alabama Power Company." And they told me where his office was. And he was the titular head . . . since then, I've found out that he is what we know as a "post office Republican." I believe that the only reason that man was a Republican was that if there ever was another Republican administration, he'd get to name the postmasters. Because, they had no organization, none whatsoever. They didn't even have a paper organization. And when I went to checking around, of course, being twenty-one years old, these older people, the few of them that were Republicans, they weren't anxious, they didn't want anybody and they sure as hell didn't want any twenty-one year old smart Alec, you know, helping them. They were polite to me, but that was about the extent of it. I mean, they allowed as how they didn't need any help from me, you know, and they had been running things pretty well all these years and weren't bothering anybody or anything like that. So, I lived in Alabama for many years and

W.D.V.: Did you get registered?

Thomas: I got registered, yeah, but as a Democrat. But they said, "Look, you're not supposed to vote in the Democratic primaries," and there again I told them, "Well, if you open the damn polls, I'll be there." And of course, the Democrats didn't like it because I voted in their primaries. I voted. I told them that if they opened the polls I would damn sure be there, and I was. Now, in the general election, of course, then you got a different colored slip, you got a white slip or a blue slip in the general election, but hell, I voted in the Democratic primaries for years. And I lived in a couple of small towns and the Democrats didn't like it, but you know, I was just kind of a pest.

W.D.V.: So when you came South thirty years ago, you looked for the Republican party and there wasn't any?

Thomas: Right. I mean, there was a paper organization, but that's all. There was no organization whatsoever. And the few people who were Republicans, most of them had probably many years ago migrated from the North, and they wanted a blood sample. I mean that really and truly, they wanted your credentials to go way back prior to the Civil War before they would accept you as a Republican. And they were so negative, the people that I found who were Republicans were really negative and it's no wonder that they didn't attract anybody to the Republican party, because they were "aginers." And I don't know whether you realize this or not, but when you are in Alabama, you should research this, there is one county in Alabama that seceded from the Confederacy. Winston County and it has always been Republican. It's called the Free State of Winston. And they are the orneriest damn people in the world and some of the finest.

But up there, they are the most independent thinkers that you have ever seen. As we developed the Republican party in Alabama, I was what we called a regional coordinator. I had five counties. Winston County was one of my counties. Everybody in the Republican party said, "Oh, Tommy is really lucky, he's got a Republican county." But I had more damn trouble with those people, even thought the court house was controlled by the Republicans. But they were very, very odd people. A very poor county, very low per capita income. But as independent as hell. You know, they refused cotton allotments, cotton subsidies and when they came along with the Soil Bank, they said, "Screw the federal government," you know. I liked their thinking, they were as independent as hell, but they were also a little bit backward and they didn't keep up with the times. And still, I asked the state chairman in Alabama a month or so ago and it is still the same way. It's up on the Tennessee border, in the TVA area, very unusual. But during the Civil War, they didn't let the Confederate soldiers or the Yankee soldiers spend the night in the county. They took up arms and ran their ass off, both of them.

W.D.V.: So, how did you get involved in Florida politics?

Thomas: Well, I had been active all those years, I mean in Alabama, so in 1964, I lived in Blount County, which is the county bordering Birmingham. I was a Chevrolet dealer and I had been a Lincoln-Mercury dealer in Birmingham for nine years and had been real active in the party. And the Ford dealer in Antiana, the little town I moved to with Chevrolet, told me, I had been letting him have Mercuries and a Lincoln once in awhile when he needed them and he told me when I moved to this small town, he said, "When they find out that you are a Republican, nobody will trade with you." And I said, "Well, I hope that it's not that way, but it's too late for me to change, I've been a Republican all my life." And it was very odd. People found out in a hurry that I was a Republican, because

all the damn Democrats had told them. But it was as unusual as hell, now this was 1962. People would come around, they would look around and make sure that nobody was listening and say, "You know, I'm really a Republican. I think like a Republican, but I'm a registered Democrat because that's all you can do." In 1964, in the five counties that I had, I elected Republicans in every county and in three of the counties, we tipped over the courthouse. Coleman County, Alabama, which is the home of the former governor, Big Jim Folsom, who was still a tremendous force, had a brand new courthouse. Now, it wasn't the fact that we had such a great organization, but we did have a good organization. But the fact that the people had been used to voting a straight ticket and because Goldwater was the head of the ticket, they walked in and flipped the Goldwater switch and all of them. And we elected the highest elected official in Alabama, which is a probate judge, we elected the probate judge in three of the five counties that I had and elected a Congressman. A very good Congressman. He'd still be up there if he hadn't dropped out and ran against Lurleen Wallace, which was a tremendous mistake. I mean, there was no way that anybody would be able to beat her. A man by the name of Jim Martin. So, immediately after that, everybody thought that I was crazy for moving to Florida because we had had such a Republican sweep. We cleaned out the courthouse in Blount County and you know, it was unheard of, people didn't believe it. But we had found that there were good Republicans there, most of them were in business. I had a man who was in the chicken business, raises millions of chickens a year and he agreed to run for probate judge and he was a very good one. So, we went a long way toward making those counties Republican and that was the best five Republican counties in the state. And then the

Chevrolet dealer here got killed in an automobile wreck and it was a bigger and better deal, so I moved down here. I got here and there are still no Republicans in this part of the state to speak of. We are outnumbered here six to one in the county, but I met with a few Republicans that were here, a very prominent lawyer who was the county chairman. The organization was dormant, but we had a fellow by the name of Kirk running for governor, I'm sure you've heard of him. And we had a meeting to select the county chairman for him and they were about to select a Democrat. And even though I had only been here a short time, I said, "Hell no, that won't work. You'll never build an organization by doing that." I went to Tallahassee and met Kirk, because I wasn't going to support him if I didn't know him and didn't like him and didn't think that he could do the job. I met him, liked him and came back and took the job as his county chairman and then in a matter of a few weeks, I took the job as coordinator of the whole northern section of Florida for Kirk. And of course, as you know, he was elected. And it is a crying shame that he was the kind of a guy that he is. I mean, personally I still like him and get along fine with him, but in my opinion, he set the Republican party in Florida back a hundred years. Because he really didn't have the philosophy and didn't believe in the things that we believe in. He was an opportunist. You could flip a coin and he would take either side, he was an attorney, he'd take either side of an argument either time and he was an egomaniac. And the day that he was sworn in as governor, he started to run for vice-president and he did some of the damndest things that anybody has ever done. And as a consequence, he tore this party asunder. Just raped and ruined it and it just makes me sick every

time I think about it.

