South Carolina Political Collections
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview

with

Raymond A. Harris

University Libraries
University of South Carolina
Interviewer:

Herbert J. Hartsook

Date:

November 29, 2001

Location:

Mr. Harris’ office, Darlington, S.C.

Synopsis:

Raymond A. Harris (b. February 3, 1927), former South Carolina Republican Party executive director (1965 to 1968) and chairman (Dec. 1968 to Jan. 1971), reflects on his life and particularly his leadership in the Republican Party.

Transcriber:

Carol Copeland
Hartsook:  Can you tell us a little bit about your background, where you were born, something about your parents, what they did, and your early education.

Harris:  I was born and reared in the little town of Wake Forest, North Carolina. It was a college town at that time and I certainly enjoyed growing up in that small town and with that college atmosphere. My father was from the little town of Youngsville which is just a few miles north of the little town of Wake Forest. Youngsville was even smaller than Wake Forest. He was in business there in Wake Forest, and married my mother, Mary Alice Brooks, and she was from Grifton, North Carolina.

I grew up, my first seven or eight years, I grew up in the little community of Forestville, which was just a mile south of Wake Forest. It was right between Wake Forest and Raleigh. Then we built a new house and moved into town in Wake Forest and I continued to grow up there and attend public school. When I graduated from high school, which was in three years, I volunteered for the service in the early part of 1944 and served in the United States Naval Air Corps during World War II. I was an aviation radio gunner in PBM patrol planes. By the time I finished all my training and had gotten to Hawaii, the war ended. I served about a year in Japan and Shanghai and Okinawa, and then came home to Wake Forest. I finished my service in May of 1946 and matriculated at Wake Forest College right after I got back home. After four years of study at Wake Forest, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. I majored in English and minored in Latin.

After that, I worked as a salesman at a sporting goods company and traveled around the eastern part of South Carolina selling sports equipment to high schools. The Korean War was going
on then and the FBI had opened up their Special Agent training to people that could qualify by taking an all-day examination. It so happened that I had taken one semester of law to see if I was going to like it and I did study constitutional law, and that examination involved a lot of constitutional questions and so I did pass the entrance exam and served in the FBI for about two and one half years as a special agent, mostly in Seattle and Walla Walla, Washington. I resigned and came back to South Carolina after about a year and we had been transferred to our second office, in Chicago. I didn’t much like Chicago as a place to live. It’s a good place to visit but not a good place to live. But anyway, I finally ended up here in Darlington, in the hardware business. My wife’s family had three or four hardware [stores] and they had sold a couple of them and had a partnership here in Darlington. My wife and I talked about it and she became a partner in the settlement. So, we moved to Darlington and I represented her partnership at Barringer McKeel Hardware. Over a period of time we had six children and I began to see the hardware partnership was not going to produce enough income to raise and educate six children.

I got interested in politics in 1962 when Bill Workman ran for the United States Senate as a Republican against Olin D. Johnston. I had voted once when I was in Chicago and that was for General Eisenhower for president. But that was my only participation in politics. I had followed Bill Workman’s writings in the News and Courier and I liked his outlook on politics and so forth. When he announced that he was going to run for the United States Senate, I wrote Drake Edens a letter and told him if I could do anything for Bill Workman in Darlington County, I’d be glad to try. I said I had no political experience but that I was interested. So it wasn’t three days later that he and Bill showed up at my hardware and they welcomed me into the campaign. I ended up being the chairman of the Workman for Senate campaign in Darlington County. Then things progressed from there. I became secretary of the state Party after that race, and served on the Executive Committee and then
participated in the Party very actively, and helped organize the Sixth Congressional District for the Republican Party.

Then the Party decided that they needed an executive director to run the mechanics of the Party and they asked me if I would consider it. I told them that I would because I was really looking for a way out of the hardware because of the obvious, that it just wasn’t enough there to support a growing family and two partners. So I accepted the job as executive director of the Party. I believe that was in the latter part of 1964 or early 1965.

In 1964, Barry Goldwater was making national announcements about his interest in running for president and I got interested in his race. A friend of mine and I, Charlie Sidbury, went up to Washington and met with Senator Goldwater. If we were going to support a candidate, we wanted to meet him, so we met Goldwater and came back all excited. We went through that campaign, and afterwards, in early 1965, I was hired by the [state] Party as Executive Director.

During that year, . . . . You know, you always have factions within the Party. Senator Thurmond came out and supported Goldwater and then switched to the Republican Party. Harry Dent, Senator Thurmond’s Administrative Assistant, had a strong interest in the Party and was working with the Party during the Goldwater campaign and he wanted to run for state chairman. Then the question to me was whether I was going to be in the Drake Edens faction of the Party, and could I support Harry Dent if he were to become state chairman. I said I didn’t have a problem with that whatsoever and that I would be loyal to the Party and I would work with whoever was state chairman. As it turned out, Harry wanted me to stay on as executive director. So, he and I worked very closely together.

The next big thing that came up was the 1966 election when we ran the ‘Wheel of Progress’ campaign. We had Joe Rogers as our candidate for governor. We fielded a full slate of candidates at
the state level and some county level candidates. I can’t think right now who ran with Joe Rogers, I don’t know whether it was Marshall Parker. . .


Harris: I can’t remember who ran for Lieutenant Governor.

Hartsook: Was it Marshall Cain?

Harris: No. He was interested but it was Marshall from Greenwood. Real outstanding. . .

Hartsook: Marshall Mays?

Harris: Marshall Mays. That’s who it was. Real outstanding individual. And they made a good run but it just wasn’t to be.

Hartsook: Before we get too much further, can I take you back and flesh out some if your earlier comments? The ‘62 Workman race against Olin Johnston - - were you excited about Workman and upset with the representation that you’d received from Olin Johnston? What got you active in that campaign?

Harris: I had read so much about Workman, his articles and opinions. And I liked his conservative approach to government as opposed to what I felt. . . I think the general feeling
among people of my political persuasion was that Olin D. was a ‘New Deal’ type individual and he had total control over patronage and all that. That didn’t set too well with me. Just the picture that was painted about him as a, what I called at that time, ‘liberal Democrat,’ didn’t set too well with me. I know that he gave a conservative image to, I guess, most South Carolinians, but I just didn’t particularly like him. And I liked Bill Workman and I thought that we needed a change.

Hartsook: How hard was it to organize Darlington County for that campaign?

Harris: I didn’t think it was very hard. This friend of mine, Charlie Sidbury, and I decided we were going to organize every precinct in the county. There were forty-one precincts. To do that, you had to get a precinct map and know where all the precincts were and get a list of all the people that were registered to vote. We used books then, big books. We tried to get the list but couldn’t get it because it was in the car trunk of the secretary of the Democrat Party in Darlington. Finally, they got the books out of his car and we got them and copied down all the registered voters in all the precincts. I knew a lot of people because of working in the hardware and Charlie ran the Western Auto store and so, he and I together knew different levels of individuals in this area. We started going into the precincts, knocking on doors, and asking people if they’d like to join the Republican Party. We told them basically we were conservative, and I was just overwhelmed with the response. They’d say, yes, they wanted to join. They didn’t know you had to join a party. I told them in order to have an organization, we needed certain people in every precinct, a minimum number, to organize that particular precinct. We just explained it to them. I’ll never forget knocking on a door in the Hartsville area, in the summer time. This fellow came to the door in one of these undershirts that had the strap over the shoulder. It was about six o’clock at night. He opened the screen door and we walked in and told him who we were. He said, ‘Well, I sure am glad to see you all. I’ve been
wanting to join a Republican Party. I am a Republican.’ We sat down and signed him up. That was one of the toughest Democrat precincts in the county. That was the precinct that when Workman ran, he got one vote and Olin D. got sixty-seven votes out of that precinct, Pond Hollow was the precinct, up in the northern corner of the county. Workman got one vote and I’m satisfied it was that fellow we talked to. But we went on from there and ended up organizing thirty-five of the forty-one precincts, having a legal organization in each one of them.

Hartsook: How much time were you devoting to this day-by-day or week-by-week? It seems like it must be an immense amount of time.

