

*Governor McNair Oral History Project*  
*South Carolina Department of Archives and History*

# Interview

*with*

Robert E. McNair

***Interviewer:***

Cole Blease Graham

***Date:***

August 2, 1983

**CBG:** This is Tape 27, Side 1, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is August 2, 1983. Governor, we're moving now to a different area of discussion, the area of civil rights, what was going on in the civil rights area in South Carolina, let's say, in the early part of your full term?

**REM:** Well, we were experiencing the same problems the rest of the country was. We were having the marches and the demonstrations over public facilities, the lunch counter problem, you know, the public facilities of all kinds, public transportation, all of that. So we were having similar problems to other places all over the country. Ours were not, we didn't think, as severe or reached the proportions that they did in Detroit and places like that, New York and Washington and all.

**CBG:** Were there any feelings as to what the reasons for that might have been?

**REM:** Well, I think there was no question about what it was. It was the leadership in the black community and particularly the young black student, college students. They were sort of the center of the movement at that time for change. They wanted to be able to sit at the lunch counter; they wanted to be able to go to the movie; they wanted to be able to ride on the front of the bus; they wanted to go to the parks; they wanted to swim in the swimming pools. They wanted access, and we had all the old laws on the books that separated the races, wouldn't allow that. They were divided then over whether to take it to the courts and resolve it or take it to the streets and resolve it.

We felt in this state that one of the reasons it wasn't as emotional and didn't reach the high level that it did elsewhere was the leadership in the black community and the leadership of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], which was a very responsible organization with good strong leadership that always took the position of non-violence. Reverend I. DeQuincey Newman was an outspoken advocate of peaceful resolution of whatever the problem was. That sort of set the tone. The big problem was the splinter groups, the new groups that were emerging, were trying to wrestle control from the established black leadership.

At the same time we had something similar going on on the opposite side. The old line, white, political leadership that just was set in its ways had determined that things weren't going to change, but at the same time we had a more progressive group of young, white leadership coming along taking a more moderate stance. We then had some progressive leaders like Lester Bates in Columbia, who pulled together the real cross-section of the business community and moved to ease the tension by opening up the lunch counters and prevailing on the business community and opening up some jobs in the stores and places like that. That's primarily what they were looking for. They wanted, as we were saying back then, equal

opportunity. They wanted an opportunity to do the things that they'd been denied. That was when the movement began for school integration after the Clarendon County decision.

**CBG:** Were you surprised at the leadership that some of the mayors like Mayor Bates showed in these types of matter, or were you fearful of things being really worse?

**REM:** Well, I think most of us were really fearful that it could and might get worse.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** And we were all pleasantly surprised that it didn't. We used to point with pride to the fact that we had had no real serious outbreaks in South Carolina. That didn't mean we were free of demonstrations and free of political confrontations and sometimes of rock throwings and all, but no real riots. I don't think we experienced what you would classify as a riot like they had in Chicago and Detroit and New York and places like that where there was just absolute, wild, reckless destruction of property and lives and everything else.

**CBG:** And an expression of bitterness or hatred among races, too, wouldn't you think.

**REM:** I really think, again, generally we were free of that. And that I used to think was attributed to the fact that, though we hadn't gone to school together, though we didn't go to church together, we'd lived together, and we had worked together because of our more rural background. I grew up in the country on a big farm and the blacks worked on the farm and were almost like the family. They stayed in their place, but at the same time there was a warm, friendly relationship. If one of them had a problem, my father or my mother was the person who took care of their problem. If they had a sick child who had to go to the doctor, my mother took them. If they got in jail on Saturday night, my father got them out either Sunday or Monday morning in order to be back at work. So there was that feeling of respect even though it was emerging as unrest. I think surprisingly, again, even to us and the rest of the nation, our problems were not as great in the predominantly rural areas, where the heavy black population was, as it was in the city and in the piedmont area where we had fewer blacks but a concentration of blacks in one area. We found there that that dialogue and personal relationship and daily communications had not existed like it had in the other areas.

**CBG:** Did you experience the reaction among blacks that this attempt to communicate was perhaps some kind of an attempt to keep them in a subordinate position, or did you feel that the communications were free and open, person-to-person?

