This is an interview with Lawton Chiles, U.S. Senator from Florida. The interview was conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries on January 30, 1974. It was transcribed by Joe Jaros.

Jack Bass: Let me ask you this question. We haven't been to Florida yet, but I understand that you were very instrumental in the Sunshine Law in Florida and also just the whole issue of legislative reform in Florida, which I assume helped developed your image in the Democratic party as a new face.

Lawton Chiles: Well, perhaps, although five percent of the people recognized my name when I started running for the United States Senate seat, even though I had spent twelve years in the state legislature. I can't say that I had built that much of a statewide image.

J.B.: No, but you did have a record.

Chiles: Yeah, I did have that and I think that that five percent did help me when I ran, because generally speaking, it was positive and it was good and it was the nucleus, I guess, the basis of where we went from there. But it wasn't like we had any great visibility.

J.B.: But as you look back over this period since 1948, what are the major changes in Florida politics?

Chiles: Oh, tremendous changes, I think and in all kinds of different ways. Let's deal with the race first. In 1948, race was still a very, very strong, probably the strongest thing. If you were wrong on the race thing,

you were dead. And you had to walk into the back door of the black church if you were seeking their votes and you were almost afraid to seek them. And then that started to change, and that change has been complete now. And I think that the 1970 election was when we probably brought it about as a complete change in Florida, in that the governor openly courted black votes, as I did. We said we were doing it, we appeared with blacks and so, because Florida had changed, you might say that we were able to do that. Or that change had occurred over a period of years. It didn't just occur overnight. It changed from '48, it kept changing. Now, while race is still there, to say it isn't there and that people perhaps use it in other ways, but now it does become a candidate to seek the black vote now. And he must acknowledge that he is seeking the black vote. And now you have all candidates saying that we "are seeking the black vote." So, it differs completely from the way it used to be. Now it would hurt you as a candidate to say that you weren't seeking them or if you made some derogatory remarks. So, I think that's very good, because nationally, this really caused a schizophrenia with a southern politician and it kept him where he could kind of be right on all issues but he had to turn around on the race thing. So, I think that it kept him from being a whole person or just ringing true all the way. So, I really think now that the South is ready to furnish national leadership and I think that because of the problems that we have had in race and other things that we are perhaps much better equipped to furnish it. And I think that's why in '70 I think there were an awful lot of fresh, new faces. And Bumpers of Arkansas and Carter and Bennett Johnson of Lousiana, Waller, Askew, all of these people are sort of a new breed of cats, I think, in that they are all basically speaking to the issues. They are not trying to appeal to prejudice and they are trying to deal with the solving of problems. And I think that's healthy and going to build a

corps of leadership for the South that is going to have to be recognized nationally, because they have sort of come through the fire and come out on the other side. Now, let's just look at some of the other changes. When I went to the legislature in 1958, we were controlled by the so-called Pork Chop group. In effect, it was seventeen percent of the people controlling both houses of the legislature, so really, legislators represented pine trees more than they did people. Neither house was apportioned even according to the Florida constitution. And with the change of the apportionment decisions, "one man, one vote," and that brought about a drastic change. It broke sort of a strangle-hold of the status quo which heretofore existed, where the vested interests and the lobbyists just exerted almost total control. They could tell you how many votes any particular bill was going to get.

J.B.: Who were the vested interests in Florida at that time?

Chiles: Well, I would say that . . . .

J.B.: Who really controlled the legislature?

Chiles: A lot of them were some of the largest landowners, timber, phosphate, those kinds of interests would be part of them. Part of it was anybody that really was for the status quo. Because it was the kind of legislature that you could defeat most things. You couldn't pass a lot of legislation, but you could defeat any legislation. So, it wouldn't necessarily have to be the largest or richest person. It could just be a group that wanted to keep the status quo, that turned out to kind of be the vested interest, because it was easier to block things. It was very easy to block, it was very difficult to pass. Also, the legislature was really a rubber stamp. The cabinet of Florida, which was an elected cabinet, and always sort of a unique branch according to most stategovernments, but the cabinet served as sort of

a super legislature. The legislature met sixty days every other year. And the main thing that they did at the time they met was to sign a check and the check was the appropriations for the next two years. The cabinet had emergency powers, so that with five out of the seven votes, they could start new buildings, they could change money from one program to another. They could take kind of affects, and which they routinely did. Everyday on their agenda, or every week when they would meet, would be these things that would always get five out of seven votes, and so they really ran the state. And so the legislature had surrendered its power . . .