Harris: I had a very good partner in the hardware business and he never did tell me he was a Republican, but I know he was. He was a very conservative individual, Frank McKeel. So I had some time off. And Charlie owned the Western Auto, so he could take some time off. But most of the time was taken at night or late in the afternoon, knocking on doors. But that was the only way you were going to build a Party. That was my grassroots organizational training to become executive director of the Party and then state chairman.

Hartsook: Did anybody serve as a mentor to you while you were getting started?

Harris: Drake Edens was more or less my mentor. He was always there and always talking to me. He and I became very close friends. We stayed good friends all through ups and downs. I really did love Drake Edens. He was one of the best friends that I developed when I came to South Carolina. He and I saw eye to eye on a lot of things, but the one thing that we didn’t see eye to eye on, he didn’t think as much of Harry Dent as I did. Where Drake was a good spokesman for a party
that was just beginning to grow, back in the early ‘60s, [later] we needed someone that could articulate the political issues. Drake was focused primarily on organizational structure, and that was my focus when I became executive director. I said you can’t have a party if you don’t have a good organization at the grassroots. I felt when they hired me as executive director my mission was to organize this Party at the grassroots level, in every county. Drake and I were like hand in glove on that mission.

I did not object to Harry Dent coming in. He was a promoter. He was active, he was smart, and he was brilliant. I never will forget working with him. He would come by the office after he left his law office and he’d say, ‘We need to get something out on this.’ I’d sit down with him and he’d get on that typewriter and write up a news release just like that [snapping his fingers], pull it out and show it to me, and I’ve forgotten what the issue might have been, but he was attacking somebody or some issue. He’d type that thing up and I’d look at it and I’d say, ‘Gosh, I can’t make any changes in that. That’s terrific.’ I’d give it back to him and he’d say, ‘Let’s get it out.’ So we’d put it out and I’d read it in the paper the next day almost verbatim the way he wrote it. Of course, the writer would make a few changes, but they would take that news release and it would be the same message that Harry was getting out. I’d look at that thing and say, ‘That’s amazing.’ I learned a lot from him from that standpoint. Harry and I became very very close friends and the closeness didn’t damage my friendship with Drake, even though they always kind of looked at each other wondering what each one was thinking. They never were close friends like I was close friends with Drake and close friends with Harry.

**Hartsook:** When you look back on the Workman campaign, what do you see as his main strengths and weaknesses as a candidate?
Harris: I thought his articulation of the issues was his strength. Bill was a friendly person but he wasn’t somebody that you could be a close friend to. He appreciated everything I did for him here in the county. When his candidacy failed. . . . I don’t think it was a failure because I think it helped build the new Republican Party. I think that particular race helped build the Party itself in South Carolina. After that, things really got going organizationally. But, with Bill, when that race was over, it was over. That was it. Bill Workman was not involved with politics after that, he just cut it and ended up at The State Newspaper. He still had some basic philosophy that I saw in the beginning, but that was the end of it, as I recall.

Hartsook: He made that kind of tragic run for governor in ‘80. I think people discouraged him from. . . .

Harris: Well, that’s true but that was so many years after, and you couldn’t revive someone like Bill. I think the reason that it was tragic was because the way he cut it off after that race in ‘62. You didn’t hear from him anymore and, I don’t know, I guess it just wasn’t there. It was too much of a gap between ‘62 and . . . . Also, when he was editor, there was some resentment in the Party toward him when he didn’t come out and endorse, or The State didn’t endorse, Albert Watson. I think that was a lot of it right there.

Hartsook: Was it a mistake for the Party to allow somebody who had been such an active campaigner and organizer, to let him get away and not keep him as an active member?

Harris: You mean after the ‘62 race?
Hartsook: Yes. I’m wondering, did the Party try to keep him active and he just rebuffed all of their. . .

Harris: My recollection is that he just kind of went away as far as the Party was concerned. That was the feeling that I got. Tommie, his wife, and his daughter stayed active, but Bill didn’t, as I recall. I hardly ever saw him around the headquarters or anything like that.

[Tape 1, Side 2 begins]

Hartsook: What were the duties of the secretary for the state Party?

Harris: It was basically to keep the minutes and get them typed up and dispersed to the Executive Committee.

Hartsook: So really, a great platform to get to know all the major players across the state. That must have been perfect training to step into the executive director’s role.

Harris: It was. I had a lot of good friends when I became chairman. It wasn’t a contest. Harry [Dent] said he wanted me to take his place and he thought I could do it and I had the support of the national committeeman, who was Drake [Edens], and the committeewoman who was Ann Morris. Once that transition took place, I had to figure out a way to be loyal to all of them. I didn’t get the feeling that they were very close to Harry. Harry was the kind of person that focused on what he wanted to do. It was hard to get close to Harry. I was about as close to him as anybody I know
except for Fred Buzhardt. I think he and Fred Buzhardt were extremely tight. But Harry and I became very good friends and I admired him a great deal.

Hartsook: How did you come to run for Congress?

Harris: That was in ‘68. We had just run a candidate in ‘66, Archie Odom. Archie was a good fellow, he was clerk of court in Florence, and he was active, but I thought we had to move up a step, having been involved with campaigns and in the Party, which Archie never had that experience, except running for clerk of court. I felt like I had a little bit more to offer, to raise the level maybe a little bit, and the image of the Party. So, that’s when I told Harry and Drake I was going to run for Congress in the Sixth District. So that’s when I told them I was going to step down, and did and came back home and ran for Congress. And I think my campaign did serve to broaden the base and increase the participation that year.

It was a tough year to run in this district because you had [presidential candidates] George Wallace running in the Independent Party and Hubert Humphrey and Nixon running. In this area, you had a lot of, still, a lot of Democrats, and you didn’t have many that said, “I vote for the man.” [Incumbent congressman] Johnny McMillan was a very strong opponent and well liked by a lot of people that I needed to appeal to in order to win. I knew that with Wallace running, it was a balancing act trying to not go out and be against Wallace, because I needed people that were going to support him, and I couldn’t be too Republican and still attract those people. It made it a tough race. I tried to go right down the middle. A lot of people didn’t like Nixon but I had to be with Nixon. It was hard to run a race like that but we ended up getting, I think, forty-two percent of the vote and I felt like the Party became stronger after that. I thought we ran a good race and most everybody
thought we ran a good race, opposing a man that had been there thirty-two years. Johnny McMillan was not a screaming liberal by any stretch, but it was necessary, I thought, to build the Party and so...

**Hartsook:** When you say a good campaign, what do you mean by a ‘good campaign’?

**Harris:** I mean one that was active. We put out good news releases. I learned all that from Harry, that you’ve got to get news out, you’ve got to make news. I had a fellow by the name of Jimmy Howle who was working at that time for the *Florence Morning News* and he was somewhat, I think, sympathetic to my race. I’d get with Harry and we’d put out these news releases. Of course, Harry was busy running the Nixon campaign, but he helped me a whole lot. I learned that putting out those news releases was the key to getting news [coverage], so we’d turn those releases out. I thought that helped make it look like we were running a real active, and possibly, a winning campaign. Because every time you picked up the paper almost, I had some news in there. I’d pick up an issue here and an issue there. I remember I got on Johnny Mac for agreeing to sell wheat to Russia. You’ve got to be careful about that because a lot of farmers grow wheat, but it became a good issue. So, things like that. We had a good organization. We had an organization in every county, almost every precinct. I thought it was pretty effective but I never had hopes that we would win. I just never had that. But that wasn’t the reason for my running. My reason for running was to strengthen the Party in this district and you can’t strengthen the Party unless you have a candidate and I felt like I was a pretty good candidate to help do that.

**Hartsook:** Was that an expensive campaign?
Harris: No. It wasn’t very expensive. I don’t recall, but I doubt if we spent $50,000 on that campaign.

Hartsook: Did the state Party help you with the financing of the campaign?

Harris: The state Party helped a little bit. They helped me with news releases and things like that but I can’t recall whether they sent me any money. National Party did, but I can’t recall how much financial support they gave us.