W.D.V.: Specifically, how did he do that?

Thomas: Well, he was

W.D.V.: I've heard that before, but I just

Thomas: Yeah, well, the worst thing he did . . . we had a guy in Florida who in my estimation deserves more credit than anybody for building the Republican party in Florida and starting the two party system really fervently in the South, because he went all over and spoke. He was in Congress for sixteen years, his name is Bill Cramer. He's a Washington attorney now, has offices in Washington and Miami. And at our state meeting a week from this Saturday, we are going to honor him by naming him the Father of the Florida Republican Party. He's one of the finest Congressmen that ever went to Washington, one of the most brilliant. I mean, he graduated from Harvard Phi Beta Kappa. Just a great guy, just a brilliant lawyer, probably knows more about Congressional rules than any man alive. And still a great assest to the Republican party because he was chairman of the rules committee at the '72 convention and he is legal counsel now for the RNC under rule 29, which I'm sure that you are familiar with. Just a great guy, but anyway, after he got out of the Navy, finished at North Carolina, graduated with honors there, went to Harvard to Law School, came back to Pinellas County, his home, and served a couple of years as a city judge or something like that. Then he ran for the legislature and was elected to the Florida house, the first Republican. I believe that it was 1954. He served a couple of terms in the House and then ran for Congress

W.D.V.: Would you say that 1954 is really the start of the Republican party in Florida?

Thomas: It would almost have to be, I mean, because you know

W.D.V.: Because we were looking at registration today and Bill gave us the figures starting in '54 with the elections, that's the time that the Republican party started in this state.

Thomas: I would say that just looking at the figures, I think that they had more or less the same kinds of Republicans here that they had in Alabama, maybe a little better, but most of them came from other states, Wisconsin, Michigan and

W.D.V.: I didn't mean to interrupt you, I just wanted to

Thomas: No, that's all right. I haven't looked at the data and been able to really see, but I would say that it would probably have to be about '54. Well, to get back to Kirk, Cramer was in Congress, very successful, well liked, very well respected, author of some of the best legislation that has ever been put on the books. He had a water pollution bill concerning Tampa Bay way back in, I think that it was 1956, '58, 'way before Ralph Nader ever heard of pollution, ecology. Just a great guy. And he worked like hell building the party. He went all over the state, all over the South preaching the Republican philosophy. And he helped . . . our senator now, Gurney, was the mayor of Winter Park, he's a native of Maine. And Cramer helped Gurney get elected to Congress, campaigned like hell for him and everything else. And in 1968, when the Democratic senator, Smathers, got in trouble over the Bobby Baker deal among other things, and decided not to run for reasons of his health . . . the old saw down here was that "it was because of his health. Everybody was sick of him." And he didn't run and a very liberal Democrat won the primary, Leroy Collins who had been Johnson's representative at the Selma march and that was the kiss of death

right there, so Gurney was elected to the senate. So, coming up in two years, in 1970, Hyland was not going to run again, and the Democrats had a big field and the deal was that Cramer would support Gurney in '68 and Gurney would support Cramer in '70. And this idiotic governor that we had wanted to be kingmaker and at the same time Carswell was turned down for the Supreme Court nomination and Kirk got the big idea and talked Gurney into it, it was Kirk's idea and Gurney should have been smarter, but Kirk said, "Here's a natural born winning man, we can't lose with Carswell, the people in the South are all upset because Carswell didn't get the nomination." And Carswell was going on about his own business, in fact, he was on his way down to the Keys somewhere on vacation and Kirk had the Highway Patrol stop his car on the turnpike and bring him back to Winter Park and they had a crash meeting with Kirk and Gurney and Carswell and they talked him into running for the Senate against Cramer in the primary. And it split the party wide open.

J.B.: Hadn't they already picked out another candidate before Carswell?

Thomas: Yeah, but he was very weak, Osburn.

J.B.: I mean, they were going to run somebody anyway, against him.

Thomas: Kirk was, yeah. But Gurney wasn't involved in it.

J.B.: Why was Kirk so het up on running somebody against Cramer?

Thomas: Because Cramer was

J.B.: Jealousy?

Thomas: Yeah, jealousy, you see, because Cramer was still the daddy of the Republican party. Cramer was much more highly respected than Kirk. And Kirk wanted to take the Republican machine. Kirk never won an election in the Republican committee. Not one. He tried to elect the president of the YRs, he tried all kinds of hanky-panky in the party and he never got off

the ground as far as the party was concerned. He was rebuked at every turn. So, as a consequence of them getting Carswell in there, and of course, Cramer beat the hell out of him in the primary, but then people were split wide open. And then some of the Cramer people got on the Eckard bandwagon against Kirk and that was a very bitter primary and there were a lot of harsh things said that couldn't be retracted after the primary was over. And so we were split wide open and of course, Askew beat Kirk much more decisively than Chiles beat Cramer. Chiles still beat Cramer by something like 120,000 votes, but Askew beat Kirk by something like a quarter of a million votes. But it was nonsense, because actually Chiles was a very, very mediocre state senator. He had a very mediocre record and he came up with the gimmick of walking the state and it caught on. But if anybody had looked at his record in Tallahassee, hell, he never would have been elected to the United States Senate.

J.B.: How would you compare Chiles as a state senator with those whose names are now being projected in the Democratic party to run against Gurney, Pettigrew and Horne and . . . Stone, who is not in the senate but was

Thomas: Chiles hasn't got anything. You know, he's kind of blah.

J.B.: How would you rate him against those three guys?

Thomas: You mean being efficient, or as a campaigner?

J.B.: As a state senator.

Thomas: I think that all three of them are much better state senators than he. They used to have to wake him up and tell him how to vote. You know, it came around time to do it and they would have to wake him

up in the morning and tell him how to vote. He was very mediocre. Stone was a good state senator, he's a good secretary of state. Horne, of course, is a very astute politician. Works, you know, has boundless energy and ambition and all of us kind of laughed when he said that he was going to retire. I mean, what are you going to do after you have been speaker of the house and president of the senate, you know. But everybody knew that he would run for something, because he is just a political animal. And Pettigrew is another hard worker. I think that all three of them were much better state senators than Chiles. I don't think that there is any comparison.

