

CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: T. TERRELL SESSUMS

INTERVIEWER: JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE: TAMPA, FLORIDA

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M= James M. Denham (Mike)

T= T. Terrell Sessums

M: I am in the law office of the Honorable T. Terrell Sessums in Tampa, FL, on East Kennedy, Salem Saxon Law Office. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me this afternoon about your memories about Lawton Chiles. We do have a script here, as you can see. We want to be able to divert from this as necessary, so feel free to do that as we go along. Can you tell me a little bit about your memories, or rather where you were born, and give me a brief biographical sketch before you met Lawton Chiles?

T: I was born in Daytona Beach, Florida, at Halifax Memorial Hospital on June the 11th of 1930, and I lived in Daytona Beach with my family, my grandparents lived in the vicinity, until 1938, when my father and the family relocated to Jacksonville, Florida. I lived in Jacksonville then until I graduated from Andrew Jackson High School in June of 1948. I then enrolled in the University of Florida in the fall of 1948. During my first year at the University of Florida, my dad's company transferred him to their district office in Tampa, so on holidays Tampa became my home after that and my family secured a home here. My two younger brothers entered the public schools here in Hillsborough County. Fortunately, I knew a number of youngsters in Tampa from the University of Florida, so it was easy for me to make the change. In June of 1952, I graduated with a degree in Political Science from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. I also was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the United States Air Force, and I did start law school in the fall of '52 because I had been elected Student Body President in the spring of '52 and served until the spring of '53, and was granted a deferment to stay over for that year. I found that the responsibilities of Student Body President and the demands of an entering law student were pretty conflicting, so after the first semester, I retreated to the safety of the graduate school and took some courses there until the spring. Then several sets of orders were canceled because of Air Force budget cuts, but before I could re-enter school, I got a new set of orders and I went on active duty in, I think January of 1954, and served two years in the United States Air Force. I took a little leave time in order to get back to re-register for law school, and then I, with the help of the GI Bill, went straight through from January of '56 until I graduated in January or February of 1958.

M: Did you serve out of the country in the Air Force?

T: Temporarily yes. I was assigned as a security officer with another lieutenant to the Research and Development Command and we escorted a group of senior officers on briefing missions through NATO headquarters, so I spent time in Western Europe and one foray into what was then French Morocco. However, the night we got there, a revolution started, so our mission was aborted and instead, we filled our plane up with French wives and children and evacuated them to a base that we had in, at that time, in Libya, I'm trying to remember the exact name of the base, and there we off-loaded the French civilians for French airliners to come get them, and continued on to Naples. But we had missions in Italy and Germany, brief stops in Copenhagen and Oslo, and most of our time on the ground in London, and back from there. So, that was my out-of-town experience. The bulk of it, though, was at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. My training had been at two bases in California, which included short courses in infantry work because we had the responsibility of providing perimeter defense for Air Force installations. At Maxwell, I was assigned to the Air Police Squadron as an Assistant Provost Martial, and it was a pretty broad spectrum of military police work. Maxwell was the headquarters of the Air University Command and we had the Air War College there, and the Air Command and Staff School, Squadron Officer School, Headquarters ROTC. Lieutenants were badly outnumbered by Colonels but it was interesting duty. The bus boycotts occurred during my time there, so we constituted the Federal Riot Control presence in Montgomery, but never had a riot, although we were trained and equipped to deal with them, and that's where I completed my tour of duty. Then I came back to Gainesville for law school.

M: When did you graduate from law school?

T: In February of 1958.

M: '58. That was the same year that Lawton was elected to the House, Florida House, I believe.

T: Yes. I'm trying to remember exactly where I encountered Lawton on campus. My first awareness of Lawton was a friend of mine mentioning that in our Comprehensive English course we had writing labs and speaking labs and he remarked that Lawton had given a very dynamic and colorful speech, almost imitating Gene Talmadge. He had made quite an impression with it and so I had deduced from that that Lawton had some modest interest in politics or government, although, as an undergraduate at the University of Florida, I do not recall Lawton being particularly involved in campus affairs or activities.

M: Now, were you and Lawton at UF at the same time, roughly then?

T: Yes. We may have been, we may not have been in the same class, but something makes me think we were. I haven't gone back to check Lawton's dates, but I started in September of 1948.

M: Now, he was a member of the ATO fraternity, correct?

T: Yes.

M: Can you comment a little bit about what they were involved in?

T: Well, ATO was a major fraternity on our campus, beautiful fraternity house, large fraternity. I knew some of the brothers. The member of the fraternity who was most involved during my undergraduate days was a gentleman named Leon Hanley who had been a candidate for president of the student body. Leon, I think, may still practice law in Orlando, Florida. Leon was not elected. A young man from Bartow named Emory Diamond was elected, but I knew of ATO primarily from their campus political representatives. And they had some folks on the football team. I think Lawton was probably reasonably well involved with the fraternity, but I'm not sure. One of his fraternity brothers in the Lakeland area would probably know better. At that time, I was not a member of a fraternity. I was an independent. I did not become an ATO 'til I returned from the service to law school and a number of my law school classmates were ATOs. I was still single and I finally had a little extra money in my pocket, and they convinced me that if I would become an ATO that I would be spared the rigors of the typical pledge life and that I would enjoy the social events and intramural teams. So I became an ATO then.