Hartsook: That year Marshall Parker was running his second attempt for the U.S. Senate and did not poll as well as he did two years earlier. What kind of a campaigner was he and did you two appear very often together?

Harris: No, not much. It seems like to me we appeared together at Myrtle Beach and Florence but I think that was the only two places we appeared together. I think Marshall felt like he didn’t have enough poll coverage in Charleston. He felt like the organizational structure hurt him in that first race, and it may have.

Hartsook: You’re talking about the charges that the election was basically stolen.

Harris: I guess. We really didn’t have the polls covered as much as we should have. You’re talking about ’66. That was probably true, but I don’t know that as a fact.
Hartsook: Tell me about the duties of the Executive Director. You basically created the mold of the position.

Harris: The main thing was to serve the Executive Committee and to serve the party as a whole, the working end of it. The records end of it. The communications with the organizational structure. To build that structure in each county and at the precinct level. That was primarily the duty of the Executive Director, to build the Party at the grassroots level, travel the state, [and] meet with the county committees. The biggest thing I had to do after that ’66 election, was get us out of debt. We had to organize some sort of effort to raise money on a monthly basis. So that’s when I started, the Silver Elephant Club, which was $10.00 a month, $120.00 a year. My whole effort was put forth, with the committees’ support. . . . Frankly, Arthur Ravenel was one of the leaders in that effort to make the Silver Elephant Club work. He was on the steering committee that created it, along with several others, including Drake Edens, Harry Dent, and Hal Byrd. So, that’s how the Silver Elephant Club got started. Our goal was to have 1,000 members. That was the goal. I traveled the state during 1967. I guess I was out working almost seven days a week, hardly had time to come home. I would come home late at night, when I was in this area. But I was on the road most of the time talking to individuals about joining the Silver Elephant Club. I think we ended up right at 1,000 members, which got us out of debt and got the Party feeling back on their feet again. It was one heck of an effort. You go out and interview about 1,500 people and ask for their support. It wouldn’t be, all the time, individuals. It might be ten or fifteen people at a luncheon or a dinner and you’d talk to them about signing up for the Silver Elephant Club. A lot of them signed up on a draft and then a lot of them just gave us $120. The main effort in ’67, was to get us on the road, and at the same time help build the Party, but the main thing was to raise that money and get us out of debt. And we were pretty fortunate, pretty successful.
Hartsook: Did you play any role in candidate recruitment as Executive Director?

Harris: Yes, but not during that particular year. That particular year, 1967, was our recovery [year]. I played a role back in ’66, when we were running all these candidates for most all of the offices. I played a big role here in the county helping get candidates and then I would go out in other parts of the state. I remember working hard for Carroll Campbell’s candidacy, running for the Senate in Greenville. It was a bit of all of it, but especially in ’66, that was the big push for candidates, and I helped recruit a lot of candidates then.

Hartsook: Were you mainly looking for true Republicans or were you trying to target likely party switchers?

Harris: We were looking for people that might switch, and we talked to many; and some did. I can’t recall who they were. Of course, Joe Rogers was one of the major ones, and Marshall Mays. I don’t think Marshall was active in the Party at the time, when we talked to him about running. And you had to go talk to them. You had to sit down with them and convince them there was the possibility that they could get elected and you had to explain to them that if they didn’t win, the only way to build a Party was to have candidates. You can’t build a Party without candidates and you can’t elect candidates without an organization. And then there were people that wanted to grow with the Party and wanted to run as candidates. Some of them you didn’t have to talk to.

I remember a friend of mine came to me one time, I’d helped him get a position. This was after the ’68 election [in 1974]. Nixon was in and there were appointments made, and patronage, and so forth. And he came to be after he’d been in this job for three or four years and asked me...
I wasn’t involved with politics then, I got out in 1970 when I resigned as state chairman. I came back to Darlington that year and opened up a real estate business. So, my friend came to me and asked me what I thought about him running against Fritz. He thought he had a good chance of winning because he had had all these contacts he had developed through his job. I guess I was too candid and I told him I didn’t think he had a chance against Fritz. He said he had all this support and I said that won’t make a bit of difference, you haven’t got that support that you’ll need running against Fritz. I learned then that when people tell you they want to run for an office, you don’t tell them they don’t have a chance. He didn’t run and he didn’t much like what I told him either. It’s unfortunate, but sometimes if you’re too candid, you might lose a friend.

Hartsook: When you become Party chair, what goals do you set for your term and how successful are you in achieving those goals?

Harris: Every Party chairman brings to the Party different expertise. For example, Drake [Edens] was a good spokesman for the Party when he was state chairman. He focused though, on two major things, I thought. One, was organizational structure, and two, was to broaden the base and travel the state and speak at different functions and promote the Party. So he brought two things to the party. He was a good spokesman and he paid attention to organization, as a volunteer. Harry Dent was a promoter. Organization - - he left that up to me. He was a promoter and that was the value of his being state chairman, and the fact that he was directly connected with the most popular politician ever, Strom Thurmond. He brought all of that to the Party from a promotional standpoint and the fact that the Senator was in the Party broadened the base and made it even more acceptable. But then when I came in as state chairman, I had two or three things I had to deal with. I was an organizationally focused chairman because I was kind of brought up like that and as I grew in the
Party, I kept growing at different levels. I went from the precinct chairman right on up to secretary and then ended up as executive director, and then state chairman, and then national committeeman. But as state chairman, my focus was primarily on organizational structure. But then, when Nixon won and was in office, I inherited the responsibility of setting up a structure within the Party that could deal with the patronage that was going to accrue to my chairmanship. We didn’t even know what jobs were available. I had to get up to date right quick on what jobs would be available to us as a result of Nixon being elected. Thank goodness, I had Harry Dent, and the close relationship he and I had, sitting in the White House, that I could call on and go back and forth with him talking about all these jobs that would be available. So, what I had to do was set up a steering committee right away.

Strom told the Executive Committee he was turning all of it over to the state Party. He said, ‘You all have worked all these years and you deserve to participate.’ He said, ‘Now, I might have a suggestion every now and then.’ But, he said, ‘You all are going to make those recommendations to me and to the President,’ which was a tremendous relinquishment of what he could have done as an individual. He gave it up to the Party and I don’t know of any senator in the world who would have done that, but he did. And he stuck by it, too.

So I set up a steering committee and get right in the middle of all of this patronage that was going to come our way. That steering committee was made up of Drake Edens and Arthur Ravenel and I forget who else, about ten or twelve people. Of course, we consulted with Harry, but he wasn’t on the committee, as such. We had the national committeewoman on there, I believe it was Mrs. Wyman over in Aiken. But anyway, we had that steering committee set up and we went through numerous jobs that were open to be filled. We would recommend individuals to the Senator, and every now and then he’d have somebody that he wanted to appoint. I remember in one case, he wanted to appoint somebody and ran afoul of our committeeman from that particular county. You talk about upsetting that county, but it was Strom’s personal friend, he was a Democrat, but he was a
personal friend. He called me and said, “Ray, I want to appoint John Amos Arrant from Chesterfield County.’ I had a time dealing with that committeeman [laughing] and county chairman and all those people in that county that were Republicans, which weren’t many, but that caused an uproar and that thing went all the way out of the steering committee to the Executive Committee. I remember Arthur Ravenel standing up in the Executive Committee and getting so upset with me. And I said, ‘Well, Arthur, you can get as upset with me as you want to, but when the Senator asked to put this person on that committee, it was my duty to do it.’ The Executive Committee supported it one-hundred percent, except for Arthur.

[Tape 2 begins]

Harris: Different personalities and different backgrounds affect what goals the state chairman had. Mine primarily was to strengthen the organizational structure, help recruit candidates, and also to deal with the patronage which was totally new to the new Republican Party. It wasn’t new to the old Republican Party, you go back to the ’50s and ’40s, you know, but it was brand new to us. And, I’ll tell you this, we looked at each one of those recommendations based on qualifications. It wasn’t strictly because they were Republicans. Republicans were important, but they had to be qualified Republicans. And, that was the way we looked at it.