**REM:** I would have to acknowledge that there was no question that a lot of it was in order to maintain the status quo.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** There were areas where there were efforts at communications, but there were efforts at communications to “Don't rock the boat. Don't stir it up. We're doing all we can, but leave things alone.” Naturally, that in time brought on an impatience here, like it did in other parts of the country, particularly in the South. We were ripe for the so-called new leader from other places to come in because the leadership here had sort of gone along with “Let's work it out. It'll take time. Let's don't rock the boat. Let's don't stir it up,” and they were reading about what was happening or seeing on television what was happening elsewhere.

A lot of the new organizations were growing up that were trying to undermine or undercut the NAACP. Those groups naturally were more aggressive. They had to be more aggressive in order to get support. Things were sort of calm and quiet here to the extent that, to get a good demonstration, they had to go to the public schools and get kids out of schools and in a lot of instances you give them a dollar or something like that to come to march because they could not get a massive group among the older people. The ones who had worked in the homes as maids or the ones who'd worked in the yard as yardmen or the ones who'd worked on the farm weren't about to get out there and demonstrate. So they'd go to the schools and get the kids out of school. Not often, though, were your principals and superintendents in the black schools inclined to participate or to sanction or publicly condone those things because they themselves, economically, were concerned about their future if they got too involved and too out front. So quite often, you know, your black superintendent and principal were part of “Let's keep calm, and let's work this thing out peacefully and gradually at the conference table.”

**CBG:** Which really made the question not “If,” but “When,” and this “When” is perhaps where this impatience came from.

**REM:** Not being a liberal leader myself, I think we reached the point where sometimes we'd sit around and say, “You know, if I were a young black college student today, I probably would be so frustrated . . .”

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** “. . . until I may be out there doing the same thing they're doing.” You really understand to some degree the frustrations of a lot of the young, black, intelligent, potential leaders who just couldn't see things happening.

**CBG:** Is this one of the things that maybe made a place of higher education a ripe environment for all these kind of forces to come together, young people learning new ideas, feeling frustration, being free enough perhaps to act as individuals without the principal to get on them?

**REM:** I think that's why most of your so-called troubled areas were around communities where there was a black college. That seemed to be the center of the movement at that time. The kids in the elementary and high schools, particularly the elementary schools, were out just for a walk, and the high school kids were on a lark. The college level was sort of a mixed bag. It was something new and exciting, and they wanted to participate in it, but at the same time they were feeling the frustration. It was beginning to be a realization in their mind that, “I'm really not getting a quality education. When I get out of here, where do I go, and what do I do?” That's the group that had in the past been heading north because the job opportunities were there. The quality of their education was not really as good as it was, so they ended up many times with the equivalent of a high school education and couldn't get a job when they got up north. So they joined the rioting movement up there. That's when we got open complaints about the fact that we were sending them all to the north. They'd join the ghetto, and that's where the riots were coming from. So we were exporting our problem.

**CBG:** Did something like improved education for blacks occur on the agenda of politics in the state, let's say, before 1968?

**REM:** Oh, yes, yes, I think that had been a priority item, again, to maintain the status quo was the way it started. It started with the separate but equal . . .

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** . . . facilities mandate from the Supreme Court when Mr. [James] Byrnes, who we talked about before, came along. We had the mass so-called educational revolution. We built new schools. We started providing transportation. We started upgrading the quality of the program in the schools in order to move toward equality for the purpose of maintaining separate but equal facilities. So the politics was to do that. The politics was to make it so that you could defend the fact that they were getting equality. That was the

purpose of the three cents sales tax, was to maintain separate but equal facilities, and that's the reason the three cents sales tax was so popular with such widespread public support and the reason it was easy to commit it to education.

**CBG:** Do you think that the idea of the status quo may have become, let's say, a bad word to an impatient black later on, that somehow or other maintaining the status quo meant keeping things frozen in this old separate but equal posture?

**REM:** Yes, to the young aggressive person coming along . . .

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** . . . that's what it meant. It meant you "Be patient, boy, and leave things alone."

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** And I think that's what caused the frustrations to finally erupt into more than just the normal peaceful marches, into a real aggressive movement to change.

**CBG:** Had those kinds of feelings been a part of the communications with you as governor before the focus at Orangeburg?

**REM:** We began to get it when I started running statewide because there was only minimal black participation at that time. I think because there was no place else to go, I fell heir to the support of Matthew Perry, Reverend Newman, and those in my campaign for lieutenant governor very quietly. At that time it was almost political disaster to be endorsed by the NAACP or any group like that. So they consciously avoided any kind of public endorsement, but I would suspect that I got overwhelming, close to a hundred percent, of the black vote that participated in my campaign for lieutenant governor.

