

FNP 5

Interviewee: Martin Dyckman

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I: Interview with Martin Dyckman, Tallahassee Bureau Chief, St. Petersburg Times.

D: unintelligible

I: This is on the cabinet?

D: Right. ____ . . . I think in every state ____ in the place of party politics, they developed ____ or personality politics, built around the various democratic office holders. ____ because of his cabinet system. For example, each member of this elective cabinet was like a governor in his own right and of course they all persisted much longer than the governor. Until 1970, Florida's governor could not seek re-election for a second consecutive four year term. There had been a couple of curious occasions in the past where governors could run again. Once was when Collins [LeRoy Collins, Governor of Florida, 1955-1961] had taken over as an acting governor, taken over from an acting governor to serve out a term and then he was allowed to run again. Haydon Burns [Governor of Florida, 1965-1967] could run again because he had been elected for a two year term. Tenure was deliberately abbreviated so they could switch the cycle to non-presidential years. He [Burns] lost the re-election. That was probably the beginning of the end of the old order in Florida. Now we call it more the end of the beginning, rather than _____. ____ secretary of state that would serve thirty years, the attorney general would serve twenty, the commissioner of education would serve twenty. There have been only three cabinet members, three incumbent cabinet members defeated for re-election when they wanted to be re-elected.

I: Since when?

D: Since 1932 when the records in Allen Morris' handbook begin. I am sure it goes back further than that but the available records are since 1932 and only three out of the sixty-eight cabinet elections held since 1932, only thirty cabinet members have even had . . . thirty of them have run without opposition. Almost a majority of these elections have been decided even without opposition. In addition to having their own little fiefdoms to run, such as education or the attorney general's department or the ____ department, they also sit as the boards of directors, of at the present time, six major state agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources.

I: What are those other agencies?

D: The Department of Natural Resources is one, the Department of Law Enforcement is another, Trustees and the Internal Improvement Fund, which has custody and management of state lands and submerged lands especially, which is very vital, is the third, the Department of Revenue is the fourth. It is early in the morning, I am missing two.

I: Education.

D: Education, although with that case they nearly rubber stamp what the Education Commissioner recommends. Oh, and the Department of Motor Vehicles and Highway Safety of motor vehicles. In a couple of those departments, the governor has a little bit more control than the others in that the head of the department, the director, must be nominated by him. This is true with the Department of Law Enforcement. Only the governor can nominate the head. It has to be ratified by three of the eight other cabinet members in order to make the appointment effective. This went through a very bruising fight over the head of the Department of Natural Resources. The governor wanted somebody with conservation and scientific environmental credentials and instead they picked a political hack who had been working in the department for a number of years and knew how to put on fish fries for legislators and had ingratiated himself to the various old school politicians. The man may have some ability, he is a superb politician, but in so far as being the right man in the age of conservation, they have serious doubt of that. After a fight that went on and off for nearly two years, he finally got it and the wounds from that fight still have not healed.

I: In education, the ____ barely made two heads each, just to keep from hiring?

D: No. That is another curious situation. They long ago decided that the universities were important enough that the governor had to be somewhat responsible for those. So the governor appoints a Board of Regents, which in turn . . . the Board of Regents members I believe must be... the governor appoints the Board of Regents. I think the cabinet can stop him in any case, but they do not, they never do. The governor appoints the Board of Regents, they are his appointees. They appoint a chancellor, but the regents run the university system. But then, the regents have to turn around and go through the elected Commissioner of Education to the Board of Education for all their rules and making policy decisions. It is a very curious _____. There have been _____ systems, where you do away with the elected commissioner and had a super board of regents running all the schools, who would hire an appointed director to run the entire education system. I think this makes sense. It was the recommendation of more than one study group over the last few years under both Republican and Democratic administrations, but it invades the prerogative of the cabinet system. Most of the Democrats in the legislature still defend the cabinet system, which I think dilutes responsibility for executive decisions and

you do not know who to blame. In addition, because the average voter has never been particularly obsessed with the cabinet, we have never had a situation where these offices were really effectively challenged. Not to mention that they probably go without re-election for the most part. There have been exceptions. For example, the treasurer, who also happens to be the insurance commissioner, was defeated for renomination in 1970 because of a series of insurance rate increases. The man who defeated him came in thinking he had a life of state in the office.

I: Do you see any signs of the cabinet system weakening or the legislature getting stronger in the last eight or ten years?