Hartsook: You mentioned the patronage under the earlier Republican presidents. The Party had changed its leadership completely in South Carolina. None of those people that were active in the ’40s and ’50s were still active in the ’60s, were they?
Harris: No. It was just entirely different. They existed for patronage. Our party, that we built, rebuilt I guess you could say, was built on philosophical ground. We had a terrible fight one time within the Party on a philosophical, conservative, issue. It was strictly within the party, and it was a knock down, drag out, and it was a tough situation. I happened to be the chairman at the time.

It was an outgrowth of the 1970 campaign with Albert Watson, and whether the Party was going to change its course, and change its philosophy, and change its whole approach to building [a] long standing solid party for the future. There was a fight within the party as to whether we were going to change our philosophy, change our conservative approach to government, and be like Democrats, in order to get black support. My contention was you’re not going to be able to go out and change your philosophy, and be like the other party. If that’s the case, why have two Parties? If you’re going to go out and say, well, I’m going to give away everything, we’ll go against all of our principles, and we’ll be like Democrats but we’ll call ourselves Republicans.

That was the fight and I’m glad we decided to stick by our guns but at the same time to seek support from the black community and minorities. We tried that in every way but it was an image problem. We had some black support, and it grew, and it has grown, but my thought was that as minorities become more successful and they realize the impact of taxes, that they begin to become more conservative and therefore they begin to think Republicans. Now, I know it doesn’t always turn out like that because you have presidents that don’t cut back on government spending and, as a matter of fact, we’re experiencing that somewhat now. But, the times are different and with this horrific September 11th, all of a sudden we’re going to have to do things financially we wouldn’t have done before. But, anyway, that was kind of a strong fight within the Party after Watson lost that election.
Hartsook: Besides Harry Dent, who could you rely on for help and advice during your term as chair?

Harris: I relied heavily on Drake Edens and Ann Morris, and then later, Mrs. Wyman as national committeewoman. I relied heavily on Gay Suber, who was my executive director and good friend. I relied on Jim Edwards a lot when I was chairman. Jim and I were close friends. I relied heavily on Hal Byrd who was an executive with Milliken. I had a pretty broad base of friends in the Party and the leadership but those were the ones that I would go to. I relied, frankly, a lot on Lee Atwater for talking to the college group. Matter of fact, I made Lee vice chairman of youth in the Party. I believe that was the title. Lee and I were good friends. I saw the possibilities in Lee and promoted him to be active in Party affairs. We were good friends but we parted ways a little bit when he ran Reagan’s campaign. That must have been in ‘80. I supported John Connally. Atwater was supporting Reagan. But he and I remained friends. Of course, Atwater went on to big things.

Hartsook: When you were dealing with Hal Byrd, were you dealing with Hal Byrd, a Republican activist, or dealing with Hal Byrd basically as a representative for Mr. Milliken.

Harris: No, no. He was my finance chairman. He was about as active as anybody in the Party. I mean he was a hard worker.

Hartsook: So he is his own man.
Harris: Oh, yes. I felt like he was. I don’t think he would go out and oppose something that Roger Milliken wanted. He’d be a little bit more diplomatic than that. That never entered my mind, that he was doing Roger Milliken’s. . . . I think Roger would have been upset with him if he thought he was doing Roger Milliken’s thing, instead of doing what Hal Byrd wanted and thought was best.

Hartsook: How did you come to tackle the welfare issue? That’s one of the first things I think you really took on as chairman.

Harris: [laughing] That was interesting. I felt like we needed an issue. I saw that welfare issue coming to light and food stamps and all that. That’s what Fritz [Hollings] was pushing and I think that Governor McNair was pushing and I felt like we had to respond to that and what the food stamp program was going to be one day. I felt like we had to put a committee together and come up with a position paper on that, and we did. I felt like if, based on what the committee ended up with, I felt like if we were going to do all of these things through government with individual-type programs, that that wasn’t the real answer to it. I got criticized for this by the opposition party. I felt like we should keep these families together. The children would be educated. To make sure that they got all the training, through instructional work, classes and so forth. You had a task of teaching those mothers and fathers, if they were around, bring them together as a family, bring the fathers in, and keep that family together and let them grow as a family. Give them subsistence and training. I think the opposition talked about camps but it wasn’t camps. It was just like, you have public housing. Those people, most of them that were getting food stamps were in public housing. They were the ones that should have the kind of training, how to bring the children up, teach them to make sure their children brush their teeth every day, they take care of themselves, and they’re living in
public housing anyway, so that’s a perfect place to make that family-oriented community. Make it that community, have it more structured than just giving them a place to live, and not having the father show up every now and then. It should be more structured so people could learn how they could live better, be more, and eventually be a more constructive part of society.

I thought it was a pretty good approach to training people how to live. As I say, these people were mostly in public housing anyway and that was a good opportunity to get in there and train those people, educate them as to how they should have their children grow up, educate the mothers and fathers to go out and get a job. Teach them how to do things so that they could earn their own living.

I know that sounded a little bit socialistic [chuckling]. I’ve forgotten who the state chairman was at that time, a good fellow. I remember him saying something like they’d be marching in lock step to breakfast, lunch, and dinner. And, I thought that was kind of funny.

Hartsook:  What did you learn from your service on the national executive committee?

Harris:  Not much. It was so structured. It wasn’t a place that you could have much influence. It was a place more of honor, I think. I guess the whole purpose of the National Committee was not to be too active issue-wise, but to be active organizationally, to be sure to have an organization from a national viewpoint and at the same time be the vehicle for nominating candidates, organizing the conventions and things like that, and working with the state parties. The focus was mainly on national conventions; that was the impression I got. I never felt like that I had a big impact. I had more impact on the state chairman’s association than on the national committee. I got the impression that everybody had their own ideas. You had two from each state and they’d let the state chairman serve on the committee but I don’t think the state chairman had a vote, when I was
on there. But most of the committeemen on there had been on there since the year one and it was just on and on and on and on. I never thought committeemen should be on there a long time, myself.

I served one term and that was all I ever wanted to serve. I wanted to serve but I never felt like that I should serve year after year after year. A lot of that committee was made up of people like that.

**Hartsook:** You were chairman during a very divisive gubernatorial campaign, Lieutenant Governor West against Albert Watson. Can you talk a little about the short and long-term effects of that race?

**Harris:** I heavily recruited Albert Watson to run for governor. I don’t say that I was the one that convinced him to run, but I certainly did strongly support the idea of him being our candidate for governor. Albert and I were good friends, as I was good friends with Floyd Spence and the other elected officials, [I was] very close to Senator Thurmond. But I thought it was Albert’s time to run.

I thought everything was in place for him to be the nominee and he was such an outstanding speaker and had a tremendously conservative voting record in Congress. I thought everything was falling into place for him to be the next governor. I did work hard to make that campaign successful, as best I could. A state chairman doesn’t have a whole lot of influence once you nominate a candidate. That candidate’s supporters kind of take over that candidacy. It’s not like its run by the state party. That candidate becomes the titular head of the campaign. [The] state chairman gives advice and works with the county organizations to set up different dinners and campaign stops and that sort of thing. But the candidate’s organization begins to take over. That started out to be a well-run campaign, I thought. But then some things happened that kind of played right into the hands of the opposition. For example, everybody knew Albert was conservative, no use to go out and say Albert Watson is a
conservative. He was conservative. Everybody knew that and his record showed that in Congress. I think probably the beginning of the end of that campaign, unfortunately, was when he came to speak at a rally in Lamar.