The same thing happened when I ran for governor although I'd been in for a year and a half and had to deal with this problem and had to face the Voting Rights Act and had to deal with some of the developing incidents that had occurred, demonstrations and all, and had to take sort of a firm stand on the fact that we couldn't and wouldn't permit destruction of property and all that sort of stuff. We'd sit down and talk; and we were encouraging communities to, you know, open up, to develop some biracial committees. We had begun

to put blacks on boards and commissions so that that would ease the tension. I think, at that time, that was sort of the starting point. Not only "Listen to us," but "Hear what we're saying."

**CBG:** Did you ever get the feeling that you were one step ahead of the legislature and one step behind an important constituency in your election, that there was pressure from both ends?

**REM:** I think that's what the problem was. That's why for the first time in my life and the only time we ever did any polling . . .

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** . . . was to try to determine, you know, really and truly where you were.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** Because you didn't know. You got letters, and all the letters were raising hell with you. Very seldom did you get letters that were commending you for what you were doing, how you were handling situations like that, and I was deeply concerned that I was there, having to deal with this and yet facing a potential campaign coming up for a full term.

So we did some sampling, and fortunately the sampling came back on the liquor question that we've already talked about and on this that "Whatever you're doing is working, so continue doing what you're doing in the way you're doing it." It did show, even at an early time, that I was beginning to have problems with the mothers of school age children, particularly the elementary schools. We had begun to talk about freedom of choice. We were implementing that, and we were implementing it publicly in good faith, and so the school superintendents were getting support from us to get on with the job and do it right because we didn't want to be sued. We didn't want to be in the courts, and we didn't want the federal government sending people down here to enforce it.

**CBG:** That's the white backlash that you're describing . . .

**REM:** That was the white backlash that I began to get and kept, that I had not had prior to this, and that caused opposition for governor, and it caused it to come from that group, like [Joseph O.] Joe Rogers who had been vice chairman of the segregation committee.

**CBG:** Did you have a feeling that maybe you were a governor in a new spot and that maybe the 1964 Civil Rights Act was the watershed, that any governor before you could have found a role model, a group of people with whom he could seek advice and pretty much keep state matters within an acceptable range, but all of a sudden there wasn't anybody to counsel with?

**REM:** Very few; and we had nobody in surrounding states to get a lot of comfort from at that time. Terry Sanford had completed his term in North Carolina, and Terry had gone out of office pretty well at an extremely low political ebb, probably as low as you could go for a person who had the image and the reputation he did nationally. We had Carl Sanders, who was a good friend, and we had communications and dialogue, but he left and Lester Maddox came along. Then we had Orval Faubus in Arkansas getting all the publicity and [George] Wallace in Alabama, and we were confronted with that at the time. Every time you picked up the newspaper, you were seeing where George Wallace was standing firm, and Lester Maddox was getting out the axe handles, and, with all the respect I have for Dan Moore in North Carolina, who was a judge and a solid, fine person who I admired very much, he was just sitting there. Virginia, which was an enlightened southern state, was taking a very firm, strong policy with my good friend Mills Godwin, and we were sort of, I suppose, in the middle of the mainstream and trying to stay in the middle of the mainstream in a state with people that shared very strongly the feelings of the folks from Alabama and Mississippi and Georgia and everywhere else.

**CBG:** Would you say a theme would be that you were trying to do as much as you thought you could--I don't want to say get away with--but as much as the circumstances would bear?

**REM:** Well, I think that's probably a good way to put it because we worked hard at pulling in people in leadership positions that others had respect for to counsel with and to draw them in and to draw some strength myself from their support, including John Cauthen, who was head of the textile manufacturers' association, John Floyd, who was head of the Chamber of Commerce at that time, and Bill Lyles, who was out front. Hugh Lane from Charleston, who was head of the C&S Bank, was a very progressive thinking, respected business leader. Bob Davis was always out front. We pulled those folks together and then pulled in the black leadership to sit and talk, and we actually had discussions, yes, talking about just what you were saying right now, that we can move so fast that we really could become ineffective and we can't do anything. It's a matter of doing it in an orderly way and accomplishing as much as you can, but not pushing it to the point that you really get nowhere.