J.B.: Could they change money from agency to agency as well as within an agency?

Chiles: Primarily, it would be within an agency and then they had some emergency powers . . . another thing they would do, especially with buildings, almost every new building during the time, the first five or six years when I was first in the legislature and the previous years behind that, was done through revenue certificates. So, what they would do is, they had the authority to start renting a building. They would say, "We are going to rent the building. The rent will serve as the financing for the revenue certificates," so they would start the building. So, most of the major court buildings, most of the major capitol buildings, the Florida Citrus Commission, all of those buildings were started by the cabinet. So, they could again start programs and then they would use some sort of a temporary funding or shifting and then the legislature would just come in and rubber stamp the program. They would initiate. . . they were the initiators of almost all the programs of legislation that we went into. All of that, and then the legislature had what was called the Legislative Council. The council was to be the legislature in the interim period of time. It had study committees.

None of those committees were like your standing committees, because the standing committees were only created for one year and they automatically disbanded. They had to take new chairmen automatically. They had no carry over. And on the legislative council, once you were on the council, you stayed unless you lost office. So, you had a different, completely different number of people on the council. It didn't even represent the leadership of your legislature. And they in turn, were sort of the super legislature. And they had the right to obligate the legislature for all kinds of matters in the interim and so they would work with the cabinet or the governor at the time. And as I say, they were not representative of the leadership of the legislature. And then the other thing, of course, is that the legislature had no staff, no offices. We used to meet on the floor, when I started. A secretary would sit by you on the floor and try to answer the mail. And we had absolutely no staff. The appropriations committee would borrow people from the executive branches to use them in overseeing and looking at the executive branch's budget. So, if you wanted to look at the department of agriculture's budget, you had a borrowed man from the department of agriculture that you used to look at their budget, because you had nobody else, no permanent kind of staff. All of this, again, we changed in the legislative reorganization and further than that, we adopted the new constitution which gave home rule really back to the counties whereas before, local bills had to be passed on everything. If you wanted to set up a dogpound, if you wanted to change boundaries, if you wanted to do anything in your county or your city, you had to come to the legislature and pass a local bill. Which meant that was where the legislators . . . the legislator's powers were not really in control of state government, but in control of local government, where they sat sort of like feudal barons over their county and the

county commissioners and city commissioners had to pay homage to you because you set their salaries and you had to really pass anything that they wanted. So, that was more of what we were. We were super county commissioners than we were state legislators. So, in the reorganization, we kind of changed that and set the proper function for it. The reorganization of the executive branch streamlined the procedure and really gave the governor, made the governor the titular head, even though the cabinet still retained some powers and in certain areas, there was a compromise, really, between those who wanted the strong governor and denude the cabinet completely, and those who wanted to place a check on the governor with the cabinet. And the compromises proved to be pretty workable. It certainly strengthened the governor and gave him the ability to really lead.

Walter De Vries: Now, you were very active in legislative reform in Florida.

Chiles: Yeah.

W.D.V.: I understand that it is now your interest in the Congress.

Chiles: Right.

W.D.V.: Isn't it a little bit ironic that a southern senator be involved in a reform of legislative procedures, when the Congress is , for all practical purposes, controlled through its chairmanships, by many people from the South? How do you feel about that?

Chiles: Well, I see the clevage now, as far as I know, there is no southern caucus that is meeting. When I first came up here, I think they held some meetings of the southern caucus and I wasn't invited to one and I didn't go anymore and I don't get invited anymore, but I don't think that there is such a thing as a southern caucus. I think that now, we are . . . you know, the vestiges of that, or the reason for that, of course, was the trying to block