The campaign was running along good. Albert asked me about coming to Lamar. I said, “Well now, Albert, I don’t know whether it’s going to help you or hurt you. But if you want to come, I have no objections to it.” I said, ‘The people that you’re going to be talking to are going to support you anyway, but if you feel like you want to come, that will be your decision. I just can’t make that recommendation one way or the other.’ I said, ‘if you come, the one thing that you’ve got to do is say to them what you have said on the floor of Congress. And if you keep it in that context, I think you’ll be fine.’ So he came and he kept it in that context. He spoke on things that he spoke about on the floor of Congress, no difference. What made the difference was that on the following Monday, I think he spoke on Saturday afternoon. . . . The tragedy of the thing was Monday. I left home early Monday morning and I drove through Lamar; that was my route. I’d go 401 to Sumter and then to Columbia. And I saw this crowd gathering. I didn’t know what was going on but I had to go on to my job and I did. The next thing I know, the twelve o’clock news, somebody had turned over a school bus in Lamar. I said to myself, Oh Lord. I don’t know now. The next day it was all over the paper and then it was all over the world. It was just a terrible thing to happen in the middle of a campaign. Whether the people that turned the school bus over, I don’t even think they were even from Lamar, because I knew one of them. Anyway, the bus was turned over. And it was in Lamar. And Albert was there Saturday afternoon, or maybe it was Sunday. Therefore, the press took it from there and implied, not in words, but the way the news was written, that it was because of Albert. I thought that was the unkindest wound of all. But that was just the way it was. It happened. A few days after that, two boys working in Albert’s campaign went over to a school there in
Columbia one afternoon and the students were doing something, I don’t remember what it was, but I have a picture in my mind that two of those boys [Watson campaign staff] were in a Volkswagen and they were taking pictures of people that were demonstrating at that school. I don’t know how long after the bus event, but that happened. That was the end of it. I’ve forgotten what the vote was. Albert got 48 to 52, something like that. [Watson polled approximately 47% of the votes cast.]

**Hartsook:** Was Watson’s a race-based campaign?

**Harris:** Not from the Party standpoint. And I don’t think it was from his standpoint, but it developed into people’s minds that that’s what it was, I think.

**Hartsook:** Everybody talks about the white necktie. That he wore the white tie to signify his stance on. . . . [Watson often wore a white tie during the campaign. Some felt the tie was a sign of his stand on racial issues.]

**Harris:** [laughing] Well, I’m not going to comment on that.

**Hartsook:** Why weren’t you excited about the potential for an Arthur Ravenel candidacy? Because he announced early. And I get the impression that he was not happy at all with the [way things worked out].

**Harris:** He wasn’t. My thought was that Albert would make the stronger candidate. That was the only thing I was looking at. I wasn’t looking at anything else but which one would make the
stronger candidate. I certainly encouraged him to get in the race. Arthur and I were good friends but Arthur and I were often, as a lot of those crazy Charlestonians. . . . We called them the Charleston crazies. They would be on the other side of the issue. For whatever the issue was, they were on the other side of the issue in most of our party fights, at the conventions and things like that. I never will forget, I stood up on the floor and spoke for this issue, I’ve forgotten what the issue was, then Arthur stood up behind me and he said, ‘Well, I’ve been told that if you stay in this Party long enough, you’ll be on everybody’s side at one time or another. Ray, I’m surprised to say that I happen to be on your side of the issue this time.’ [laughing]

[Tape 2, Side 2 begins]

Hartsook: Is it fair to say that you thought Ravenel would run a good campaign but that Watson could win?

Harris: I think that would be a fair assessment.

Hartsook: What made West a good candidate?

Harris: Why, I didn’t think he was a good candidate, I thought he was a poor candidate. [chuckling] I just can’t get over us not winning that campaign but the way that Lamar and that school issue hit the press, it just killed the campaign, it looked like to me. Just no way around it. But West was not that good a candidate. I think he’s a good person and I think he ended up being a fairly good governor but I don’t think he had a good campaign.
Hartsook: Jim Henderson [Republican nominee for Lt. Governor] seemed a pretty effective campaigner. Did he and Watson campaign together?

Harris: A little bit. But that bus turning over and that school incident, I think Jim kind of felt like his only chance of winning was to kind of get on the outside perimeter. I don’t think he ever discredited Albert’s campaign but it was so obvious after those two incidents, that was a burden to bear if you were running as a Republican that year. Even though Albert got forty-eight percent of the vote, a good run, but that was a heavy burden to bear after those two incidents and the way the press played it. Then you had Bill Workman to come out and endorse John West, and I guess you had the Greenville News. . . . I think the Greenville News supported Jim for lieutenant governor and John West for governor. I’m not sure about that.

Hartsook: What was the long-term impact, if there was one, of the Watson campaign on the Party?

Harris: I don’t think it had any long-term impact. Almost half the people that voted, voted for him, regardless of those two incidents. Albert Watson was a good person. I liked Albert Watson a lot. He was about as articulate as anybody I’ve ever heard. And you couldn’t find a nicer person than his wife. She is one of the nicest people I’ve ever known. And I don’t know a thing in the world that I don’t like about Albert. I just hate that fact that those two incidents occurred. I look back on it and I just think, I wish I’d said to Albert, ‘No Albert, don’t you come.’
Hartsook: And, ‘Don’t you come,’ basically, because of the timing?

Harris: No. It was just, ‘Don’t come.’ He didn’t need to. . . . When you say timing, I don’t know, was it some disruption at Lamar at that time?

Hartsook: Knowing that the bussing was going to begin the next week.

Harris: You mean school busing. The integration. I see what you’re saying. Yes. Bad timing. Terrible timing, I guess. And I should have said, “Don’t come.’ But I didn’t. And I regret that.

Hartsook: Can we talk about Floyd Spence? He comes in that year, wins Watson’s seat. Holds it until his death. What did he mean to the Party? First significant Democratic office holder to switch parties.

Harris: Means a lot. Of course, he had switched long before, I believe.

Hartsook: Yes, in 1962.

Harris: Floyd Spence was probably one of the nicest people you will ever know. I always thought a lot of Floyd, I never did get close to Floyd, as a close friend because Floyd was always pleasant to be around, but Floyd almost had a party within a party. He had his dedicated following and he took care of his constituents and they loved him to death. He didn’t have a bit of dynamite in
him. He was just always cool and calm. When you compare him against Albert, Floyd couldn’t hold a candle to Albert Watson’s oratorical ability, but Floyd was just ‘old Floyd,’ you know, and he’d stand up there and make those talks and he wouldn’t excite a person in the room but he gained his solid support from them every time. And it always amazed me, but he was just ‘good old Floyd’ and people loved him and supported him and he was right where he wanted to be, and should be, as a congressman. He was just one of the finest people that you could ever meet. You look at some people and think he’s not only going to be congressman, he’s going to be a senator and maybe president one day, but you never thought in those terms with Floyd. Floyd was right where he wanted to be. An outstanding congressman and a great American, that’s exactly what he wanted to be. I had a great admiration for him.

Hartsook: We talked a little bit about the role of the executive director. Has that changed much over time? Did you change it at all, when you became chair?

Harris: No. I relied pretty heavily on Gay as my executive director. He was a close friend. He thought like I thought, and I never questioned things that he wanted to do as executive director, which was basically, though, to carry out my thoughts and the Executive Committee’s direction, and of course, the convention policies and issues. So, it was to do the day-to-day work of the Party, which was a lot, answering telephone calls, and a lot of the times trying to calm people down that got upset over something you didn’t even see, in the paper. And they wanted you to read it, and wanted you to get upset too. You had to more or less keep a calm approach to it but try to give some satisfaction and not get too upset about that. We’re looking at the long range.
Hartsook: We talked a little bit about the Silver Elephant Club. I assumed that with the election of a Republican governor in ‘74, that must have really taken off, whole new body of people I imagine wanted to attend and contribute. Is that true?

Harris: Oh yes. As far as I know, it did. We had the biggest Silver Elephant dinner, I believe, that we ever had in 1968 when Spiro Agnew came down. I think we had over 1,200 people at the fair grounds. He really turned those people on, I’ll tell you. That was the biggest one that I know of. Of course, we had big ones during Carroll Campbell’s service as governor, too, but I believe that was the biggest one.

Hartsook: During 1969, under your leadership, the groundwork was laid for the primary system. Can you talk a little bit about the debate over the statewide primary?

Harris: I had mixed emotions about the primary. I thought the timing itself was bad. It was my feeling that we were two years away from having a primary. Not to have it in 1970 because, if I recall, the Democrats were pushing us to a primary and always saying that we were “selected and not elected,” and that sort of thing, as to candidates. I didn’t think that we had the time, nor the organizational structure at that time, to run a real primary campaign, having to cover all the precincts.