**CBG:** Did events as they started to develop at South Carolina State enter into these conversations?

**REM:** The South Carolina State problem involving the faculty and administration was sort of the opener for me. I think that sort of brought it to my attention better than anything else, and the direct communications with faculty committees and direct communication with the student leaders demonstrated to me why they were so upset and why they were frustrated. To me that was a legitimate complaint and a good cause that we felt we could do something about. We could improve the quality of the program down there. They deserved a better education. We felt that by working on that that we were showing the kind of concern and demonstrating an interest that hopefully would help us continue easing through the transition that I think we knew was coming.

**CBG:** This was not atypical of higher education institutions in the state across the board at about that time, was it? I mean there were . . .

**REM:** Yes.

**CBG:** . . . studies, the junior college approach, the graduate education development, and . . .

**REM:** I think we had come to a time when that was developing and people were going in so many directions. We were trying to pull together and develop a comprehensive program, beginning in preschool and kindergarten through the so-called adjunct education, which was really nothing more than trying to develop something in the schools to hold them in the schools and to take care of the slow learner and all of that as well as to broaden the vocational education. I've said before, if you didn't want to be an auto mechanic or a beauty parlor operator or a brick mason, there wasn't much for you. We felt we had to broaden that to sort of supplement the developing technical education program. Technical education, you know, we used because that started off wide open. It was fully integrated and was a model for what we could accomplish in the right way.

The colleges were woefully weak, underfunded, and I think there was a general recognition that the quality of education in this state was at a low level. We had no graduate education. The Woffords and the PCs [Presbyterian Colleges] and the Newberrys had to go elsewhere to get faculty members because we didn't have doctoral programs. We had no real good program for school administrators. Principals just became principals because they had retired as football coach, and they were good disciplinarians. Superintendents were picked more on a political basis than they were on their real quality to provide leadership. So, we felt that we were trying to comprehensively do it, and thus, State College was part of it.

**CBG:** What was the situation, I believe it was in February, 1967, when there were three teaching fellows, I think, Woodrow Wilson teaching fellows, down at South Carolina State . . .

**REM:** Yes.

**CBG:** . . . who perhaps raised the consciousness of . . .

**REM:** Yes, yes.

**CBG:** . . . the quality of education question among students? That really resulted in a conflict with the administration, didn't it?

**REM:** That's right.

**CBG:** Did that bubble up to the governor's attention?

**REM:** Yes, it sure did. It got all the way up because Dr. [Benner] Turner was terminating them. That's the kind of thing, you know, that we knew nothing about and weren't involved in until the thing burst.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** It got up to our level with him terminating those faculty members, and, you know, you sort of get caught in a dilemma because you don't want to directly involve yourself in the administration of the institution, but at the same time, when administrative decisions create massive problems that you've got to deal with, you get concerned about it. So we did have a serious problem. The faculty was upset, the students were upset--and we had started trying to improve the quality down there--and I think that's when it finally reached the point that we all acknowledged that, as much as we respected Dr. Turner, as much as we recognized the tremendous contribution he'd made to State College and to South Carolina, that he really needed to retire. He needed to stand aside and let us bring in somebody else, more progressive, who could communicate and would communicate with the faculty, with the students, and try to really build the institution and upgrade it. He was satisfied. He had done his thing and resented any kind of interference. He resented suggestions from any source and just didn't want it.

**CBG:** So here you have a classic kind of problem, I guess, from a political science perspective of an institution with fairly rigid internal controls that may not really be aware of the political splash, the outside consequences of an internal decision. Did that change in leadership, do you think, give people on the State College campus a signal that the state was oriented toward change, that the state really wasn't just putting its foot down and saying it had to be this way or else?

**REM:** I think that was everybody's full intention. The unfortunate part of it was that you couldn't have press conferences like you do today and announce change and how progressively you were moving. Everything that we did, I would say, with rare exception was discussed with the black leadership. They didn't always agree but I can't recall many instances when they were caught by surprise. Now quite often on television they would express great dismay and displeasure and come down on me pretty hard, but they normally knew what was going to happen, and there was normally an understanding. They had to keep their position and maintain their credibility and their image also, and we operated that way, but we tried very diligently to communicate with them. They were honest enough to tell us when they were going to have a public disagreement.