M: Now, was Lawton involved when you were there at that time?

T: Lawton probably was out by then. A number of us got out of sync because of the military. If Lawton had taken his commission and gone straight to active duty as most did, he would have finished his military service and been back in law school while I was still in the military. But I lost, gee whiz, a year or two fumbling around. The Korean War wound down and the Armistice was entered into, if I'm not mistaken, about in July of '53. And I think that was one of the factors that resulted in the cancellation of my original orders. But before I got back in school, I got a new set and did spend my two years of active duty time. Lawton, I believe, had an Army commission, and may have served in Korea, may have been in artillery, but I'm not positive of that. But we were out of sync as far as law school is concerned.

M: When Lawton ran for the State House in 1958, how knowledgeable at that time were you about what was going on in Polk County or those political activities in Polk County, even though you were here in Hillsborough, I guess, at that time?

T: Not very much at all. I came to Tampa when I finished law school.

M: Would you have known, for example, who he ran against? Would you have known any of those kind of things? Or remember the campaign at all?

T: Probably not. I can remember one politician from Polk County then, a gentleman, I think named Roy Searles who was a lawyer and I think he was killed in a plane crash. He was a pilot and piloted his own plane and was killed in a crash on the way back from Tallahassee to Lakeland. I think he got into weather that was more severe than he could cope with. I'm not absolutely positive.

M: That would have been after he was defeated, I would imagine? Well, it would have to have been.

T: You know if you tell me that Lawton defeated him, I wouldn't know if you were correct. I didn't know whether Lawton ran for a vacancy.

M: Right. He ran against Roy Searles. Okay.

T: But Roy Searles, I think, had been a little bit of a heavyweight in the legislature but he obviously got out of sync with the home folks on something, though I don't know what that was. But, I was too busy in 1958 becoming a lawyer. I had agreed to join a small up and coming Tampa law firm and had gotten married, and my wife and I were moving to a relatively new community, starting to practice law, so I focused pretty much on the practice of law.

M: Now what law firm was that?

T: Well, I started with the law firm of Hardee and OTT. It is no longer around. C.J. Hardee, Jr., and T. Truitt Ott were the two partners. C.J.'s father was then the County Solicitor or what we call today the State Attorney, and an uncle had been a governor of Florida. C.J. was very active in local politics and state politics. I think he was President of the Young Democrats in Florida and had been a big man on the campus at the University of Florida. Truitt OTT was really a trial lawyer who had joined C.J. Truitt had been at the Carlton Fields firm working with Governor Carlton, and was a very fine able lawyer. They had a third lawyer who joined them, A. Dallas Albritton who I had met on the debate circuit in college. Dallas was a Yale graduate, though he did his undergraduate work at FSU. So I joined that firm and was with them until January '61.

M: Did you know Lawton Chiles' law partners in Lakeland, Bill Ellsworth...

T: I just know them by name.

M: Okay.

T: My first real exposure to Tallahassee came in 1959. Sam Gibbons had been elected to the State Senate.

M: And you worked on his campaign?

T: I didn't really know Sam but I had a friend from law school who was an associate in that law firm who acquainted me with Sam's credentials, and I thought Sam was a progressive up and coming young legislator, good citizen, and thought he would be a better senator than the incumbent, so I agreed to help. I think I put some bumper stickers on and may have made a \$25 campaign contribution, went to a meeting, encouraged my family and friends' family to vote for Sam. I didn't realize he really knew me, who I was all that much, but he called up one day and asked if I would agree to come to Tallahassee and be his legislative aide. The partners I was working for agreed that I could do that, but they let me know that it would have to be without pay, but Sam said that the county would provide a per diem and that he could make some arrangements to get me a place to stay. My wife consented, provided I came home Friday evenings and was there on the weekends, so I went to Tallahassee. I began to meet some of the different folks there and I believe the state senator from Polk County during that time was Scott Kelly. Lawton was a House member.

M: That's true.

T: But I worked some with the Hillsborough House members, mostly with Sam in the Senate.

M: Hillsborough County and Polk County are right contiguous to one another. Would you and Sam try to collaborate on issues with Lawton and Scott Kelly or would there have been a normal interaction there much?

T: Well, they are floating coalitions. On some things, yes; on a number of things, no. I found that the state legislature was really divided into two groups, one group had been labeled the "Pork Chop Gang" and that was essentially the Small County Caucus. The exception to that was Duval County, which historically was allied with the Small County Caucus. Hillsborough was not in it. In fact, I think one of the reasons that Sam was elected to the Senate is that his predecessor had been a little too friendly and had been considered a tool of the small county group who were supporting programs that were unfriendly to the larger urban counties in Central and South Florida. Lawton was a member, his county was in the "pork chop" group and the legislature was pretty well organized. The "Pork Chop Gang" ran the House by script and although they would be polite and deferential to people who were not in the group, you had last choice on committee assignments, your bills rarely saw the light of day, and you really didn't have an opportunity to do too much. I remember talking with Lou de la Parte, one of my colleagues, probably during our first term. We saw more movies because we didn't have anything to do in the evenings. We were sort of out of it. And Sam was out of it. And we didn't like it.

M: So, even though Polk County was in the South, in the southern part of the State theoretically, they were still considered in that "pork chop" group.

T: Yeah they were, the differences were primarily tax and economic differences.