W.D.V.: So, you think that that election of 1970 set them back a hundred years?

Thomas: Yes, it really did. That may be stretching it a little bit too far, but we were going great guns. It was really going. The party was coming along in good shape and then the big split. And see, the sad part about this, here we are four years later and we still have some of those old wounds. When I was in Pinellas County yesterday, spoke twice, at the Clearwater Women's Club at noon and the men's organization at night, and of course, that's Cramer's home county, but the feelings are still very deep. They'll never forgive Ed Gurney for it. Never. Because they are the older Republicans, in Pinellas County, and you know, the median age there is very high, a lot of retirees, and a lot of them have been active in the party for many years, you know. And they just aren't about to forget it.

J.B.: What's the outlook for Gurney this year?

Thomas: Well

J.B.: Assuming that he doesn't get indicted.

Thomas: Well, honestly . . . now, you are not going to use this until

after the election are you?

J.B.: No.

Thomas: Well, even if he doesn't get indicted, I don't see how he can win in 1974. Because I've said, and I believe this fervently, that this year, I don't care whether you are a Democrat or a Republican, if you've got a book past due at the library, you are in deep trouble.

I mean, any incumbent who has got any blemish on his record, who has been in any kind of hanky-panky, anything like that, he's going to have a problem, if he has a qualified man running against him who brings it out. I mean, it ought to prove to our benefit as far as the state is concerned, because there are so many Democrats, particularly in the cabinet, you know, who are involved in these scandals. And if we don't elect two or three people to the cabinet, there's not much hope for us. Hell, we'll never have a better opportunity than we've got now.

J.B.: Askew would be pretty tough though, wouldn't he?

Thomas: Askew would be tough except for one thing. And I think that this is the way we are going to run the campaign . . . 75% of the people in Florida, or close to that, are conservatives and it doesn't matter whether they are registered as Democrats or Republicans, they are still conservatives. If we prove, and this is going to be our campaign, we can prove that Askew is not a conservative. He ran as a conservative and he was elected as a conservative, but the day after he was elected, he started bending to the left and he has gone too far to the left. The vote in Florida against busing was about 80% and Askew endorsed it. Now, a lot of people say that busing is not going to be an issue this year, but I'll tell you right now, it damn sure is.

It's going to be a big issue. It's going to be a big issue in lots of states and it's sure going to be a big issue in Florida.

J.B.: But yet his popularity . . . the Atlanta Sentinel had that poll last month, I think and

Thomas: But their poll was a Mickey Mouse poll. The poll that they ran was not a real legitimate poll. Because one of the pollsters went to Senator Gurney's office down there and said, "Look, I took the poll in this area and the people that I polled and talked to, the results that I got are not the results that they are showing. Now, Senator Gurney's aide down there is pursuing it to see, you know, what happened. In fact, he went to the Orlando paper and pointed out to them that here was a person that took the poll in this area and said that, "Look, this is what I turned in and this is not what was published in the paper." So, somebody bent the statistics on it somehow.

J.B.: Did they respond to that?

Thomas: No, they haven't.

W.D.V.: So, in short, because of the climate, the environment, you see that it is going to be tough for Gurney

Thomas: I think that it will be very tough.

W.D.V.: And equally tough for the three cabinet members who are under indictment or being investigated by the grand jury

Thomas: Almost impossible.

W.D.V.: And you see the weakness of Askew with the fact of his busing stand and the general move to the left. Does that pretty well summarize it?

Thomas: Yeah, plus the fact that we have a very, very good conservative

candidate running as a Republican. He was Democratic president of the senate, his name is Jerry Thomas, no relation of mine, but a great guy and a dyed in the wool conservative with an outstanding record and he works like the devil. Campaigns hard and has been building an organization for over a year and he has the best organization right now, five months before the election, he's got the best organization that I have ever seen. He's got the most people. And that's what it takes. And he has done it quietly, a lot of people don't even realize that he has such an organization. He has organized every county, it doesn't make any difference . . . you know, we have eighteen counties in Florida, I believe it is, with less than a hundred registered Republicans, but he has an organization in each one of those counties, and obviously, they are not Republican. He's gone in and gotten Democratic conservatives on his steering committee. And he's done a phenomenal job and I'll tell you right now, remember, I'll bet on it, I'll put money on it, that he'll win. Because, listen, things haven't changed that much in 110 years since Abraham Lincoln told us how to do it in 1854, find the Whigs, be sure they are registered and be sure that you get them out to vote. And that's what this guy is doing. He's finding the people who are sympathetic and he's building an organization. And Askew's going to try to do it with the press and with PR and I just believe that the way that Thomas is doing it this year is the way that is going to win.

J.B.: What do you see as the outlook on the Congressional races?

Thomas: All four of our incumbents will win and we will pick up one other seat. The Fifth District, there again, we should have had it in '70, '72. It was a new district, it's a Republican district, but we got involved in a bitter primary and when the two guys got through calling

each other sons of bitches in the primary, then they couldn't get their people back together in the general election. And we should have won it. This year, we have two fine candidates running, both of them high type of men and they have agreed to run for the seat and not against each other. And therefore, I think that we will win the seat. It's the one that Gunter is vacating.

J.B.: Do you think that the fact that the primary is held so late in Florida hurts either party in contested races, I mean, that it is bad for party politics?

Thomas: Oh, I don't know. You know, I've heard all kinds of arguments on both sides and I don't know. I don't think that it really makes any difference. You know, the thing that scares me more than anything now is the apathy in both parties, I mean, the distrust that people have in general. You know, in the primary in Indiana, what . . . two weeks ago, in Indianapolis, eighteen per cent of the people turned out. My God! If that's any signal as to what to expect in November, that will be tragic. There are an awful lot of people who are turned off, an awful lot of party people who are. . . who in the past, you know, have really been good workers and who are now really turned off.

J.B.: You think that the effect of Watergate is a temporary thing?

Thomas: Well, what do you mean temporary? I think that we will get over it in a few years, but I think that it will probably take the next presidential election to straighten it out.

J.B.: How much has that set the party back, South-wide?