**CBG:** Is that something that the typical citizen would find hard to understand and not realize, that you can't always take political communications at face value? I mean, it may be the type of thing that you'd see in diplomacy, for example, that you would jockey toward a position, and, therefore, it wouldn't be uncommon for state officials to do that, too.

**REM:** Yes, I suppose so. I'm not sure how widespread it was really known that there were a lot of discussions going on and there was a lot of communications going on. I think it was pretty generally known that I was a communicator, you know, and really believed in communicating.

***END OF SIDE ONE; BEGIN SIDE TWO***

**CBG:** This is Tape 27, Side 2, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is August 2, 1983. Governor, we were talking about communications and how sometimes the public may not understand that there is a seriousness but yet at the same time a playfulness to what people may say in a public statement. Do you think that's a fair assessment?

**REM:** Well, you could put it all kinds of ways and say it probably a little better than that . . .

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** . . . but, yes, you know, you have to do that to keep public confidence. Without that you can't accomplish anything. The Voting Rights Act is a good example of it, something that was mandated, that we were under for no reason, that was in the record and caught by the statistics of the act, and yet, you know, we felt deep down that it ought to be enforced, it's time to do it, but we couldn't jump up and say, "I'm glad we're under it, and we're going to comply with it. We're going to go out and do all these things." We had to take a position on really how upset we were that South Carolina was put under the thing, statistically, and therefore we didn't think it was fair, right constitutionally. We were going to court to challenge it, but at the same time we were going to comply with it, and we were going to enforce it in South Carolina in the process . . .

**CBG:** And this . . .

**REM:** . . . without outside interference from the federal government.

**CBG:** The general expression, though, was a positive, forward-looking one, not a negative . . .

**REM:** No, no.

**CBG:** . . . foot dragging . . .

**REM:** It wasn't.

**CBG:** . . . type thing.

**REM:** It was not that and that wasn't intended, and I suppose that we worked on that statement for as many hours and with as many redrafts as we did on anything because to me that set the tone for my position, long-term, down the road. That was the thing that we had to do in the right way because that was setting the tone and the direction that I intended to go. We were going to stay in the courts as long as we had a legitimate reason to be in the courts, but beyond that we were going to comply with the law, and we weren't going to stand in the schoolhouse doors. We weren't going to just get out there and totally disobey mandates from the courts, but to do that, you had to let the people understand and maintain your credibility with them, or it was all gone.

**CBG:** Were you ever charged by some segments of the white community as being two-faced or talking out of both sides of your mouth, so to speak?

**REM:** Well, constantly we were under barrage because we were selling out, weren't standing up for South Carolina. We wouldn't have demonstrations. We wouldn't go to the stadium and speak. I wouldn't stand up and say, "No, not ever," and there was a large segment of the population and a substantial percentage of the real political leadership of this state that thought I was not firm enough and not strong enough and not taking as adamant a position as they'd like to see me take.

**CBG:** Did you try to communicate with these people as much as you could?

**REM:** We communicated with them as openly as we could. That was the one thing I think we were able to maintain, was we would maintain communications with the organized white citizens' council leadership, with all of the "save our schools" groups and things of that nature.

**CBG:** Was there any way that you could organize for this, or was this more of both a reaction and an anticipation of who was going to be speaking?

**REM:** I think we pretty well knew, but we got so many blindsided surprises. Nobody could have ever prepared me for the reactions in Greenville. You know, I would have been prepared for it from Horry County or Georgetown County or Berkeley County or Allendale or Orangeburg County or Lexington, particularly, but I would not have been prepared from Greenville and didn't anticipate that kind of a problem. That's a good example of being caught sort of totally off guard. The problems that we experienced in the beginnings up in Rock Hill were sort of a surprise to me. I don't think we'd focused on the fact that these things sort of centered around where black colleges were. If we had, we might have said, well, keep a close eye on Rock Hill. There's a black college up there. It's a poor college. It's a terrible program, you know, and there's going to be unrest. That came up and really almost erupted into a pretty tough situation. We didn't anticipate it up there. We thought Rock Hill, you know, was an enlightened metropolitan area close to Charlotte, which was a progressive city, Winthrop College, and all of that.

**CBG:** What do you think caused something like Rock Hill not to go further? Was it law enforcement, good communications, or what?

**REM:** I suppose it was an overlooking of the problem and sort of a feeling that it will go away and it'll take care of itself. It wasn't big enough . . .