M: Okay, so it's incorrect to suspect that, as a rule all the time that "pork choppers" were in the Panhandle. That wasn't necessarily so.

T: Oh no, they extended down into all the small counties in Florida.

M: The counties particularly with small populations, say Collier County would have been a "pork chop".

T: I expect Collier, Lee. The ones that wouldn't have been would have been Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Hillsborough, Pinellas, Orange.

M: So it's more of a population distribution issue rather than geographical.

T: As a general rule I think that was correct, though that group was dominated by a majority within it who tended to come from North and West Florida, all within commuting distance of Tallahassee.

M: Right.

T: We were seriously “malapportioned”, and that became a major issue. Earl Faircloth helped organize some committees for fair representation whose principle duty was to defeat several proposed constitutional amendments that were really counterfeit amendments that would have diminished the States’ constitutional responsibility to reapportion. The State Constitution required reapportionment on a population basis every 10 years, but had been effectively ignored for years. One of my projects was to see if I could find any legal precedent for maintaining an action in the courts and, at that time, we couldn’t find anything that really would’ve been successful unless you had a very activist urban oriented court. It wasn’t until Lenore Rhyne and the Baker v. Mann Case, we got that decision probably in ’66 or ’67, that the courts took notice of it and the Supreme Court enunciated the one man one vote rule. But before that Governor Collins and Governor Bryant had called the legislature to several special sessions to deal with the subject and I got in the legislature in a special election in 1963. Because of one of those reapportionment sessions, the legislature added additional seats to the largest counties and Hillsborough was increased from three to six representatives, which created three new open seats. I was elected to one of those and Lawton, of course, was already there. And I believe that one of my committee assignments, Lawton was chairing a House Judiciary Committee and I was made the vice chair of that committee, I don’t know if that was in ’63 or ’64, but ’63 was not the regular election cycle. I was elected just before the ’63 session, and then had to run again in ’64. But I can recall working with Lawton on one piece of legislation. You know we had a friendly relationship. We weren’t thick as fleas politically ‘cause we operated out of different caucuses. His caucus was running the show, every member of that caucus was chairman of a committee. We had 60, gee whiz, over 60 committees and we also had proxy voting on committees, so the “Pork Chop Gang” reps controlled all the important committees and they were named on more committees than they could go to, but they gave their proxys to their friend, the Chair. But they were run very closely by the Speaker’s office. It was sort of what I would call a traditional power pyramid. Once a year or so three or four of the state’s major lobbyists would meet with three or four senior legislative leaders, ordinarily at Wakulla Springs or Nuttall’s Rise and Fishing Camp without the press or anybody being there, and they would debate and make the major public policy decisions in Florida: Would there be a sales tax? Would there be a tax on phosphate? What about railroad legislation? What about road money? Who would be the next president of the Senate? Who would be the next Speaker of the House? And they then left there and practiced Democratic centralism and took their slates and their programs to their caucuses and did it.

M: So you mention railroads. Obviously, if they’re meeting at Wakulla Springs, Ed Ball is there.

T: Ed Ball was probably, although I was never there, was probably the senior guy.

M: You think he would’ve been at those meetings?

T: Oh I’m pretty positive he was, yeah. And MacGregor Smith, President of Florida Power Company, was one who was generally there. I’m not sure who all the others were. Winn Dixie probably had a rep. It wasn’t a really large number. They may have consulted with some of their business colleagues before they got there. To give you an illustration of how it would work well, quickly two of them, one of the committees I was named to was the Committee on Atomic Energy. Well, the Committee on Atomic Energy

never met. The only reason we had it was the State Representative from Levy County, where there was a nuclear power plant at Crystal River, wanted to chair a committee, and I think that's the committee he decided would be very helpful to him in his district. So he became the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Committee, had nice stationary printed up, hired a Committee secretary, and we did nothing. I don't know if there was anything to do, but I do not recall ever having a meeting.

M: From what you've mentioned since Lawton Chiles was in the "pork choppers", he was very much an insider, which meant that he...

T: He may not have been a principal ringleader, but he was in it.

M: ...was on the right side of the power team.

T: ...and a beneficiary of it.

M: Now how long did this situation go on? Obviously this was the case when you were elected. Did this change over time in your tenure?

T: It broke up in '66 and then really in '67. In 1966, a couple of unusual things happened. I cannot remember the exact year of the Baker v. Mann decision, the one-man one vote, but that gave the signal that constitutionally some things were changing. A new House Speaker was to be Representative George Stone from Pensacola. George was a good guy. He was certainly liked by those of us from Hillsborough. He was a public school teacher, World War II veteran, but shortly before the session, George was killed in an automobile accident. So we had a sudden emergency as to who was going to be the Speaker of the House. And the Speaker of the House, as long as he could maintain the majority votes, is as close to being a dictator as you can have. You determine what the rules are, what the committees will be, who will chair the committees, which bills go to which committee, which bills see the light of day, which bills don't, and you negotiate the overall agenda with the Governor and the President of the Senate and set the program to the extent you can. But George was out of it, so a number of candidates jumped in. One of them was Bob Mann, a very popular, able representative from Hillsborough County. Another was Ralph Turlington from Gainesville. There may have been several others but those of us from here supported Bob Mann. Bob Mann was not acceptable to the "Pork Chop Gang". In fact, he was a burr under their saddle but Ralph Turlington was from a "pork chop" county. He was a college professor, State Farm Insurance man, reasonable, moderate, progressive, and Ralph ended up being selected Speaker. He was acceptable to the "Pork Chop Gang", probably the most acceptable member of that caucus to the urban group and he became Speaker. Another thing happened. Again I need to get the exact chronology straight but we had a Republican sweep in '67 in the U.S., first Turlington had only had 33 returning Democrats in the House. He had a lot of new freshmen. So he decided to do what most political science professors would have recommended, significantly reduce the number of House committees and make them into real committees, so he cut the number significantly and I was invited, to my surprise, to be a committee chair. And Ralph was more open. And the House was, I thought, fairly apportioned by legislation. But, I think in 1967, U.S. District Judge McRae had been a former law partner of Senator Holland and Chesterfield Smith, studied in Jacksonville, determined that we were not constitutionally apportioned and did not meet the requirements of Baker v. Mann, so he