We had a lot of organizational structure out there in small counties. Like Darlington County, where we had about thirty-five of the forty-one precincts organized. It was going to be a tough thing to do, put on a primary. I felt like we could put it off two more years. Of course, Arthur was saying you’ve got the convention locked up, you’ve got the delegates and all that, but that didn’t really bother me at the time because I felt like the timing of the primary, to be put on in 1970, it just wasn’t the right
time to do it. I kind of felt like it would have been destructive, somewhat, and drawn out. Long campaign, up into June. We needed to go ahead and get our candidate and get going.

Hartsook: Did the ‘74 primary have the impact that you would have expected? [The primary pitted popular retired general, William C. Westmoreland, against state legislator James B. Edwards.]

Harris: Yes, it did. I expected that. As it turned out, we had two good candidates. No, [laughing], I won’t say the General was a good candidate, but he was a fairly good candidate. I think it had the exact affect that I thought, with those two candidates, it would have. I was pretty pleased with the way it developed and I thought the timing was good.

Hartsook: Did it shock you that the General wasn’t more trainable [as a candidate]? Certainly you all worked with him a good bit. [Westmoreland was courted by both parties when he left the service, but was not a natural campaigner and ultimately fell to Edwards.]

Harris: [laughing] It sure did. But there’s a difference in being a general and a candidate --- that’s a hard transition to make. You might be able to make that transition at a national level but to make it at a local level, local meaning state, that’s a tremendous adjustment. When you’re a general of the Army. And, wasn’t he Chief of Staff?

Hartsook: Yes.
Harris: That’s a hell of an adjustment to step down and go out and face the people, some that come up and tell you they don’t like you. They’ll tell you they don’t like you. You’re exposed to that sort of thing and if you said something wrong, they may support you but they’ll tell you exactly how they feel and you’ve got to stand there and take it, and not take it personally. Chief of Staff? I don’t see how he did it, I really don’t, but he tried. His wife should have been the candidate. I love the General. I have the highest regard and respect for him. He tried his best, and of all the damn times for his voice to give out on him, and all that effort he put behind it, [it] was right before the election. He couldn’t talk. I remember sitting on television with him and I felt so sorry for him I couldn’t even think myself. He was trying so hard to get something out of his voice and with all the effort he made, nothing would come out sometimes. And if it came out, it’d bark, you know, it sounded like a bark, not a word. I felt so sorry for him, I felt like crying. I remember Tucker Weston and I were on TV trying to speak for him. I just felt too sorry for him. I guess we shouldn’t have put him through that, but he wanted to do it. That’s how competitive he was. I’ll never forget how he strained to get those words out. But, again, to step down from being the top military person in the world and have to face people at all levels, and in politics you can get hit with some of the worst things in the world that you never expected, and sometimes you get caught flat footed. And when you’ve been up there and you’ve got to step down here and converse, it’s tough.

Hartsook: What kind of impact could you have as Party chair on statewide issues that aren’t strictly related to politics. I’m thinking about things like the hospital strike. Are those issues the kinds of things you felt you should speak out on?
**Harris:** Herb, I’ll be frank with you, I don’t even remember that hospital strike. Where was the hospital strike?

**Hartsook:** In Charleston. It was one of the very significant labor. . . .

**Harris:** I kind of remember that. If I recall, I didn’t have anything to say about it.

**Hartsook:** Did you try to limit yourself to things that were truly political and governmental?

**Harris:** I tried to. It depended on what the issue was. In that hospital thing, I just don’t recall getting involved with that at all. I do recall that I got involved with a technical education issue because at that time the fellow who was running the technical program was going out of state, like over into Arkansas, helping them set up a tech program there and was getting consultant’s fees for doing that. I thought why would somebody from South Carolina go and help build a tech program, which was, in my opinion one of the great things that South Carolina had, one of the secrets to getting industry. And had such an outstanding program. . . . And this same person helped build that outstanding tech program. To go out and create another tech program that we would be competing with. . . . I just couldn’t see that. And I don’t see that today. Right here, Florence/Darlington Tech has one of the best tech programs anywhere in the country. In fact, this state has some of the best tech programs anywhere in the country and they’re very effective. And being in economic development, I have a greater appreciation for them now than I’ve ever had. But I would still not agree that we ought to be going out and helping make other tech programs better and being a
consultant. I just don’t think that’s right. But that was the only other issue that I recall I really got involved with, except that food stamp issue.

I’ll tell you somebody I really thought a lot of, and think a lot of today, as a Democratic governor, was Bob McNair. I thought Bob McNair made one of the best governors, even though Joe Rogers ran against him, I thought Bob McNair was about as good a governor as we’ve ever had.

Hartsook: Did you have any interest in the [Clement] Haynsworth nomination?

Harris: Yes, I had some interest in it, from the standpoint that I thought, number one, he was a South Carolinian, and number two, he was one of the outstanding lawyers in the state. Certainly one of the outstanding U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges in the Richmond Circuit Court of Appeals. He certainly had a tremendous record there. My wife was distantly related to him. I don’t think anybody really knew that but that didn’t make any difference anyway. One of the worst things that happened during Nixon’s administration was the fact he didn’t carry the day for that appointment. The Democrats had turned an issue on him that was just totally unfortunate because he was one of the finest men I ever met. I had met Judge Haynsworth a couple of times and he was just a fine gentleman and for them to tie him in to the Milliken. . . and I think it was something in connection with stock he had in some company that furnished machines to get sandwiches out of . . . in the Milliken plants and some other plants. But they made a big thing out of that and it just was so stupid to pass up a gentleman on an issue like that. Of course, it just went downhill from there. I thought that was a terrible thing to happen to him and to our government, too, because here was a man that had a proven record of being an outstanding jurist. But, you’re going to see some more of it
before it’s over with. I’ll tell you how it ended up, it was a typical class warfare issue that Democrats in general use that tactic, from time to time, and I just hate to see it.

[Tape 3 begins]

**Hartsook:** We’ve talked a bit about candidate recruitment and a lot of people are particularly interested in party switching. Can you talk about a negotiation to try to convince a Democratic office holder to switch Parties? Were you involved in one you could talk about?

**Harris:** Oh, yes. I worked with Joe Rogers, who also happened to be one of my dear friends. Harry Dent and I had many conversations with Joe and his family. If you recall, Joe Rogers was one of the most respected members of the state House of Representatives, and just an outstanding individual. I don’t know of anybody that I’ve ever known that was more straightforward. And, a capable attorney. An outstanding family person. And, I don’t know of anybody in the Party that sacrificed more in switching from a Democrat to a Republican, than Joe Rogers. He could have stayed there right where he was, as a long-standing well-respected member of the House of Representatives and probably would have run for governor as a Democrat, and could have possibly won, as a Democrat, back then. But, I think we all helped convince him that... . He was basically a Republican. A conservative and all that. I think he wanted to run as a Republican, but we still had to convince him that we were going to be behind him one-hundred percent and that the Party would support him. You make all those promises and maybe you over-promise and are over-optimistic in your projections, but certainly everything was said from the heart, about Joe. But I think, too, that Joe wanted, and he felt more comfortable running as a Republican than he would have as a Democrat. I think that was what finally made the difference and made him decide to run. The fact
that Senator Thurmond was our senior Senator, I think, helped a whole lot. Joe was an issue-oriented candidate. He helped develop a lot of issues. We had a platform and we had that ‘Wheel of Progress’ slogan, and we had Inez Eddings as a candidate for education. We had an outstanding candidate for Lieutenant Governor in Marshall Mays. Just an outstanding group of candidates. And, we were running some people at the local level. As I mentioned, we ran a full slate of candidates right here in Darlington County. But we weren’t quite there. I forget what the percentage was in that race but it seems to me it was like forty-six to fifty-four, something like that. [McNair polled approximately 57.5% of the vote to Rogers’ 42.5%] It was a pretty respectable race. That was in 1966 and the Party, it wasn’t but four years old. Joe and the others made an outstanding race and then when Nixon won in ‘68, Joe became United States District Attorney and then he was recommended for the U.S. District judgeship, but finally that didn’t work out.