Thomas: A lot. It set us back a lot in Florida. This fellow, Jerry Thomas, switched on December 7, 1972, a month after the general election. We had a

whole bunch of other Democrats scheduled to switch and you know, we were busy, preoccupied with the inauguration and everything, on Cloud Nine and weren't really concerned about it. Everybody was tired from the '72 campaign. We could just visualize that '73 was going to be just a hell of a good year for us. Then, you know, the can of worms started opening up right after the inauguration and of course it has hurt.

J.B.: How strong is the Wallace movement in Florida?

Thomas: Very strong.

J.B.: Let's assume for a minute that Askew gets elected, for the sake of my question. If he gets re-elected and then runs against Wallace in a presidential primary in Florida, which would be only Democrats voting, how do you think he would come out?

Thomas: How would Askew come out? Well, things would have to change an awful lot for him to do any better, Wallace would beat Askew in Florida two to one. I think that Wallace is that powerful here. That's why I say that Jerry Thomas will beat Askew, because we are just going to prove to the electorate this fall that Askew is not a conservative. No way is he a conservative and as of right now, and I don't know what your brother tells you in Pensacola, but Askew couldn't carry his home county right now. And naturally, he was their darling in '70. They put up a lot of money for him, a hometown boy and nobody thought that he had a chance. But he could not carry his own county now.

W.D.V.: Why not?

Thomas: Because they fear that he is a turncoat. That he has forsaken them. And he has in many ways . . . not just . . . he has made some tactical blunders besides his philosophical blunders. The tactical things are that he doesn't return calls to people that supported him when

he was running. They can't get to see him. The attorney right here in this county who was his county co-chairman wrote a hot letter to him and released it to the press, because he was disappointed in his liberal leanings and wrote him for an appointment and didn't even get an answer. So, he blasted him in the paper, all over the state. He has not done his homework and one reason that he hasn't done it is that he has surrounded himself, his staff . . . there is only one conservative on his staff. That's a man by the name of Harvey Cotton. The rest of them are very liberal and the guy who is giving him the most trouble now . . . one of his press men is an old aide, a fine man by the name of Moose Harling, from Pensacola. But he doesn't have any clout. The man who is running the show there now is a man by the name of Don Pride, who is an ultra-liberal reporter from an ultra-liberal paper, the most ultra-liberal paper in the state, the St. Petersburg Times. And Pride is running the show. And it is damn sure going to kill him.

W.D.V.: Do you see the two parties realigning themselves along liberal and conservative lines in this state?

Thomas: I see them doing it nationally. I see it happening in this state and I think that within another four to six years you can almost throw away the labels "Democrat" and "Republican." I think that we will be just about like they have been in England. I think that you will have the liberal-labor party and the conservative party.

W.D.V.: Will that be the basis for building Republican strength?

Disaffected conservative Democrats?

Thomas: Yes. It has been for

W.D.V.: I mean, is that a conscious strategy by the party?

Thomas: Oh yeah, sure. Hell yeah. We've been wooing the conservative Democrats and telling them that they are in the wrong party ever since I've

been here. I've been trying to convince the people on the local level, but they come back and say, "All right, leave me alone. I'll give you money and support you, but let me vote in the Democratic primaries and I'll get two shots at a guy. If I don't like him, I'll get one at him in September and another at him in November." I've been trying to convince them that they should realign now, but as long as the Democrats control all these courthouses from Jacksonville to Pensacola, it's hard to get them to switch. But you know, if there is a grand realignment . . . you are talking about Wallace and while you are in Alabama, you can find this, you probably already know it and probably know more about it than I do, but I lived in Alabama when this happened . . . it tickles me in a way, I mean, it tickles me funny-like, it's not a damn bit funny, but Wallace has got people convinced that he is a conservative. But he's not a conservative. He switched in 1958, he was the most liberal minded man in the Alabama legislature. And he ran for governor against a man named John Patterson who was elected strictly on his father's shroud, if you want to put it that way, because his father was assassinated, but when Patterson defeated Wallace, Wallace made the statement that, "I will neve be out-seged again." He did a 180 degree turn in one day, he didn't do it gradually, he did it in one day. And you know, you can tell the people from his hometown down there, you can tell the people from Montgomery and they've already forgotten it. And they think that he is a great conservative, but hell, he's not a conservative. He's a political opportunist. That's true.

J.B.: Who do you think would win a Republican presidential primary in Florida in '76, looking the field over now?

Thomas: In Flordia? Reagan definitely would. Ford in all probablity, if

he chooses to run, he could carry it. Reagan could definitely win, probably Connolly could beat any Democrat. And that's about as far as I would go. In Florida, I don't know how Ted Kennedy would do, but in Florida, the leading Democrat that is being spoken of now would be Jackson. Because Jackson is closer to the philosophy of the people of Florida than any other Democrat that is prominent.

W.D.V.: How do you think that the Republican party in Florida compares with the party organizations and candidates in the other southern states?

Thomas: I think that we are way ahead of most of them. Maybe excluding Virginia, but from what I've heard about Virginia, their organization is not too good. I think that we've got the best party organization in the South. I think that Texas is coming along, you know.

W.D.V.: How about Tennessee?

Thomas: Yeah, excuse me, I forgot Tennessee. They have an excellent organization mainly because of . . . you know, which came first, the chicken or the egg, but with two senators and a Republican governor, they've got to be doing something right. But you know, Tennessee has historically had, you know, even since the Civil War, Tennessee has had a strong Republican party in the eastern part of the state. Almost rock-ribbed. I think that Tennessee has got a better organization than we have. Georgia and Alabama, Louisiana . . . Mississippi has got a funny kind of an organization, the oddest that I have ever seen. Did you say that you have been there yet?

W.D.V.: We've seen Clark Reed.

Thomas: You've been there?

J.B.: Yeah.

Thomas: He's got the damndest, you know, Clark has got a kind of a little

clique thing. You know, I didn't know him very well and the kid didn't know . . .but when he elected two Congressmen, he screwed up. Because up until then he had been the kingfish. I mean, every damn pork barrel that they rolled out in Washington, Clark Reed opened it. I mean, he had more patronage in Mississippi than we ever heard of in Florida, you know. And that irritated the hell out of me to tell the truth. But he was on the inside on everything. But now that he has got two Congressmen, they are sharing it with him, you know. He has diminished his power somewhat.