civil rights legislation. I don't think that you are going to find any of the new members from the South that are elected that are going to want to participate in blocking that. Most of the legislation is on the books now. But it is interesting to see that the filibuster even, is turning around, and is not being used by the people that are trying to block civil rights legislation. If anything, it's now being used effectively by the other side. But I think that you are seeing now the vestiges of where the southern group had control of chairmenships, but even that, that's changing everyday. And I see a clevage now more in the Senate, on the basis of . . . not just age, but on the basis, if there was any basis, of time elected to the Senate, than I do on area, than I do on party even. We started meeting with a group of freshmen in the 1970 class, primarily concerned with housekeeping functions to start with. We couldn't get the office changes . . . every one of use was getting kicked out of the offices of the old Senator that we replaced and we knew that, but when? It ran over a year and we got moved down from one office and then get bumped and moved . . . and so, we found that people were taking up to three weeks or a month to make their decision as to what office they wanted. And so, on things like that, and the fact that there was very little difference, about $50,000 difference from the budget of a Senator from Alaska and the budget of a Senator from California, regardless of the tremendous caseload, and mail, and everything else. So, we started addressing ourselves to those kinds of things. How to allow the larger states to have larger budgets and handle their work. How to have proper office space, how to get some of these housekeeping things together. And that was a bi-partisan group, it was just all of the freshmen. And then we broadened that group and took in the '72 freshmen and then the '68 group decided that they really wanted to join us, and so, we have had meetings in which we represent

some forty something Senators, you know, or fall within that general area, and we find that our thinking is alike. While we try not to get into philosophical measures, in most of the reform areas, we think alike, in opening up a meeting.

W.D.V.: Is that a function of recent elections, or is that a function of the kind of people that are coming?

Chiles: I think that it's a function of the kind of people that are coming and I see it very much in the people that are coming up from the South. I think that it's a function that many of them have either served in state government or served in the Congress or have been under this old kind of, again, "Status quo, don't change anything . . . you'll earn your spurs in ten or twelve years and stick around to that time . . . "

J.B.: Do you see that among both new Republican and Democratic Senators?

Chiles: Yes.

J.B.: From the South?

Chiles: Yes, very much so. I find that with, you know, on some questions, I might differ a lot with Brock of Tennessee, on most of the reform measures, for example, we will think exactly alike on most of those measures. And he is performing a leadership role in that area, in trying to reform committees, to reform budgets, to open up all these kinds of things. I see it very definitely.

W.D.V.: But it doesn't extend from procedural matters to very subjective matters?

Chiles: Well, it does where those . . . you know, it's hard to draw a line in a reform area where it is almost procedural or substantive, because it crosses into that. And in many of those, it does kind of fall into there too. Again, I think that one of the healthy things about people coming up from the South is that, generally speaking . . . or some of the southern leadership that I'm seeing,

it is not triggered as much to feeling that they have got to have 100% ACU reading as an ADA reading. And too many of the Senate, as I see them, almost feel like they have got to wear one hat or another. And so, they tend to vote knee-jerk on issues, based on how that is going to place them in those areas. And I kind of see a lot of the southerners, they feel like they can take it issue by issue, the new ones that are coming up. And vote convictions on those issues. So, if anything, it is more of a populist kind of trend than anything. If you look at Hollings of South Carolina, or if you look at Spongs' voting record and you would think that he was a great Senator, he got caught in the Goldwater thing . . . but Bentsen of Texas, Nunn, myself, Huddleston, Johnson, all those, and look at voting records, what I found when I came up here, and I kind of see it happening in these other people too, is that a lot of times, people were coming to me and saying, "We can't understand your vote on such-and-such." I'd say, "Why not?" "Well, because a week ago, you voted the other way. You voted on this." And they felt like that you had to be, you know, it's just like sticking a pin in a butterfly, you are supposed to stand on one track and are never supposed to be able to find out anything different. Well, I just don't think that we aretriggered that way. I don't feel that way myself, you know, that I have to vote one way because I voted the other.

W.D.V.: Well, the common perception was that because race was the one thing that united, or at least oppressed everbody in that sense, but you are saying that since that has been removed, you now have more freedom to be responsive to other kinds of decisions . . . .

Chiles: And I think that we feel that freedom and are excersising it to a wider degree than a guy up North is. And a guy in the West. He is still kind of locked in somewhere, in many instances.

W.D.V.: You mean regionally?

Chiles: Yes, or if not regionally, locked into that he's got to be a conservative and wear the conservative hat all the time, or that he's locked in as a liberal and has to wear the liberal hat all the time. And at a time when issues that made up liberal or conservative or changing. I see guys that agonize as to whether this vote is going to be considered by ADA as being liberal or not almost, and they are trying to outguess, because they either want to fit in that group or they want to make sure that they don't fit in that group, and so they agonize.

W.D.V.: But they are in the older generation of Congressmen and Senators?