And Marshall Mays. I participated in getting Marshall to run. And I participated in talking to Jim Henderson to get him to run with Albert. I really felt like I had a family out there in the Party. I had friends that supported me in the activities at all the levels that I went to in the Party. I just felt like I kind of grew up with a lot of people in the Party and it just felt like part of a family. So, when I went to talk to these people, when Harry was chairman, or when I was chairman, I felt like I was talking to family people, friends. I don’t recall going and trying to recruit somebody that we failed to recruit. I just don’t remember that.

**Hartsook:** What kinds of things would you emphasize besides the natural fit, philosophically? Would you typically promise some level of financial support for future campaigns? What kinds of things would you highlight as strengths?
Harris: We didn’t highlight so much the money. The money was part of the incentives, but we talked about organization first. And, of course, you don’t go to somebody to ask them to run or to switch that doesn’t have that instinct, or that desire. That desire is there and all you’ve got to do is convince them that this is the party to expose that desire. They want to run. Most people want to run if they’re in politics. They have a desire so you have to fertilize that desire, so to speak. They have to weigh their chances. They weigh the pros and cons. It’s kind of flattering to have a state chairman or senator make a phone call, or congressman, to say, “It looks like your time.’ That’s flattering and that desire is already there and that just ups it. So, it was a fun thing to do, for me. I looked at it as quite a challenge but, at the same time, it was fun to put that together. I knew when I was talking to them, I knew the disappointments that might be there, but I knew, too, that they had to feel the reward that could be there, too. And that was the way they would weigh it.

Hartsook: Were you ever surprised by anybody’s reaction? Did anybody hear you out and then curse you out and boot you out the door?

Harris: No. That never happened. I don’t recall that ever happening.

Hartsook: Did you ever think you had somebody pretty much in the net and then have them back out?

Harris: I can’t think who it was, but I do remember approaching a couple of people. I’ll tell you one fellow that I approached. I wanted him to run for Congress, come to think of it, was David McLeod. He was the mayor of Florence for years, one of the most respected mayors in South
Carolina if not the Southeast. A wonderful person. A good friend of mine. Came out and supported Nixon. I think he supported Joe Rogers, but I’m not sure about that. But I do know this. That David was a good friend of mine and he was as conservative as I was and am. I did try to recruit him. But he just couldn’t make the decision to run. I don’t know why either. I don’t think he ever wanted to be more than just a mayor. And that must have been it. He had a wonderful wife and was just an outstanding citizen and he would have made a great candidate. I wanted him to run for Congress, really.

Hartsook: That seems like a rare blessing to achieve an office, to be content. You think about somebody like Bryan Dorn, who could have stayed in Congress forever, but he wanted to be governor.

Harris: Forever. He wanted to be governor [laughing]. I remember the first time I ever heard Bryan Dorn. I said, ‘Well brother, that’s my candidate.’ I was at a hardware convention in Charlotte and he was keynote speaker, up there. I was so impressed with that oratory. I walked out of there and said that fellow is going to be President of the United States one day. I mean, he just walked around that podium and just waved his arms and everything. I’ll tell you, he was an impressive individual. I sure liked him. That was long before I got involved in politics.

Hartsook: When you look back on your tenure as party chair, what gives you the most satisfaction? What do you think of as your most important achievements?
**Harris:** The fact that the people in the Party wanted me to be their chairman was probably the most flattering thing that I ever had to happen to me, except when my wife told me she would marry me. I think those two things. But I don’t know that I achieved that much. I think when Albert didn’t make it, I felt like we missed a great opportunity based on factors that we had no...that maybe we had control of, if we’d made a different decision. I just didn’t achieve what I wanted to and that was to see Albert elected governor. And Joe Rogers elected. Of course, I wasn’t chairman then but, hmmm, that was a blow. As for achievement, I think about pulling the Party out of debt and that sort of thing, getting a little stronger organization, and having that Silver Elephant success. That’s about the only thing I can point to that we achieved.

**Hartsook:** When I listen to you talk about driving all around the state, I imagine all the rubber chicken you had to eat, with a large family at home; obviously there are some aspects to the job that aren’t pleasant. What do you remember as being the least pleasant aspects of your duties as chair?

**Harris:** Being away from my wife and children, that was the toughest part of it. But the excitement of getting people organized and getting candidates helped offset some of that. I remember, we had a family project of converting a school bus into an RV. I’d come home at night, and sometimes I’d work up until two or three o’clock [in the morning] on the weekends, whenever I was home. One of my children reminded me the other day that he would hear me working on that bus out there at two or three o’clock in the morning and he’d get up and go out there and ask me if there was something he could do to help. And, they were little fellows. I’d tell them to go under the bus and take the pair of pliers and hold that nut and let me screw this nut from the top and screw it in tight. He was telling me about that. I remember them coming out there but I don’t remember them
getting up that late. They had a bedroom not too far from where I was working on that bus and they could hear me hammering or running a drill or something.

We ended up taking that bus and the family around the country. I was executive director at the time and Harry said, ‘Just go. You deserve to get away with your family.’ And we took that bus all the way to California to Disneyland and then went up to Vancouver and back across [the] Trans Canada highway. It was the greatest thing that ever happened to our family. We ended up in Montreal. That was our goal, was Expo 67. We ended up there and then came down to New York, went to RKO Radio Center, up on the Empire State Building with all of them, then left New York that night and got down to Philadelphia and ended up in Washington the next day. We parked the bus down there at the Washington Monument, then back to Darlington. That trip took about thirty days.

Then we took another trip to Washington in that bus. Harry Dent was in the White House then; that was in ‘68 or ‘69. We had our children up there and took them to the White House. We had a private tour with Harry taking us all over it. We went into the Oval Office, the president wasn’t there, and the children were looking around, but then one of them spied the bus that we had parked down at the Washington Monument. They all got excited, pointed, ‘Look, there’s our school bus.’ We named it “The Harris Rotel.” Now, they’re in the Oval Office and they’re looking at that school bus, the “Rotel,” down there, and that was what excited them, not the Oval Office. I will never forget that. But that bus meant a lot to us when I was doing all that traveling. We had a project; it was a family project.

Hartsook: What are the other negative aspects? I’ve had some people talk about the financial drain of the job.
Harris: You mean the personal financial...? I never thought too much about that. I guess I was the first paid state chairman. I couldn’t have been a volunteer. I wouldn’t have been effective because I had to make a living. Raising six children, that’s pretty tough. But Drake [Edens] was independently wealthy. Harry [Dent] was not wealthy but Harry had a law office and some retirement coming from working for years under the Senator and for government. So, Harry had some financial compensation so he could do it, and he was right there in Columbia. I wasn’t. I had a place I would go to on Monday mornings and try to come back home on Wednesday nights and then go back Thursday. A lot of times I had to spend the weekends at conventions or meetings or whatever.

The toughest part of the job was that damn telephone. I’d come home tired, get home about eleven o’clock, then somebody would call me, in the Party, and they wanted to talk. I can’t recall how many times I went to sleep listening to people on the telephone after I came home. I was so tired, I actually would go to sleep listening. They’d be complaining about something, and you had to listen to them. Then I’d wake up and go on with the conversation. ‘Oh, yes,’ you’d go on with the conservation [laughing]. That was kind of a tough thing. But as I say, I got paid. I was the first paid chairman and, I think, the only paid chairman.

Hartsook: I know Ken Powell, when he left [office as State Chair], he seemed quite bitter about the fact he had not been paid. It was in the newspaper reports.

Harris: I didn’t know that. I wasn’t aware of that. You know, that was a pretty hard fight, right then. Harry Dent wanted Cordes Seabrook to be the next chairman to succeed me. And Cordes
Seabrook and I were good friends but that was when we were in that fight to change the direction of the Party and I wasn’t for Cordes. I loved Cordes. I thought he was one of the finest gentlemen you could run into. But Cordes was Harry’s candidate and Ken was my candidate. That’s when Harry and I had a real, real, difference of opinion.