promulgated his own court apportionment plan, which apparently was drafted and proposed to him by Dr. Manning Dauer at the University of Florida. Well, what he did was get the numbers balanced out, the ratios. But the way he did it here, Hillsborough County was a little under-represented with six representatives. Pasco County, Hernando County, and Citrus County, were a little over-represented with one representative each. So his order was just to put the four counties in one district and gave them nine seats and there were 10 incumbent legislators. No, is that right, nine or 10, but that was the first wave of reapportionment, and that did mathematically straighten this out so that the balance shifted from the small county or rural caucus to the urban caucus. But a third factor came in because in that special election in '67, there wasn't anything else on the ballot and there was a very low turnout election, and the Republicans captured almost every Democratic seat north of Dade up to Brevard and most of Orange County, plus additional seats in Sarasota and Pinellas that they didn't have, and the Republicans showed up for the first time with a significant minority. So instead of being a two-ring circus, it became a three-ring circus. And on some issues, the Republicans worked with the urban Democrats. On other issues, they worked with the rural Democrats. The rural Democrats to give you an idea I believe the next Speaker we elected was Fred Schultz from Jacksonville, the first big county Speaker and a county that had been a member of the pork chop block. Fred knew all the large urban areas were suffering in the distribution of road money. Road money, state road money was allocated primarily on the basis of the number of miles of primary road in your district in 1930, so he went to work immediately to change that. The second thing, the price for getting the tax on pari-mutuel gambling was to divide it equally between the counties and we looked at that and found that

M: I'm sorry.

*T: Well, I was asked to just go, a group of senators wanted to have a secret meeting in a room at the Cherokee Hotel. The meeting was going to be held in Scott Kelly's room as I recall it. I went ahead and I didn't see anybody loitering around or members of the Capitol Press Corps there. It was pretty quiet. So I went back and reported to Sam that the coast looked clear, so we went on up and a group of senators finally came, got in the room, and they were concerned with the Last Resort Legislation which, in essence, would have closed the public schools if the courts ordered desegregation. And the legislature was threatening to pass that legislation and the Governor, I think it was Governor Collins, was going to veto it if it did pass. And, what they were trying to do was to make sure that, if it passed and Governor Collins vetoed it, that they would all vote together to keep the veto from being overridden and they wanted to make sure they all had a clear understanding and, in essence, shook hands on it and could count on each other, because nobody wanted to vote to uphold the veto if it wasn't going to be upheld because it just was too high a cost politically to vote for it and be unsuccessful. But if they were assured of success, they were going to do it. Now some may have voted to uphold it anyway, but some of them needed the assurance that they would be successful.

M: Can you remember who the Speaker in the House was at that point?

T: It may have been William V. "Bill" Chappell, Jr. from Ocala.

M: And the Head of the Senate as well.

T: I can't remember, maybe Sen. Charlie Johns from Starke.

M: Well, I can certainly find out.

T: It would have been either in '59 or '61. But these at the hotel meeting were all senators; these were not representatives.

M: Yes. Can you remember who was in the forefront of that legislation at the time, who was pushing it the most?

T: The Last Resort legislation?

M: Yes

T: No. I associate Charley Johns with it, but that may not be correct. I'm sure there were a number of senators at the hotel meeting, but the senators were not all from the biggest counties. Some of them were there from smaller counties. I recall Doyle Carlton, Jr., being there, Doug Stenstrom being there. I think Ed Price may have been there. Scott Kelly was there. I remember discovering Scott Kelly must lift weights because there were some weights or barbells scattered around on the floor.

M: We went through some of this with him, too, a couple of weeks ago.

T: Okay. I don't know if he remembers that session or not.

M: He mentioned it but not in the specifics that you did.

T: I think they left with firm agreement that on their honor they would vote to uphold the veto if that became necessary.

M: Where do you think Lawton Chiles would have come down on all of this? This would have been, I guess, his first session. In your mind, just speculate; feel free to speculate about what he would have thought about all of this.

T: Don't know.

M: Don't know. Okay. That's fine. If we go back to your first year...

T: ... as a legislative aide, I just wanted to see what went on in Tallahassee.

M: That would have been, I would imagine, an eye-opening experience for you. Can you also tell me a little bit about what lobbying was like back then? What kind of rules were there? Were there hunting junkets, you know, dogs, fishing.