**CBG:** Yes, it was a private college.

**REM:** . . . like it was in Bamberg [chuckles] or Allendale or places like that, where it was big enough. You saw it every day and you knew you had to maintain communications.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** That college was isolated. No community involvement. The community would just as soon have it get up and go. You know, they would have loved for it to have moved overnight, probably would have contributed to get rid of it.

**CBG:** Yes. It was a private college.

**REM:** It was a private college.

**CBG:** Did the events in Orangeburg along with the faculty events and the communications about the bowling alley as they developed over time strike you as a situation that could erupt like some of these others had?

**REM:** Well, that again, you know, I didn't like surprises, but the bowling alley in Orangeburg was a surprise. We knew we had the State College problem, we knew we had community relations problems because when the students boycotted, we got buses to send them all home. That was the first experience, a year or more prior to the Orangeburg incident, we'd spent so much time on. I suppose at that time, if you'd put it to a vote in the community, it would have been overwhelming to move the school out of there. In fact, I got an awful lot of pressure to move it out of there. They would love to have gotten it out of Orangeburg. It was a troublesome spot. It was creating problems, and Orangeburg really didn't want to deal with it and hadn't dealt with it. There was some political move to get it out of there. We could have brought it to Columbia real easy.

**CBG:** Which was the model with the law school, wasn't it?

**REM:** That's right.

**CBG:** I mean the law school had been consolidated.

**REM:** Well, the law school was down, and we did that by pure agreement.

**CBG:** Yes.

**REM:** Dr. Turner and all. We said, "Let's get rid of that." We took the agricultural program, you recall, because that had become sort of a bad image thing. We were teaching them to be farmers, but the farming program at State College compared to Clemson was . . .

**CBG:** Out-of-date.

**REM:** . . . out-of-date. We were teaching them how to be sharecroppers and not farmers. It had a bad image. So, we said we can solve that problem. I felt they would have been upset if we took something away, but we had been doing all of this in the meantime. We immediately got a working relationship with [R.C.] Bob Edwards and Dr. Turner where you took your second two years at Clemson, and then we phased out the agricultural program. But we immediately sent them up there for the second two years, which Bob Edwards was readily agreeable to, just to show we were starting to do something right now when a problem arose.

My recollection of the bowling alley is getting a call one night that they had a problem at a bowling alley in Orangeburg with a bunch of the students all from State College. I'm not sure I got it that they were trying to go there to bowl as much as they'd had a big demonstration and kicked out the glass doors, and they had rioted going back to the campus because they'd had quite a head-knocking session in front of the bowling alley, several hundred students and others in the black community with law enforcement officers. So, you know, there was a thing that had sort of erupted on us. Nobody had called up and said we got a problem with the bowling alley. We knew we had problems in Orangeburg, but I don't think we knew at that moment that they were anywhere near an eruption. We had problems everywhere all over the state and were getting reports.

**CBG:** Right.

REM. When we found out the seriousness of it, we found out there'd been some real head-knocking that night, and people had gotten hurt. The students were angry, and faculty members and Oscar Butler, who had sort of led it, had gotten beat up pretty good. There was a real angry mood in Orangeburg. So when we assessed the situation with all the information we could get, and having a pretty good idea of what Orangeburg was like already, and getting the report that all the people were boarding up in the stores, armed and everything else, I just could see those kids go marching through town, and somebody--and there's always one like the one that kicked out the bowling alley door. I would imagine that he would take that back many times now. That was a spontaneous act on his part that just erupted into a confrontation. Some group marches down the street and somebody throws a rock or a brick, and everybody starts shooting.

So we determined that Orangeburg was a place where it was an armed arsenal and that the students and kids and all on the campus and the community, the black community, was so upset over the fracas at the bowling alley that we had to get it under control and keep the town and the school apart. So there we go from having no real good information to a bowling alley eruption to a massive, serious problem that really looked horrible to us, to immediately putting in an emergency and a curfew and getting the guard in there to keep the town and the school separate and apart and to keep those kids from marching down Main Street in Orangeburg.

**CBG:** How does a situation like that come to a governor's attention? I'm just thinking now that here it was early in a new legislative session. You've just made your state of the state address, and there are a lot of things going on statewide plus a lot of these civil rights-type, student things going on at different institutions around the state. Did you just detail that problem to staff as long as nothing comes up and as long as there was good communications?