Of course, it came after the Watson campaign. I believed Harry was doing what [H.R.] Haldeman and [John] Erhlichman were telling him to do. I don’t know what they said but I can imagine his mission was to go down to South Carolina and change all the directions of these southern parties. My whole theory was if you’ve got a philosophy, you stick with it, if you’ve got issues that are right, you stick with them, and you don’t change directions in a party just in order to try to get more votes. You’ve got to have votes. You’ve got to have votes to win. But it doesn’t mean you’ve got to turn it upside down and abandon all your basic principles to get just one group, which you probably can’t get anyway. To me you just destroy your foundation and I just couldn’t see it. So we had that terrible time. It was the hardest time I ever had in my lifetime, I believe, to not be able to support your friend who had meant so much to you. Not only not support him, you were fighting him. I was fighting for the existence of the Party and I felt like he was fighting because I don’t know who it was — Haldeman, Erhlichman — somebody had told him to come down here and get control of the Party and re-direct it. Of course, he had control of the Party, through me, so to speak. But he wanted it changed. I thought it would damage the Party and, frankly, when it came to a vote, it wasn’t even a contest. Ken got all the votes practically.

[Tape 3, Side 2 begins]
Harris: You were fighting your friends, and I couldn’t believe it. I just couldn’t believe it was going on.

Hartsook: How long did it take afterwards, to repair that friendship?

Harris: Probably two or three years. I never lost a friendship with Harry’s wife, Betty. I never lost that. I don’t know how she lived through it because Harry and I had meetings about it and had a couple of them at their house. Of course, she’d never, she would come in and speak but that was it. I just never felt like I lost her friendship during that temporary period. Harry and I today are probably as close or closer than we’ve ever been. I just figure Harry Dent as one of my very best friends. And I believe he feels that way about me. Even though he’s got this Alzheimer’s thing. But I love him and I know he loves me, but that was a tough time. That was the toughest time that I know of in my whole life. It was a fight between the two of us and I knew he couldn’t win and I hated that because he was the general counsel to the president. I hated it more than I could say but I couldn’t walk away from it. Just couldn’t do it. But two years later, during the re-election of Nixon, that’s what brought us back together.

Hartsook: Can you talk a little bit about your political activities after stepping down as chair?

Harris: I got active over here with the congressional campaign of Ed Young. I could have gotten that nomination for Congress. I’m satisfied I could have won it if it had been a campaign between Ed and me, but I didn’t want that to happen. Because I really didn’t want it that bad. I felt like I did it as a service. I never expected to win [in 1968]. I felt like if we were ever going to win
that seat, that this was the time to do it and Ed Young was the man to win it. He had a distinguished background. He’d been in the House. He was a good friend of mine and I told him, ‘Ed, I think you’re the candidate. I think you ought to run for it and I’ll step aside and help you any way I can.’ He said, ‘Well, I want you to be my campaign manager.’ I said, ‘Yes, I’ll do that.’ So, he ran and he won and I was very much involved in that campaign.

Then for some unknown reason, he kind of went his way, and I just kind of dropped out of sight, politically. Of course, I was having to make a living. I was in the real estate business and development. During that time, I don’t know why, but he never did. . . . We were always friendly when we saw each other, but he never called me or asked me, ‘What do you think about this, what do you think about that.’ And, he didn’t have to. I kind of hoped he would. Anyway, one day they had a vote in Congress on the Social Security issue. His last name doesn’t start with an A or B or C, it’s Y, but anyway they went down the line and as I recall, they had four hundred and some votes for that legislation in the House, and he voted against it. I read that in the paper and I couldn’t believe what I was reading. I could understand if his name was Brooks, that maybe he would pass and see how things were going, but to vote on an issue that was so overwhelming. It wasn’t that big an issue, as I recall, on Social Security, but he voted against it and I knew right then he would never walk back in as a second term Congressman, and that just brought [John] Jenrette back into the campaign. He [Jenrette] was down and out. And that one issue. It was stronger back then. I don’t believe it’s that strong now because it’s being discussed so openly, and all the different plans are talked about. Anyway, it was the issue and he lost that race and I believe to this day it was over that one issue. Ed Young was a popular person. He was a nice person. He had all the money in the world. It wasn’t a matter that he couldn’t go up there and serve in Congress and sacrifice anything back here. He was a good person, had a wonderful family, and let this fellow Jenrette take that seat away from him on one
vote. He and I are friends today. But then John Napier wanted to run. I like John. He ran and won the seat back. I think that was the way it was. And then John Jenrette came back and beat him after, was it two years?

**Hartsook:** I think it was one term.

**Harris:** Yes, one term. How did I get into that?

**Hartsook:** We were talking about what you’ve been doing since stepping down as chair.

**Harris:** Yes. I was elected national committeeman in ‘76 and served through ‘80. I was somewhat active on a national level but I didn’t do a whole lot because I had a business I had to run.

**Hartsook:** So, since ‘80 have you been pretty much just an interested bystander?

**Harris:** In ‘81, I went to Atlanta with an appointment from the administration as executive assistant to the regional administrator of HUD for the eight southeastern states. That was through the Reagan years. In ‘86, the regional administrator retired and the Reagan administration appointed me as one of ten regional administrators of HUD. I stayed as regional administrator under Jack Kemp too. Then in ’92, when Bush lost, I stayed on as regional administrator through ‘93 and retired in January ‘94. I didn’t have to retire. I was the only regional administrator in the country that was of career status. I was in the senior executive service but I knew they were going to send me to California or somewhere far away and give me a desk and let me sit there, and I wasn’t going to do
that. I said no, I’m not going to do that. I told them I would retire in January of ‘94, which I did, came back to Darlington and stayed retired for two years and then this job came open. The two years that I was retired here, this job turned over two or three times. And, I thought to myself, that’s the craziest thing in the world, that you don’t have people staying in that job. And I said, it just looks bad. So when the last director quit and went to another job — that was in March of ’96 — I said, ‘I’m going up there and apply for that job. I’m tired of playing golf and not doing anything constructive.’ I was about to get back in politics again, but I said, ‘I’m going up there and apply for that Director’s job, and I did, and here I am. I’ve been here since ‘96 and I love it. I told Vi, I said, ‘You know, this is a God-send. I’m having more fun in this job than any job I ever had.’ You know, you have jobs, and a job is a job. I just feel like I’m doing something for my county and I believe it’s good. I’m getting a little old for it, but as long as I have that fire in my belly and they want me, I’m going to keep trying to do it.

Hartsook:  Is there anything I should have asked and didn’t know enough to ask? Or anything else you want to add to the interview?

Harris:  You sound like an FBI agent. I used to be one and we always asked whenever we interviewed somebody, ‘Is there anything else that I haven’t asked you that you want to tell me?’ No. I can’t think of anything. I’ve had a wonderful life. I really have. And politics has been a big part of it.

I guess the one thing if it has a downside, sometimes you have to make a decision in politics, you look back on it and say, ‘Well, I really shouldn’t have done that.’ And that involved the race between Reagan and Gerald Ford in 1976. I was national committeeman and I had just been elected
national committeeman. I didn’t run as a Reagan delegate but I was elected by the Reagan people in the Party to be a delegate. I was for Reagan. But when Reagan announced his running mate, [Richard S.] Schweiker, from Pennsylvania, who happened to be the most liberal Republican in the United States Senate, with a 100% voting record by the ADA, I thought to myself, I’m not going to support somebody that’s going to put somebody like Schweiker, who has that kind of record, as his running mate as Vice President. Why he did that, I will never ever know. But he did. He announced it prior to the convention, about a week before the convention. And, I said, ‘I’m not going to support that.’ I regret that I went ahead and went to the convention. I shouldn’t have gone. I wanted Reagan to be the nominee but not under those circumstances and with that running mate. I should have decided not to go to the convention, and let somebody else take my place, but I didn’t. I got hardheaded about it and I got a lot of pressure, and I didn’t like that, so I ended up voting for Ford. I look back on that and I think, I should never have gone. And, if I had it to do today, I wouldn’t have gone to that convention. I’d let somebody else, a Reagan supporter, take my place. That’s the only big thing I really regret in my political life.

[Interview Ends]