T: Yes. The whole legislative scene was more social then, and legislators as a group do not prepare many pieces of legislation. They were ordinarily prepared by the Governor or Cabinet Members who give them to them to sponsor or introduce. Every now and then they may have done something on their own initiative but there was virtually no legislative staff. It was a small legislative reference bureau with 3-5 people.

M: Was it a process of the lobbyist actually writing the stuff and handing it over to them?

T: The lobbyists probably prepared that and when the Governor or the Cabinet blessed it, it was farmed out to different legislators. One example of this, as a student at the University of Florida when I ran for president of the student body I had to meet with the political committees of the different social fraternities to try to get their support. I do not believe that ATO supported me, but I'm not sure. But one that did was Alpha Gamma Row and Alpha Gamma Row was strong with small county boys and agriculture. A number of them had been active in government since then, but the chairman of that committee was Doyle Connor from Starke, and Doyle, I don't think was at the meeting I went to, but he had just been elected to the legislature and he wasn't old enough to vote yet. But he had been adopted by Charley Johns and the Starke group and identified as a bright and upcoming young man, he had been a leader in the 4-H Clubs, was at the University, so they got him elected immediately and Doyle, who is a capable, decent person, got put on the fast track. He got a committee chairmanship right away, was given important bills to handle and they were handled successfully, and they were, again, fast tracked, and before you know it, he was elected Speaker, probably one of the youngest Speakers. And that group funneled money for statewide campaigns. If you were in the group, you'd get help. And if you weren't, you weren't. The only way you could get any public attention by not being in the group was to be sort of extraordinarily obnoxious so that the Press Corps followed you a lot and reported you in the urban press.

M: Who do you think that Lawton Chiles' best colleagues in the Florida House, in the Florida Senate were at that time, in those years, leading up to say 1970? Who were the people he worked closest with?

T: I think later in the Senate I remember my friend, Lou de la Parte who had served in the House with me, and Lou decided he wanted to be a senator and was elected to the Senate. And he was a little concerned with Lawton Chiles and didn't think Lawton Chiles was necessarily a good government man or friendly to his interests or everything like that. So, I tried to tell him, "Look, Lawton really isn't all that bad. He's a pretty good guy. I think you'll like him." And I gave Lawton some good words on Lou, and they met and they liked each other. And so they became political allies frequently. Reapportionment was behind us. We had one other issue that did separate us a little bit. When Hayden Burns was elected governor, he was governor for a 2-year term and, as you will recall, we amended the State Constitution to get the gubernatorial elections out of the presidential election year, so he was permitted to run for re-election. And the number one plank in his platform was a three-hundred million dollar state road bond issue and my recollection is that Scott Kelly had headed some big investigation into the State Road Department on graft and corruption and Lawton had succeeded him in the Senate, and Lawton was vigorously opposed to this three-hundred million dollar road issue, which looked like it was a boondoggle with a lot of payola for Burns' supporters and contractor friends. And we looked at it and in Tampa, the Mayor was all for it, the Chamber of Commerce was all for it. Our legislative delegation, though, declined to sign on it. But as things went on they could not get the signatures or the votes for the bill in the House to put it on the fast track to be on the November election. In looking at it and talking with several of our chamber people and a couple of my colleagues we said, "Well, we're not fans of Hayden Burns but you know this road bond amendment, except it's got an awful

lot of detail in it, makes fairly good economic sense.” We were in a period of high inflation. It permitted us to move ahead before things got worse than they were and to get transportation improvements. So, I negotiated with the Governor’s House Floor Leader to say, “A couple of members in Hillsborough are not excited about this, but we can see some fairly good arguments for it and we perhaps might agree to at least vote for it so the people can have a shot at it, but you’ve got our bills all bottled up in committee, primarily our bill to establish a medical school at the University of South Florida and the College of Nursing.” I had gotten 33 people to co-introduce that with me and our delegation was for it, and so Emerson Allsworth, who was a State Representative at that time, I think from Broward, came back to me and said, “Will you get me two votes? That’s all we need, two votes out of your delegation, and we’ll pass your Medical School Bill, send it to the Governor and he’ll sign it.” I said, “Are you kidding? How do we know you’ll really do that?” He said, “Well, you and your other member who’ll vote for us on this will have a meeting in the Speaker’s office tomorrow”. That was E.C. Rowell. And I got Ray Knopke to go with me. Ray sort of wanted to vote for it anyway. But Lou de la Parte and Bob Mann, they thought it was terrible and they hated Hayden Burns worse than we did, so we went in there and the Speaker, E.C. Rowell, was there and the President of the Senate, Nick Connor came over, and a couple of senators and Emerson Allsworth was there and they said, “Look. If you all will endorse our bill, we will get your bill out of here and to the Governor’s desk in 48 hours.” So we came back. I talked with a couple of my colleagues to tell them what we were contemplating doing. I called and had a long telephone conversation with Jim Clendenin, the Editorial Editor of *The Tampa Tribune* had been pounding this road bond amendment, and so I wanted to let him know what was going on, what we were thinking about and what we expected. He also was vigorously pushing the medical school, so we agreed to do that. And sure enough, our Medical School Bill went like greased lightning. I went down and the Governor had a bill signing ceremony and we signed it as I recall and probably the worst thing we could have done to Hayden Burns was to vote for that amendment because, I mean, it cost him the election and it didn’t get approved either. It just had too much detail in it, too much room to attack and he was under great suspicion of requiring kickbacks. There had been some 65 or 66 indictments of local officials in Duval County, many of whom had been associated with him, but he was never implicated in it to the extent that he was indicted or anything but they were requiring a kickback on all public contracts.