**REM:** We were very conscious of the civil rights problems and of the disturbances going on around the state. We were very conscious of potential problems where we thought they were there. We had SLED [State Law Enforcement Division] spread pretty thin over the state so that we could get what we thought was the best information we could get and not depending solely on the local law enforcement officers and the mayors and others to give it all to us. A lot of times we would know something was going on before they would. That was the interesting thing, that we would have information a lot of times and pick up the phone and call a mayor and tell him he had some real problems. Quite often they'd be responsive, but sometimes they'd be rather belligerent about it. You had to use diplomacy on them. But we were conscious of it, and we had the various staff people with various broad areas of responsibility for communication. I was one of those who wanted to know what was going on. I never delegated to a staff person authority to go, you know, "That's yours, you go do it," but they had responsibility for it, and they had broad responsibility, and they

knew they had a lot of responsibility, and they had total support. The legal area had communications with all the law enforcement people on a daily, sometimes, you know, two or three times a day, basis depending on what was going on. We got reports every evening and usually got reports in the mornings, every morning, on what happened the night before and what had happened around the state. Chief [J. Preston] Strom would always call me. I'd usually go to bed with a report from Chief Strom. He reported to the legal people an awful lot, but Pete Strom always reported to me directly, and I suppose a day didn't go by that I didn't talk to him at least late in the evening and early in the morning, to get a full update report.

So, you know, like Orangeburg, with all the other things going on, erupting, then getting called that they've got a problem, not every time would he call me and say, "I'm going down to Orangeburg. They've got a problem." He'd usually go check on it and then call and give a report on it if it was something they needed, or if they discussed it and things were fine they'd give me a report. I have used the illustration of the University [of South Carolina] with Dr. [Thomas] Jones. I always got something when it needed a Caesarean, and not often did we get serious things because these things erupted. I mean, they just happened. Most of them happened when you didn't anticipate them. The hospital strike, you know, happened because they fired six hospital workers for incompetence and insubordination and sitting. They wouldn't work. They all walked out, so I got a phone call. I didn't even know they had an employee problem at the hospital in Charleston. Orangeburg, I don't think I had any previous warning of the bowling alley until that night.

**CBG:** That would have been like Tuesday, I guess, of that week, wouldn't it?

**REM:** It was the night that they had the confrontation at the bowling alley which sort of set off the whole thing down there.

**CBG:** Yes. That's the kind of thing that erupted, as well as I remember accounts, when a young man, a student, was to organize a sit-in and had, what, ten or twelve people . . .

**REM:** Right.

**CBG:** . . . and they passed by a dormitory and found a dozen or so eager freshmen to go along with them to make their case.

**REM:** Make their case and picked up a lot of kids along the way because it was in sort of an area where there were a lot, and as they got around, you know, it's just like when you have a fire. The fire whistle blows in a small town everybody goes out to block the fire trucks so it can't get there to put out the fire. In a place

like Orangeburg, I suppose everybody congregated. By the time they got around there, there were two or three hundred people there, and the thing was being calmly discussed and almost peacefully resolved by Chief Strom who handled it that way normally in a calm, deliberate, patient sort of way, saying, "Why don't you get two or three of your buddies and come on in and get arrested and get it in the court and get the federal court involved and get this thing resolved?" That was about to be done when some kid, probably not knowing what was going on, got frustrated, got excited, and wanted to be a hero, and he kicked out the glass door.

**CBG:** Not understanding the real, but, perhaps, at that point, subtle, distinction between a civil and a criminal offense.

**REM:** That's right, not understanding it, and as you know, the reports we get are mixed. You get different reports from all the various parties involved and I've had them from everybody from Leon Gasque and Chief Strom, who were standing there talking, trying to resolve it, to Oscar Butler, who was then a faculty member who was sort of coordinating the movement, to some of the students, who were caught in the fracas and got bummed up heads and everything else. They were probably right saying, "We were just there. We weren't doing anything, and all of a sudden everything started, and these policemen started beating us over the head." They were probably telling the truth from their view.

**CBG:** Were there some specific details, as you have thought back over this incident, which seemed conflicting or perhaps, let's say, contradictory to you?