W.D.V.: Why is the party stronger in Florida? Is financing one reason, or something else?

Thomas: No, I think that it is the philosophy that we have and in having the counties organized. And in some of the states, they have a central committee and that is all, I mean, you know, that's the end of it. They've got a lot of talk and all, but . . . particularly since, and you know, I'm not taking any credit for this, it's just what I believe in. I'm real old fashioned. I think that if you are going to win, you have to have every county organized and that's what I've tried to do, even with the little counties. I've probably spent more time working in the small counties than any chairman they have ever had. In fact, I'm probably the first one that ever spent any time, but we have tried to get the small counties. Because I know that it can work, I know that it can be done. Because I have seen it in Alabama and I tell them, "Look, I'm not telling you something that I read about, I'm telling you something that I saw happen." And you know, it's funny what one guy can do with a county. You get one good guy in the county that dares to stick his head up and if he is a good man, it is fantastic what he can do. We have a young state senator in Tampa, in Hillsborough County, one man. His father

died, his father was a rare individual, a rare character. He was elected to the state senate, he had been dean of three or four law schools, a tough old bastard. But very well respected by everybody and he died in office and his son was appointed and then ran for the job and was re-elected and we are making headway in Hillsborough County, in Tampa.

J.B.: Who is that?

Thomas: David McLean. And largely because of this one man. It is a very Democratic county.

J.B.: What do you perceive is the role of the latin population in Florida and particularly the Cubans in Dade County?

Thomas: Well, that's a strange thing. They can be a great help to us, but truthfully, we lack some good leadership in the Cuban area down there. The problem that I have with them, and they are very devout but they are peculiar people. And they tell me that this is the way they did it back home, you know. In Dade County, at one time we were registering before Watergate, about 85% of the Cubans registering were registering Republican. Now, it's about 60 - 40%. We've dropped off quite a bit. But the trouble is that there are about four big cliques and then there are about eight minor ones, so there are a total of about twelve cliques. And if I go into the county and have lunch, they call me, and the leadership in one clique wants to see me and if somebody else in one of the other cliques sees me even having lunch with these other guys, oh my God, you know, they are calling and raising hell and wanting to know, "What have I done wrong? What's wrong, you don't love me any more." And all this, I tell them that that doesn't have anything to do with it. I have simply met with these people because they asked me and there are no deals with them or anything. They are always afraid that somebody else is going to

get a little power. And I understand that was the way that it was back in their homeland, you know, they had all these little cliques and were extremely jealous of one another. If we could ever get them to pull together . . . and there are some very intelligent people down there. I mean, hell, you know, we've got a lot of lawyers and doctors and bankers and some excellent people. But they know that the big problem they have is the petty jealousy. If they ever decide to all pull together, they will be a hell of a force. But it is going to take some strong man to come along and grab the leadership and truthfully, right now we don't have it. We have a guy down there that I like very, very much and he is the one that I trust the most. He is a stock broker by the name of Jose Casanova, but he can't get them all together.

J.B.: They have the potential to be a significant political force in this state.

Thomas: They certainly do. You know, I'm sure that you are aware of this, but the Cubans in Tampa and the Cubans in Miami are two distinct different breed of cats. The Cubans in Tampa, most of them are Democrats. They are second and third and fourth and fifth generation Americans, you know. And they are Democrats. They have been steeped in the Democratic party politics of Hillsborough County. And the Cubans in the Miami area are completely different. Most of them have been here less than twenty years, you know. I don't know what the percentage is, but there are a lot of brand new ones and they are completely different from the Tampa variety. But boy, you are right, if they ever decide. And I have been trying to tell them that for a couple of years. But you know, you have got to have one strong man.

J.B.: Who is the leading potential candidate for lieutenant governor among the Republican candidates?

Thomas: For lieutenant governor? Well, I don't know. You know, there are so many people that I think would like to have it and are kind of courting Jerry Thomas, but I have stayed out of it. I think that should be his prerogative, I mean to pick the guy that

(end of side A of tape.)

Thomas: . . . will do the job. And I kind of think that it wouldn't be too bad strategy to have Thomas campaign and have the guy on the ticket say, you know, "If I am elected, I am going to ask the legislature to abolish the job." This would be 1978 before they could do it, you know, but I don't think that a lieutenant governor is necessary. I mean, I think that in the line of succession, it could go to the secretary of state and something like that, somebody who is elected state wide. Not the president of the senate, because he is only elected from one district.

J.B.: The way that it is in this state, it sure doesn't have any functional duties that we can discover.

Thomas: No, we've been paying this asshole all this year for doing nothing. He hasn't had a job since he was called before the house for impeachment last year. The governor removed him from his duties. He doesn't even cut ribbons.

J.B.: What kind of future do you see for Paula Hawkins?

Thomas: A fantastic future. If she gets some very confident help, I think that she has got some more confident help. I mean, personally, I would hope that she wouldn't be quite as quick on the trigger. She's a brilliant

woman and a hard worker and a hard campaigner, but she is a little bit inclined to shoot from the hip and that can get you in trouble. But she is probably the best thing that we've got going for us right now. Because she has been grabbing headlines for over a year and just works like a beaver. Every time that they have a hearing in a town, she schedules a luncheon speech to the Rotary and the Lions or something like that and then meets with the local Republicans at night, so she is building a hell of an organization. I think that she would be our best chance to beat Chiles in '76. As of right now, I think that she is the only one that I know of that could beat him.

J.B.: You think that Florida is ready to elect a woman to the senate?

Thomas: Yeah, I think so. I mean, she is the first woman elected in Florida in a hundred years and next to Nixon, she got more votes than anybody has ever gotten in Florida. She got a million and a hundred and fifteen thousand, something like that. More votes than Askew, more votes than Gurney, more votes than any of them.

J.B.: I would think that she is a pretty tough campaigner.

Thomas: Oh God, she's tough. And work! You know, she's a . . . have you talked to her yet?

W.D.V.: Yeah. Today. She said to say hello.

Thomas: Did she? She's. . . did she tell you that she is in the vitamin business?

W.D.V.: Someone else told us that she was in health foods.

Thomas: Yeah, did she try to sell you any?

W.D.V.: No.