M: And, of course, he and Scott Kelly went after each other in the next election.

T: Oh yes. Scott Kelly was on his case on that, too, and we gave him something to shoot at.

M: Yeah.

T: But all of that, I think Lawton of course was very much opposed to the road bond amendment.

M: When did you first get an inkling that he was going to run for the Senate? Was that something that surprised you?

T: Oh I wouldn’t say it really surprised me a whole lot; he ran the same time Reubin Askew did. Claude Kirk had proven to be a very colorful and in many ways though, a

very antagonistic Governor, who alienated many, turned many potential friends into enemies, and Reubin Askew ran for Governor and Lawton decided to run for the Senate. Well, a number of other people I knew decided to run for the Senate. Fred Schultz decided to run, Dick Pettigrew, a House colleague, decided to run, Farris Bryant decided to run, and Lawton decided to run. Well, by that time, you know, I respected Lawton, thought well of him, and the same with Reubin, but I didn't think either one of them had much of a chance of getting elected, and I did not mess around in other people's campaigns too much. I was more concerned with making sure I kept a Democratic majority in the House, because if I'm not mistaken, I can't remember if I was Speaker then or Speaker Designate.

M: Wasn't it true that Sam Gibbons was also thinking about it?

T: Sam may have.

M: And Bill Gunter too?

T: Yeah, Bill may have even run, I'm trying to think...what little support I gave, I gave to Dick Pettigrew and I think Dick came in what third or fourth? And I liked Bill Gunter alright.

M: Do you still have any contact with [Bill] anymore?

T: No, not for years. He's still around.

M: Is he in Orlando?

T: You know, it beats me. I don't know. If I were in the insurance industry, Hyatt Brown I'm sure could tell you, but I really don't know.

M: Can you remember who some of his primary backers were, or who you think would be as far as the beginning, and then as things began to go well?

T: Yeah, well, once the primaries were over, I had no problem supporting him and made a contribution and voted for him and recommended him. Who did he run against? Who was the Republican he ran against?

M: Cramer.

T: Cramer. Bill Cramer? Okay.

M: Can you comment on Bill Cramer, a little bit about his background?

T: Well, Bill is you know out of Pinellas County. He was probably the original Republican in the House. I think he is a capable guy. He is, you know, a firm Republican. I would put him almost in the group of competent modern Republicans, though he isn't nearly as bad as a lot of the current Republicans but you know he was always a minority but an attractive figure, popular in his district, and the Republicans had begun to show strength in Congress. I think that Gurney had been a congressman and Kirk, Governor, and they began to attract money and support that they hadn't had before

so I don't know how close the race was, but I'm sure Cramer was a competent, qualified candidate who was pretty well funded.

M: Do you remember any of the people that were working on Lawton's campaign, particularly during the walk?

T: Well, probably Charlie Canady, Sr., and I think my friend Lou de la Parte was vigorously for him. I know Wilbur Boyd was.

M: Does Jack Pridgen ring a bell?

T: Yeah. Wasn't he a former reporter who became his press person? I did not know him well, but I remember the name and he was a capable gentleman.

M: It is very difficult to separate in their campaigning and their world, really, Rhea and Lawton. Can you comment on their teamwork in terms of his political career, even before he ran for the Senate?

T: Well, I do not recall Rhea being an out-front partner in the mode of a Hillary Clinton but Rhea was knowledgeable and interested in all of this, knew most of the players, and I'm sure she was heavily involved with her husband and his political and public career and was very helpful to him.

M: Now, that 1970 campaign was very, very exciting, I would imagine, with both Askew and Chiles running. That would have been a very exciting time.

T: Well, it was a revelation. It was almost that the least known candidates were the most likely to be elected. They both started as progressive young men with good records, good credentials who were articulate, and Lawton, of course, got attention with his walk, and Reubin, of course, was gung ho on the corporate income tax and some other things. And I think their time came. Most of us were excited and pleased that some younger, very able Democrats got elected and thought they'd be great public servants.

M: Now, 1968 was the year that everything kind of unraveled in American History, the King assassination, the Democratic Convention, and Bobby Kennedy's killing. Vietnam was at its height. Within two years of coming into 1970, were any of these issues out there in these two races that you can remember?

T: Probably more so than in the world I was focusing on. At that time, there was not a great spillover of national politics into state legislative races, which tended to be local, and probably in 1970, well, '68. When was the Democratic National Convention held in Miami?

M: The Democratic Convention? That would have been '72 I think.

T: The one that nominated McGovern, '72. Alright.

M: Yeah, that was McGovern's year.