**REM:** Well, you get all kinds of reports over the bowling alley, you know, contradictory reports over that. The bowling alley had been a sore spot for a long time because they wouldn't let the black students go in. It was the only bowling alley. They didn't have one. There'd been discussions, I understand, about, "Well, will you set aside a night that we can bowl. You know, we want to have a bowling night." Well, you know, that wouldn't work, and the town council was caught with the operator of the bowling alley and supporting him in his position. His was he didn't come under the federal [Civil Rights] act, but I don't think there'd been much discussion about that until we got into it whether it was or was not subject to the public accommodations section that had just been passed.

To bring the thing to Columbia was not normal with mayors and folks until it got sort of beyond their control. That's when they came to us, and that's why we really would never take something until we had a chance to find out more about it. When we did become involved normally, it was at a point where we felt like if we were going to get involved we had to have control of it. So we never went in leaving something to

the mayor and the city council to give us direction on what to do or how to do. We felt that politically and otherwise that we needed to have control of it. I suppose the bowling alley thing had been handled locally. I'm not sure if Maceo Nance had involved himself or not and had had any discussions with the city council over the bowling alley and the fact that it was a festering thing that was sort of a red flag and was going to explode.

We thought we had crossed the public accommodations hurdle because we'd opened up the lunch counters and opened up the restaurants to access. The interesting thing about it was that once access was made available there was little or no use. I can recall my friend, Charlie Lafitte, who ran the Holiday Inn in Allendale, a town that it was as difficult as there was any place in this state to open up the restaurant. Charlie Lafitte got a visit, Charlie Lafitte got put under pressure by the black community leaders, and Charlie said, "Well, come on," and that evening, I think my recollection is, four blacks came to the Holiday Inn, were taken in and seated, were served a full meal and paid for it, and nobody ever came back, for several reasons. One is they couldn't afford it; the second is they really didn't like it, but they didn't want to be denied the right to come in. We thought we were over the hurdle of sitting at the lunch counter, and we really couldn't understand why there wasn't some way to set aside Tuesday night, like you do for the church leagues, or on Wednesday night for State College to come bowl and let them have a bowling team and let them have bowling contests.

**CBG:** Were you ever involved in any direct conversation with Mr. [Harry] Floyd, perhaps to try to persuade him to make those moves?

**REM:** No, I never was because, see, I wasn't in it.

**CBG:** Was too far . . .

**REM:** It was too far gone and had already erupted. My only involvement with Mr. Floyd was when I thought the bowling alley was closed, and then I got word that somehow--and I don't know how, but somehow--the Attorney General--and I wasn't privy to all of that--had sort of said, "You can't keep it closed. Open it up." Then I got the word that people were in there bowling, and when I got that, my only involvement was to tell Leon Gasque, with Chief Strom reporting all of that to me, and say, "Go close the bowling alley, and keep it closed until we get something done about this thing." That's when we were on the phone with Ramsey Clark and his top civil rights guy to bring a suit under the accommodations act and get the papers served because we were aware of the fact that we were on thin ground just arbitrarily keeping it closed. When I declared an emergency, I felt like I had pretty good authority, and I felt like that bowling

alley was the real source of a problem, and it never bothered me to close it and keep it closed. That was my only indirect confrontation with Mr. Floyd because he wasn't going to close it, and Captain Gasque, I think, explained it to him in a way he understood that it was closed, and it was going to stay closed, and he would lock it if he had to. I never had any conversation with Mr. Floyd from then until now that I know of.

**CBG:** As you were going along in this procedure to try to calm things down in Orangeburg, did you feel generally that federal officers were helpful?

**REM:** We had developed, I think, a relationship with the federal government that was very good by that time. We had developed an image with them that I think was good. They recognized that we were trying to do things the right way. So we normally had full cooperation and support from them, and they never felt like they had to come in and take over a situation. They also felt comfortable working with us. Our people were in close, daily communications with the FBI. The FBI was fully aware of everything that was going on. In a situation like Orangeburg, once it erupted, the head of the FBI here was always a part of it and was always very close and knew from Chief Strom what was happening, what he was doing, and generally got good support from him. They never wanted to actively involve themselves. They never would get in a confrontation if you had one. They'd back off and watch and observe, but they were always there. They sat in on conferences. They would participate in discussions. They would give you the benefit of the vast information they had, like on a Cleveland Sellers. You immediately had the resources of them telling you everything about him, what all he'd been involved in, what he did, how he operated, the kinds of strategies that he used, and all that kind of stuff.

***END OF TAPE***