Thomas: Well, she should have. I tell you, she puts out these little packs, five or six of those damn little things in little celophane

packs called "Something Great." It is fifteen dollars a mark, they send you these thirty little sacks and you take one every morning and I get tired of taking the damn things and forget to take them about half the time, but I'm convinced they work. And she takes them and sends them all over the country to her friends. And I have never seen anybody that can work as hard as she can. God Almighty! I mean, you know, you would think that sometime, someday, she would run down. But she was my co-chairman in the Nixon campaign and at the same time, we got her to run for the public service commission, so she was doing both things at the same time and she never got to bed before midnight at the earliest, and boy, at six o'clock the next morning, she was just as bright and chipper as anybody that you have ever seen. And ready to go again.

W.D.V.: Disgusting! It really is.

Thomas: Yeah. And she doesn't drink or smoke and cuss. She is a very devout Mormon and Jesus, I don't know how she gets her kicks except loving to run and loving to tear men's asses up. She is a little bit too quick with that knife sometimes, you know. And I am afraid that sooner or later that will get her in trouble, because she is so sharp and she comes back so fast that somebody is going to bump into somebody that sets her up, you know. She kind of got set up last week if you read the papers. She has been a bank director for three or four years and a year ago . . . her secretary puts out three or five hundred letters a week, she says. . . but she wrote a letter to the FDIC asking them to . . . she wrote it on the Public Commission stationery

W.D.V.: I read that.

Thomas: Oh God, that was a super colossal blunder. She shouldn't have even written it on her personal stationery, but she damn sure hadn't have written it on the PSC stationery. And for the first time, see, she

has had a honeymoon with the press for a year, and for the first time, they said, "Uh-oh, she's not a housewife from Maitland, she is a tough politician."

When you start trying to block bank charters and using Public Service Commission stationery to do it and telling how many businesses you regulate and so forth . . . they took it a little bit out of context. Reading the whole letter wasn't as bad, but it is the first severe rebuke that she has had. I agree with what she said in a lot of ways. You know, we don't have branch banking in Florida, but we might as well have it. Because we are getting too many little banks. I mean, you know, we have got banks in places like Orlando that are like the Seven to Eleven grocery store.

And that doesn't make sense. You know, you can have too many of everything. As Orlando found out, they've got too many motels. Way too many.

W.D.V.: How is the press in this state, say the state capital press?

Thomas: I think that generally speaking, very good. We only have one bad paper, and that damn thing, I'm telling you the truth, it's unbelievable.

The St. Petersburg Times. I mean, God Almighty, how they twist things.

I really think that they are unfair and I think that it is the only one in the state that's unfair. The Miami Herald is pretty damn liberal, but

I think that they are fair. It's a Knight newspaper and like your

Charlotte Observer, but I think, you know, they do a good job, they have been on Gurney's back for a year, but they've had something. Now, they've

been awfully repetitive about it, I mean that they have kicked the same

damn old mule, they warm him up every week, you know. Every Sunday they

take the same thing and hash it over again, you know and from that standpoint,

I think that they have overdone it a little bit. But generally speaking, I

think that the Miami Herald is generally fair.

W.D.V.: How do you feel about all the legislative reforms that have been made in the last eight years?

Thomas: Of course, coming from this part of the state, I'm almost taking my life in my hands to say it, but you know, they were long overdue. And for God's sake, I had better cut off right there and don't quote me on this. Because I've still got to sell Chevrolets in Panama City. So don't quote me, but you know, for years and years what was called the "Pork Chop Gang" controlled the legislature, until they had reapportionment. And boy, they didn't let anything get through that they didn't want to. And so, they held the populist areas of the state down, for many years. But boy, many a guy has been frozen out up here for making that statement. One poor guy

W.D.V.: Is it still that strong?

Thomas: Yeah, oh yeah. Yes sir. One poor guy here was a television announcer and he took the campaign for a candidate from South Florida, it must have been for a cabinet post or something, having no idea that they would have a tape campaign show of this guy's speeches made down in South Florida and there he was raising hell about the "Pork Choppers." And boy, they froze this guy out. Just because he was the guy's campaign manager. He had no idea about how the guy felt about it, you know. But here he was on local television raising hell about eh "Pork Chop Gang." And oh man, they are still tough. Another thing that we don't talk about up here is . . . have you ever seen the green belt map of this area? Are you familiar with what I'm talking about?

W.D.V.: No.

Thomas: Well, I wish that I had one, you ought to have it. I can mail it

to you. But they have in the Chamber of Commerce here, one guy in the restaurant here, I think that is about enough to do it . . . they had a map printed of Dade County and he showed in red and green and yellow and white so that it knocks you in the eye, 87% of the property in this county, I believe it is, is under the Green Belt Law. And the Green Belt Law, I mean, it's not agriculture land, it's tree raising land. And maybe since you have been in the state, you have heard in the last week or two . . . St. Jo paper company, are you familiar with them?

J.B.: Yeah.

Thomas: See, they own everything in Florida. They are in the Florida National Bank. Mr. Ed Baugh was the administrator of the DuPont estate, the Florida East Coast Railroad that stayed on strike for how many years? They own millions of acres of land in north Florida. Millions. They own hundreds of thousands in this county. They wouldn't sell a damn inch of it, nothing. That's one reason that real estate, the little real estate that is available here now is so high. And they have land, what they are trying to do in the Chamber of Commerce here and in the legislature, anything that is within 600 feet of the beach, take it out from under the Green Belt Law. They pay no taxes. I mean, they are supposed to be growing pine trees and they've done it and they do a great reforestation job, but some of this land is prime land, worth, you know. Anything worth \$10,000 an acre damn sure shouldn't be under the Green Belt Law in my opinion. But I don't go around hollering that, because they could put the freeze on me just about as much as on anybody, being in the retail automobile business. But I will mail you a copy and you will see what I'm talking about. There is so little land here, it's owned by International Paper Company, Hunt Oil Company, St. Jo Paper Company and St. Regis.

W.D.V.: It's all exempt?

Thomas: Yeah. It's not total.

J.B.: No, it's

Thomas: About a quarter an acre or

J.B.: It's assessed on the basis of

Thomas: Of agriculture.

J.B.: Of agriculture on this land classification. Right?