T: I remember that Governor Askew invited Neva and I to go with him to that convention and we did, and that was the first and last one I've ever been to. I've watched them on TV but that again was a very educational experience, and Senator McGovern was all over Reubin to be his Vice Presidential candidate. But, you know, we told Reubin that Senator McGovern was undoubtedly a fine American, but he wasn't going to get many votes in Florida. The best we could ascertain, he might be able to carry two South Florida congressional districts, but that he was going to get wiped out otherwise, and I was real concerned about a Nixon landslide, and it might pull some Republican House members in and cost us some Democratic seats. Reubin understood that and politely waved off and declined. And I remember Teddy Kennedy giving one of the keynote addresses. I got to thinking there he was so enthusiastically received that if he had said, "I've changed my mind, I'll be a candidate" they may very well have nominated him. But he didn't. He may have seen that Nixon was almost unbeatable at that juncture. So my focus was on the House and we maintained the status quo pretty well.

M: Now, when Lawton was elected to the Senate do you remember working with him at all in Washington? I know your worlds are really different in Tallahassee and Washington. Do you remember anything that you collaborated on?

T: I think probably during that period of time I had finished my legislative career and one of my clients was the Tampa Port Authority. I served as General Counsel for them for some 14 years, and their major project was a Harbor Deepening Project, which was one of the largest Federal Works projects and I made trips to Washington from time to time with the Port Director, the Chairman, and to work with our lobbyists up there. Sam Gibbons was our spear-carrier in the House and Lawton was very helpful in that in the Senate, and they didn't require much persuading. It was more a matter of them giving suggestions as to what we needed to do or see, or such as that, but Lawton was, I thought, a very good Senator.

M: Do you have any thoughts about who his closest colleagues in the United States Senate would have been?

T: In the United States Senate? No. I'm sure that he and the Junior Senator, Bob Graham, worked together nicely, but I don't know that they were personal confidants.

M: Okay. Did you ever have a chance really to speak to him personally while he was in the Senate about family, about some of the challenges in the Senate, about his committee assignments, anything like that? What he liked about the Senate, what he didn't like about the Senate?

T: I may have in passing. I talked more with Sam about Congress in general. I could tell it was as though Lawton was never one to really show a lot of great excitement, you know, Lou de la Parte would come on as more excitable or enthusiastic at times. I could tell it was a tough job. I probably had more dealings with Charlie Canady than directly with Lawton, but we had a project. I also served as President of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of 100, and we had an Economic Development Project the Federal Government was encouraging the American Semi-Conductor industry to beef up capacity, and they were preparing to fund what was called a Semi-Tech Project, and our community decided to compete with that and the final decision was probably

going to be made in the Congress in the appropriation process. Lawton was the Senior Senate budget guy and on the Conference Committee, and we ended up coming in second to Austin, Texas, but Lawton and Bill Chappell, who was a House conferee, got us a \$25 million consolation prize and the bill, and I think that they worked hard to protect and advance the interest of Florida in a number of things from the Harbor Deepening Project to economic development projects, and I think most of us resonated with Lawton, who was a deficit hawk. Most Floridians are used to balanced budgets and just get a little staggered by the massive federal deficit so Lawton, I thought, was a good and popular senator. His personal problems and Rhea's personal problems, you know, in retrospect, are not shocking or surprising but, you know, I was not aware of him having any coronary difficulty or Rhea having an addiction problem. And I think a combination of frustration, fatigue; everything probably just wore him down.

M: Now he was Chair of the Budget Committee at the height of the deficit balloon in the '86, '87, '88 period, so I think it would be pretty reasonable to speculate that that obviously was wearing him down pretty well.

T: And he took his responsibilities very seriously.

M: Seriously, yes. Did he ever express any of those things to you?

T: Not in any real overt way other than expressing to the public or to people generally.

M: Do you know if he had any opinions on President Reagan? Did he like President Reagan, did he not like President Reagan?

T: Do not know.

M: Was he able to separate the man from his policies, that kind of thing?

T: We never discussed the subject. I don't think he agreed with his fiscal policies at all because Reagan was the principal driver of the deficit.

M: After he retired, were you surprised when he first let it be known that he was interested in running for Governor after he retired?

T: Well, I was surprised when he decided not to be a candidate for the Senate and immediately after that, Reubin decided he would be a candidate and asked me to be his fundraiser in Hillsborough County and to help him here, which I agreed to do. And as you know, Reubin took himself out after awhile and Buddy MacKay got in it. Later, I was surprised when Lawton got in the Governor's race. I think he would have been easily re-elected United States Senator, maybe not easily but comfortably had he chosen to run, but in talking with friends, my understanding was that he had made it clear that he would not be a gubernatorial candidate. So I had finally agreed to support Bill Nelson, whom I had known in the House and had committed myself to a modestly energetic role on Bill's behalf. I had done some fundraising and other things, so I was aghast when Lawton and Buddy MacKay decided they would team up and be the dream ticket and run.

M: This was fairly late in the game then.

T: Yeah. And I know Bill Nelson was very disappointed and he felt maybe not Lawton as much as Buddy MacKay went back on their word because he didn't commit his candidacy until he was assured that they would not be candidates. But he persisted and I stuck with him. As soon as the primary was over, I immediately sent Lawton my contribution and helped him and was glad that he was elected Governor.

M: You've already talked about that phase of the campaign. Do you remember having any memories of the campaign itself, any of the debates or any of the conflict with Governor Martinez, any of the highlights of the actual campaign itself?