Chiles: Generally speaking, they are, yeah. Right. But I see more of the southerners that have been coming in that seem to feel freer, you know. They are voting freer.

J.B.: Do you see the old conservative coalition, as it frequently was referred to, as dying completely?

Chiles: Well, I don't say dying completely. I think that it depends on . . . there are probably still some areas where you find Democrats of a conservative persuasion that vote with Republicans. I think that it's not the locked step thing that it was before and it's harder to find those issues, to define the issues.

J.B.: Do the Democrats from the South who were elected from 1966 on, do you know whether or not a majority of them are voting at a time with the Democratic majority as a whole?

Chiles: I don't know. You could look at a print out that we've, that's done and find that out. That information would be pretty easily discernible from a print out. It shows what the president's position was and how the majority of the Republicans were and how the . . . .

W.D.V.: Well, there has been a change in the House of Representatives, in

that more Democrats from the South now vote with the Democrats than with the Republicans in the last two years.

Chiles: Yeah. I think that change would be . . . I know that it would be true from '66 on. That more Democrats from the South would be voting with the Democrats than with the Republicans.

W.D.V.: Another change that we've found with the younger Democrats in the House and in the Senate, is that they are more oriented toward their district. That they are more responsive, they tend to communicate more with their district than some of the older members, at least they see it this way. Is that true of the Senators as well?

Chiles: Well, it's true of me. I think it is. Yeah, I see that most of the ones I know, they are going back all the time, especially ~~jusxxxhx~~ the ones that were just elected. Most of us got elected more from a populist base, you know, kind of, or more sort of a people thing. More of us were long shots.

W.D.V.: Well, most of you were not organization candidates.

Chiles: That's what I mean. And so, my constituency, that's all that I can really speak for intelligently, you know, my constituency is not based on any kind of organization. I can't call somebody in ten towns and be giving word and so speak back to the folks. I didn't have organizations in most towns. I don't know the people that were working for me. I find out everyday, because they were just somebody that I waved at on the street or I ran into, you know, or knew that I was out there walking or something. So, it's a completely different kind of constituency and I find that when I want to go back and see my people, I'm going two weeks from now and I'm going back and walk in a parade at the Gasparilla, the Tampa fair, and that's where I'm going to see my people, you know, or where they are going to see me. Because I don't know any other way to try to see them. Oh, I can go back and try to get on the tube when I can, you know.

W.D.V.: Well, isn't that a fundamental change in Florida politics, too. The way you campaigned the last time?

Chiles: Yeah.

J.B.: How did the walking idea originate?

Chiles: Well, I guess that I had . . . in '58, when I ran for the state legislature, I had knocked on doors. My wife went down one side of the street and I went down the other. I ran against a guy that had held office for ten years and so he had all the committee structure and the money and so we just went out and spent three months knocking on doors and tried to go see everybody in the county. And from that, I never had another serious race and everybody would always say, "That's the guy that knocks on doors." And when I started running for the U.S. Senate and I went around my county first to try and get support there, everybody kept mentioning, you know, "We remember that you came to our house. Why don't you do something like that?" Then, I was going to run in May and the former governor, who I had been his floor leader, Farris Bryant, decided to get in the race when they changed the primary to September. When he did that, it cut off all the sort of, you might say, organizational support. Because, we didn't have party, we had personality group cults. We had the Hayden Burns group and the Farris Bryant group and the Leroy Collins group and everyone that had sort of been in office, his people were the kinds of groups. So, I lost all the Farris Bryant group and was left with nothing. And the idea was could you transfer this knocking on doors, would it transfer if youwalked across the road? And so, that's where sort of the idea came from. And the necessity was that I didn't have any way of getting any money or any kind of support other than that and I decided that this was my time to run. I was either going to run then or get out.

J.B.: In the legislature, you and Governor Askew served together.

Chiles: Right.

J.B.: Did you work together closely on the various reform committees that took place?

Chiles: Yeah, generally speaking, we were in the . . . we went to the legislature at the same time. I was eight years in the house and he was four in the house and then he went to the senate. I was eight in the house and then I went to the senate, so we were always contemporaries. And generally speaking, we both went to the Eagleton school, I think one different year, and that sparked us in going for it, so generally, we were basically for the same things. And for trying to change the process and strengthen it and caused the lobbyists to register and passed the conflicts of interest bill and the kinds of things like that. You know, we were . . . .