Thomas: It's certainly a rip-off. And see, it goes all over from Jacksonville to Pensacola, many, many counties, that's all you have is pine trees. And I'm not knocking that, but they ought to pay a fair share of the tax burden. And we ought to have pine trees, we've got to have paper and that's all that some of this land is good for, you know, is going pine trees, really. But when they get down and get waterfront property, good God Almighty, that shouldn't be under the Green Belt Law.

W.D.V.: Somebody took care of them.

Thomas: Yeah, way back. And they are fighting to hang on to it.

But Mr. Baugh, you ought to interview him, if you could get an interview. Florida National Bank . . . I've forgotten the . . . well, I don't know, a hundred banks, something like that in the state. All the small towns have a Florida National Bank. All the DuPont estate in Miami, the downtown area, DuPont Plaza . . . you know where DuPont Plaza is down there? All that land around there belongs to them. I mean, they just have billions of dollars. He's eighty something years old. Wouldn't give a nickel to see a pissant eat a bale of hay, you know. An ornery old bastard, but he's a pretty good old fellow at the same time, but you ought to get an appointment with him in Jacksonville and go talk to him. I bet that he would see you if you could

J.B.: Didn't he lose a lot of his power after reapportionment?

Thomas: Yeah, he had to lose some, you know.

J.B.: But if he hadn't lost it, they never would have passed that corporate income tax would they?

Thomas: That's right. He lost some, but he's still powerful.

J.B.: But in the old days, almost anything that he said went, right?

Thomas: By himself, yeah, I mean, one man had that much power.

J.B.: Didn't he have the reputation pretty much of just controlling the legislature?

Thomas: Yeah. Because he could do it in so many ways. I mean, you know, he owned some of these guys lock, stock and barrel.

J.B.: And then just being smart on top of that.

Thomas: Real smart. But you know, when you come to Port Saint Joe, or Perry or Chipley or Bonifay or name the towns across there, every one of them has got a Florida National Bank. The only bank, in most cases. And some guy is running for the legislature or something and he's got a gas station or a drugstore, you better believe that they did what the hell he wanted them to do. It wasn't just north Florida, he had a lot of that control all over the state. And he had some big people, too.

J.B.: Are those days gone forever in Florida?

Thomas: I think so. I really do.

J.B.: Well, this disclosure law as it is passed, will it be a hinderance in sofar as recruiting candidates?

Thomas: Well, it depends on what form it is passed in. You know, what I wish that they would do, I think that there ought to be some kind of disclosure, but you know, I would like to see a bi-partisan committee set up with, you know, some top people on it that would look at the tax returns, have them file a statement, but you know, an awful lot of people aren't going to run

for office if they have to divulge all of what they own and everything. I will tell you, in the climate that we are living in today . . . I had a daughter that just graduated from college Sunday out of Queens in Charlotte. And she did television commercials there for us for several years, beginning when she was about twelve years old. And did a fantastic job, it really worked. But it scared the hell out of me, I was afraid that some crazy son of a bitch would kidnap her or something, you know. And I think, I'd hate now . . . I mean, I wouldn't mind at all giving somebody that I trusted, some judge, or some bi-partisan panel, I would be glad to turn over my income tax returns, and my financial statements to them, but I would sure as hell to put it in the paper. Because I would be inviting all kinds of kooks to shoot at me from all different angles. And I think that a lot of people feel the same way. If in the original form that they had two or three weeks ago, where they were going to ask committeemen and committeewomen, hell, if they did that, we couldn't get a committeeman or a committeewoman, if they had to file a financial disclosure. Hell, we have enough trouble getting them as it is. And if they had to do that, I don't figure that the Democrats or the Republicans, we wouldn't have been able to get them to do it. I think that they have pretty well got them eliminated from what you are talking about right now.

J.B.: When you talk about the Republicans being well organized as a party, say in this county, to what extent are they organized?

Thomas: Well, they probably have precinct committeemen and committeewomen for, oh probably, 35 or 40% of the precincts, which represent probably 75 or 80% of the votes. Some of the small precincts where there aren't very many votes, we may not even have a Republican living in the precinct, you know. Or maybe just have one or two. But we have them organized enough

to where we keep them informed on what is going on, who our candidates are, what the issues are and what the other side has done that we consider wrong. We put out a monthly newsletter to them, I don't know if Bill showed you one of them or not, but we try to keep them informed on what is going on in Tallahassee, what is going on in Washington. And then come election time, the people on the county committees organize the campaigns for all the candidates that we have, and we haven't had that many statewide candidates in the past, but they know that we are going to have this year and in the future and it gives a candidate a good strong base to work from.

J.B.: Are there any elected black Republican officials in Florida?

Thomas: No, not that I know of, except on county committees. We have several of them serving on county committees, in Palm Beach County and Broward County in particular, but I don't know of an elected black in a county commission job or something like that. In fact, we don't have many black Republicans in Florida.

J.B.: How do you approach that situation?

Thomas: You know, I wish I knew how to approach it. I've been very unsuccessful at it. Unfortunately, most of the blacks that have talked to me about getting into the Republican party and doing something, they are really, they expect a whole lot for nothing. And I tell them that we can't out promise the Democrats, there is no way. We just can't do it. I'm not going to lie to them. But all of them usually want money. And I tell them that we don't have any money to give them. The state party is supported by filing fees and contributions by people at the county level and we don't have money to give them back. We have tried in some cases to help some, particularly in Palm Beach County, and it

was unsuccessful. Palm Beach, Duval County, there's a tremendous black population in Jacksonville and we have some good dedicated black Republicans over there, but only a handful.

J.B.: Do you see more coming into the party or just staying where it is?

Thomas: No, I think that it is going to stay pretty well like it is. I don't see anything that's going to entice them to come into the party. And you know, I think that the Democrats, particularly in north Florida, are so wrong about this and I think the blacks are wrong too, but both are still bought and sold in north Florida. Right here in this county and other counties across here, it's funny, you'd think that the Democrats would catch on. But some of the candidates, say in the county commission races and the sheriff's races and all buy some of the black votes. Some of the black votes were sold in the last election in this county two and three times. You know, it's ridiculous. And it is morally wrong to buy votes, and it is just as wrong to sell one. I don't know which is worse, but it still goes on. And the blacks make fun, I mean, the blacks laugh at the Democratic candidates for buying the votes, because when they go in the booth and close that curtain, who the hell knows how they vote.