T: Not a whole lot, although Governor Martinez had become an increasingly unpopular Governor, at least here in Hillsborough County. His friends in Public Education felt he had ignored them and ignored those issues. The same feeling was sort of prevalent in higher education and Bob I think also disappointed people when he flip-flopped on the service tax so there was a pretty good built-in negative vote for Martinez and Lawton didn't do anything to alienate any of those people and he had a good record of being a fiscal conservative but still being a progressive leader, so Lawton was an attractive candidate. He carried Hillsborough County comfortably.

M: Can you evaluate his first term? Was he already on the children's agenda by that time, and the tobacco?

T: Pretty much.

T: My friend, Louis de la Parte, was strongly for Lawton and they resonated on children and youth issues and worked together. I believe that Lawton has a daughter who has some physical handicaps, that probably had helped him and Rhea become very sensitive to the problems and needs of that part of our population, but that was certainly a strength or highlight of his administration was to bring the state's attention to bear upon needs here. I remember having some conversations with Lawton and during that period of time I was asked as a lawyer to represent a coalition of Florida school districts in a constitutional case asserting that the State had failed; primarily the legislature had failed to abide by the constitutional requirement to make adequate provision for a uniform system for free public schools. We felt we had a pretty good case and before we filed a litigation, I made the rounds and talked with some legislative leaders and talked with if not Lawton personally, with his senior staff and his General Counsel and with Buddy MacKay to let him know what we were contemplating doing and because this litigation required a response by the Governor, or certainly by the Governor as a member of the State Board of Education, and I was hoping to persuade several public officials to do as had occurred in a couple of other jurisdictions, either to decide to join the litigation as parties plaintiff or to stipulate to and concede to many of the factual allegations to simplify the litigation and isolate it to the constitutional questions and Lawton seemed to be, you know, real concerned with the State revenue problem. I remember him telling me that the real big budget buster was the required funding for Medicaid, that that was gobbling up almost all the money that was available and really limiting what the state could do to help public education. I had suggested several times that if you need a new tax, don't have the new tax for the public schools, have the new tax to fund Medicaid. That was the black hole, and to a large extent, still is. I think they recognized the number of the deficiencies in the State revenue structure. I was not involved in the decision to go after big tobacco but think that was a great, great move

that was very much in the public interest. I was disappointed that his administration never got more involved or was never more supportive of education, not to the extent that Bob Graham had been or even Reubin Askew. His focus tended to be on other issues. And part of it was, I guess, fiscal reality, and an unwillingness after the service tax debacle to be a militant crusader for tax reform or something.

M: Do you remember the people in his office that you worked with the most closely, his aides, his advisors?

T: I had a contact or two with his General Counsel, J. Peterson, and a lot of it with Buddy MacKay and I had been asked at one point to draft a proposed answer and stipulation and everything to give to them, which I provided to Buddy MacKay, but nothing ever came of it, and they just joined in the general State Board of Education response. The main burden of defense was carried by the legislature, who retained former Florida Attorney General Bob Shevin to represent the state in that action.

M: Can you comment on Lawton Chiles' sense of the Democratic Party and was he frustrated with the Democratic Party? We both know that the Democratic Party was losing ground, a lot of ground in the nineties. What do you think his thought was on that?

T: You know, we never had a direct conversation. I can only speculate, but he was like most elected Democratic public officials in Florida. He was pretty frustrated with the Party, both nationally and at the state level, although I think Charles Whitehead probably chaired the Democratic Party at the state level, and I think that he and Lawton probably got along well. I can't remember to what extent Lawton exerted leadership in the State Democratic Party.

M: Well, we're coming near to the end here. In 1994, of course, he ran again and then narrowly won. Well, that campaign, of course, will be remembered for the Hecoon quote, I'm sure.

T: Yes.

M: Do you remember what you thought when you heard that? Did you hear the debate that day or did you hear the news afterwards or what? What came into your mind when you heard that phrase?

T: Well, I have to confess, although I've grown up in Florida, I've not been an avid hunter or anything, and I wasn't exactly sure what it meant, but it sounded folksy and you just knew intuitively from voice inflection and everything else, Lawton was identifying with and reaching out to his old Florida constituents, the folks in West and North Florida, sort of letting them know that he was one of them. And it wasn't the polished urbane thing that Jeb Bush would have handled, but I think it was intuitive. I don't know whether he carefully crafted it or just did it, but it was a very wise, intuitive response to the situation. I don't know how to quantify its help, but it was able to do for him what Bill McBride wasn't able to do and that was to, enlist the good will of many, many redneck Florida voters who otherwise have a real tendency, despite their economic interest to the contrary, to vote Republican, primarily on the basis of what I refer to as the long list of

social issues ranging from gun control to abortion, you name it, but Lawton got a good lick in there.

M: Well, I guess I'm just going to ask you to conclude things. Can you then comment on what do you think his legacy for Florida will be, or for future generations, and also, what do you think he should be remembered for mostly in terms of his contributions?

T: Well, Lawton was a very complex person, certainly forthcoming and forthright, but not always easy to read or understand. But I think in the broad context, he'll be remembered as a good legislator, an outstanding United States Senator, and a very good Governor and, after everything is said and done, someone who did a very honorable and effective job as a public servant. And Florida is better off for him having stepped out. He's quite capable of taking some really bold and courageous positions.

M: Well, Mr. Sessums, I really appreciate your time with me today and what I'm going to do is, as I can, have these transcribed, and I'll send you copies for your records, and we'll be able to use these at the Center for Florida History as well.

T: Okay.