J.B.: Were the campaigns linked at all, in 1970?

Chiles: Were they what?

J.B.: Were they linked in any way?

Chiles: People linked them. They were not actually linked, but people linked them, because we were both sort of the two long shots in the race. And when it happened that we both came up and won the primary, or got in the second primary, then people started making a link. And there were quite a few young people and all that were in both campaigns, because, you know, we were both kind of the long shot and both not doing things the usual way and so, that kind of link was made. We never put our campaigns together, never tried to. We both tried very hard to run our own race. We recognized that we were both sort of getting some mutual benefit out of the other one being there, but we tried very hard not to put it together. During the . . . after the primaries were over and again, we both had people that were in the other camp, you know, but after the primary was over and the general election, we did start kind of

a situation in which the liberals and conservatives of the Democratic party got into a fight and High was elected from Miami, who was considered to be a liberal because he came from Miami. And then, Burns, who was the then governor, was defeated by High in the primary. We had a sort of two year term, because everybody thought that he wasn't honest. Then, he turned around and went to the Republicans, went to Kirk, he just went out to defeat High. And his people switched around and . . . or sat on their hands, and that elected Kirk. So, maybe part of it is what you say, but part of it is that we had a no party situation. I think that for the first time we are trying to build a Democratic party in Florida. We have a viable Republican party, well organized, well disciplined, or it was until they had a little prosperity, and in my election, they tore each other up, you know, with the Cramer-Kirk fight and Carswell, all of that situation. They hit the fan, but still, they have got a better party structure, better organized than we have. Because our party vestiges were just like an old soldier group. They went to meetings and fought, they never knocked on a door, never passed out a piece of literature, they never solicited a vote. It was just a thing that you put on your uniform and went out and fought among each other.

W.D.V.: But neither you or Askew was identified with any of those personality factions.

Chiles: No, that's right.

W.D.V.: And since you represented a new aspect . . . .

Chiles: That's right. And we are now, with John Moyle in Florida, trying to build a Democratic party. I can't tell you how much success we have had at it, because it's hard to cut the old away on the thing, but we are working on it.

(interruption by aide. Chiles leaves)

running together in some places. We still ran separate campaigns, but we started talking about each other and we started talking about the Republicans at that time. The president was coming down and holding their hands up and bringing all these people down and so we said that there was a D.C. going on and that's coming out of the state and we've got an A.C current and that's Askew and Chiles and so we tried to make what we could out of that sort of thing.

(interruption by aide)

W.D.V.: Can I ask you sort of a theory about the southern states?

Chiles: Sure.

W.D.V.: After so many years of Democratic rule in state administrations, every state reaches a point where they want to reform, so what they do is put the Democrats out and put a Republican in. Like Winthrop Rockefeller, like Kirk or so on. But after three or four years, the party has a chance to cleanse itself or reform itself, put new leadership in, and then they go back to a Democratic . . . ~~(inaudible)~~ Cameron

Chiles: Well, you know, I think Florida . . . maybe that applies, I don't know, but what I saw happen in Florida, and I think happened in a lot of other places too, from the time of the Civil War until the time of the late 50's or really the early 60's, we had a no party situation. Really, you might say, until the Eisenhower time came along. It was a no party situation . . . .

(interruption by aide)

. . . . in that sort of no party situation, then you got these personality cults that grew up. And the party had no influence, everybody ran under the Democratic umbrella, but you might as well not have called it Democratic, you know, it was just . . . the history was there. And that, you know, when Kirk got in, we got

(Discussion follows with an aide, George Patton)

Patton: The first thing that I would do would be to contact Charlie Canaday in Lakeland, the number is 699-6681. Charlie managed the Senator's campaign when he ran and has as good a grasp of all the people that you should talk to to get a feel for this sort of thing. He's in the Lakeland office.

J.B.: Who is the Democratic party chairman?

Patton: John Moyle, he mentioned that . . . .

J.B.: Right. He is located where?

Patton: He is a lawyer and his firm is in West Palm Beach, but he also has an office in Tallahassee as the state democratic party chairman.

J.B.: Is he usually there?

Patton: Well, you can usually find him . . . (inaudible) . . . Charlie will have his number for you, but you can either find him in Tallahassee or West Palm Beach, one of the two. It's M-O-Y-L-E. John Moyle.

(end of interview)