J.B.: I guess that makes it a risky business.

Thomas: Yeah, but there is a lot of money spent on it. I'll tell you, there was several thousand dollars spent in this county in 1972 buying black votes and I know at least one candidate who really got taken. I mean, spent a lot of money and they didn't deliver.

J.B.: Do you have anything else Walter?

W.D.V.: No, I don't think so. I'm sort of run down. This is about what? Our seventh or eight interview today.

Thomas: Is that right?

J.B.: Fifth or sixth, somewhere in there.

Thomas: Well, I'm sorry that you can't spend more time in Panama City.

W.D.V.: I'd like to.

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

Thomas: No, not that I know of.

W.D.V.: We'll probably come back to you after the election and check your predictions against reality.

Thomas: O.K. (Laughter.)

W.D.V.: And see how much of it was bullshit. (Laughter.)

Thomas: Well, you know, in 1972

W.D.V.: And see how much was pure prophecy. That's about the choice you have.

Thomas: In 1972, I called the primary right down to a gnat's eyebrow and people in Washington didn't believe that and in September, before the general election in November, I told them exactly what Nixon would get and everybody made fun of me, particularly the Democrats, they said that it would never happen. But I told them that we would get 72% for Nixon and we got 71.91 and I'll settle for that all day long. But that's why I say that Thomas can beat Askew, because 75% of the people in Florida are conservatives and all we've got to do is prove to them that Askew isn't

W.D.V.: You're basing that on the '72 election returns?

Thomas: Yeah. The '72 general election and the Wallace thing. I mean, it's just here and that's the way it is. And see, you know, I don't have any crystal ball for my prediction in the '72 thing. I took the Wallace vote in '68 and the Nixon vote in '68 and added the two together and added 3% that McGovern was a fucking nut, you know. You've got to think of that, and that's the way it turned out, you know.

W.D.V.: Expletive deleted, huh?

Thomas: Yeah. (Laughter.)

J.B.: Well, I did want to ask you one more question and that is, do you see Cramer playing any future role in the party insofar as seeking elective office?

Thomas: No. You know that old story, he's like the country girl that went to town and found out that what she had been giving away for years she could now sell. And Cramer is going to have to do a lot of explaining to a lot of people about this, you might have read in the paper in the last month or so, he's representing OEO now and they came to him and wanted them to represent them and my God, if anybody doesn't believe in OEO, it's Cramer and they asked him to quote them a figure and he gave them a quote of \$25,000 a month and thought that would get rid of them and they hired him.

W.D.V.: Sounds like a good way to get rid of them.

Thomas: \$25,000 a month, yeah. \$25,000 a month retainer, how about that? I told him that his philosophy didn't go very damn deep and everybody has got his price, you know. (Laughter.) But I would imagine that Cramer

W.D.V.: I would think that would be a very effective way to eliminate poverty. (Laughter.)

Thomas: And Smathers. There's no telling what Smathers will make as a lobbyist-attorney now. You know, I'm guessing, but if Smathers doesn't make a quarter of a million a year, he won't make a nickel. He can peddle his influence and if you don't want to pay for it, then don't bother.

J.B.: Why did you take this job as chairman? You said that you don't get paid anything for it and how much time do you spend in a month

working for the Republican party?

Thomas: Well, I probably spend about half time working at it.

I probably spend thirty hours a week, but because I . . . number one, because I want to see a strong Republican party, I want to see a strong conservative party and you know, I want to see a two party system established, because I know, you know, the benefits of having a two party system, having lived in a two party state, you know, where you have the checks and balances that we haven't had here. I mean, you know, these guys in the cabinet over there, they've been protecting each other for a hundred years. I mean, shit, they just didn't start selling bank charters, they've been doing it for a hundred years. This is nothing new. Well, if you had a strong two party system, you couldn't do this type of thing.

J.B.: Have you ever run for office?

Thomas: No, except for the state chairman.

J.B.: Do you think that you might after you finish this?

Thomas: No, never. I don't even think like a candidate. This is hard to believe, but I don't really like politics. I've had some of the dammedest, knock-down fights that you've ever seen. And I'll tell you something else, a lot of people don't believe it, but I spend more time talking people out of running than I do talking people into running.

In '72, I tried to spend every Friday in the office and people called in and they wanted to run for county commissioner and this and that, and the first thing that I asked them was "Why?" And I wish that I had had a tape recorder for some of the answers, because some of them were really ridiculous. I mean, you know. I had a guy one time tell me that he wanted

power. And I said, "My God, is that the only reason?" "Yeah." I said, "Well, you are wrong. If you serve the people, you are not going to have any power. You've got the wrong idea. You shouldn't even consider running for the county commission." And you have some real odd balls, you know, that have freakish ideas. One thing for damn sure, there is no money in politics if you're honest. There is no way. You've got to have some other motivation, because you damn sure can't make any money out of it. I don't care, you couldn't make any money being president if you are honest. If the guy has got the money and the inclination, then great, but I just hope that

J.B.: What kind of people do you try to recruit?

Thomas: Well, you know it depends on the kind of job they are running for, if it is a part time job or a full time one.

J.B.: Well, say that it is the legislature.

Thomas: Well, legislature . . . you know, I think that we have got too many lawyers in the legislature and I can get in all kinds of arguments over just saying that. I think that it is true, we've got too many lawyers and too many insurance men. I think that the kind of guy we ought to have in the legislature is some kind of young guy that's on the way up or some guy who has got it moderately made who can afford to serve over there and have a free and open mind. But so many of them, we've got an awful lot of them in our own party over there, we've got some good young people and some of them aspire to higher office and that's great. I mean, they are really dedicated. But then we've got some other guys that we're not real proud of. And of course, there are some guys in the Democratic party that they are not proud of. They've got some guys who have talked to me about switching to the Republican party and I let them know that I didn't

want them. Just didn't woo them. And I could have gotten some members of the Democrat house right now to switch and I'm sure that the Democrats would have applauded if we had been able to get them to switch. But we didn't want them, because unfortunately, there are a few people in the legislature now that shouldn't be there. But you know, to run for the state chairmanship, two things . . . I doubt if I will ever do it again and I probably wouldn't have done it in '70 if I hadn't been so damn mad at Kirk for splitting the party and playing the part like he did

(End of tape.)