D: Yes. The legislature in one particular area has asserted itself much more in the past and that is, [actually] in two areas, in audit control, especially audit control, and in budgeting. They used to let the cabinet lead them around by the nose in budgeting which was _____. They do not anymore. The legislature pretty much takes the governor's budget, over which the cabinet has no say anymore. You used to have these seven executives sitting down and recommending a budget. They might follow the budget, but the cabinet would never usually ask for far more than [the] revenue it would produce and never recommend to the legislature where the revenues should come from, what taxes should be raised. Obviously the inevitable result was a series of sales tax increases. Thanks to the reorganization act of 1969, the governor is now the sole budget authority. He makes the recommendations. The cabinet can still make a separate recommendation to the department for the _____. As a rule they do not do that. The governor makes his recommendations to the legislature. The law requires that if he is asking for more spending than the revenue estimate would support, he has got to recommend the taxes to raise it. [That is] Probably the most important improvement made in the last twenty years.

I: Do you think the indictments and the current investigations may result in a further weakening of the system?

D: It is hard to say.

I: Or at least in the newer, more progressive members of the cabinet?

D: That is true. That is definitely true. For example, some of it is _____, but the man who was indicted, Floyd Christian [Commissioner of Education, 1965-1974], the education commissioner, really was not a bad sort. He really did care about the schools. I saw him stand up, and he is a conservative man, a man who is hardly a racial liberal, but I saw him stand up, in effect, in defense of busing, in defense of a federal court order. When Claude Kirk [Governor of Florida, 1967-1971] was trying to close the schools in one county, I saw him stand up

for negotiation with the teachers, when the teachers had gone out in strike in 1968 and Claude Kirk was trying to exploit it, like Calvin Coolidge [U.S. President, 1923-1929] in Boston, or wherever it was that Calvin Coolidge made his famous remarks. _____ Kirk took him _____ and the commissioner of education stood up for what I thought was the right approach. But the allegation seems to be that he did a little bit of stealing, more than a little bit of stealing and he just happened to be the most careless one and he got caught first. The man [Ralph Turlington] who replaces him is a better man in terms of ability. You could not call him a professional educator, but he was a college professor at one time. He has a mind like a steel trap. He understands education, particularly he understands education financing. He has been in the legislature since 1950, almost twenty-four years, [and is] still fairly young, in his early fifties. [He has a] Liberal voting record, progressive voting record. I think he will do all right. If I have to choose between a professional educator in a position like that and a politician who understands education, I think I would sooner go with the latter. You get more done. As for these other cabinet offices, there are some pretty good men waiting in the wings to run if this federal grand jury investigation seriously weakens the _____. What appalls me is there has been enough come out about his conflicts of interest and his absolutely cavalier attitude towards ethics as a result of this investigation, that if the people of Florida really cared about ethics and conflicts of interests that would have ridden him out of the state, riding on a rail, tarred and feathered. Just the very first disclosure last fall that he owned property in partnership with bankers with he regulates is enough to horrify me. I do not know about anybody else.

- I: What intrigues us about Florida politics is the press corps itself, the second largest in the country. Not so much the size of it, but the kind of reporting, which looks to us to be pretty aggressive. [There is] much more investigative reporting. Advocacy as well. And very strong. Some people tell us that some of the major _____ by six or eight as result of active lobbying or efforts by the press corps.
- D: I do not know to what extent you call it lobbying, but the fact is there have been plenty of issues that were developed by the press and exploited by the press and untold long series of articles, that have seen some results.
- I: How do you explain the size first of all?
- D: I do not know. I think a lot of it has to do with Florida's growth and a great deal of it has to do with Florida's geography, being a long state with many major population centers. For example you have cities where you have investigative reporters stationed in Tallahassee, Pensacola, parts of the Gannett Service. The Gannett Service which is several papers in Florida, does its share of investigative reporting. [The] Pensacola paper particularly never cared about it,

but some of the other Gannett papers do, especially Cocoa, *Cocoa Today*. Jacksonville papers do not do any [investigative reporting]. They are owned by the railroad. The Tampa and St. Petersburg, side by side to each other, *Tampa Tribune* and the *St. Petersburg Times* fighting for circulation dominance for years, which is a natural aid to the growth of investigative reporting by one or the other of the papers. Then you have Miami, and some good investigative reporting is done by the Gainesville and Lakeland papers, which are owned by *The New York Times*. I don't really know what got it started. It has been a phenomenon ever since I can remember.

I: How long have you been here on the staff?

D: In this job, five years. I was here two years before that, but I was working for television stations.

I: How is the relationship between the press and the legislature? Does it remain somewhat strained because of the invasive nature of the reporting?

D: I would not say so. Now individual legislators can bully cops from time to time, but it is usually not over a genuine issue but over some silly thing that happens. For example, one legislator took the floor of the House and appointed personal privilege a couple of weeks ago to denounce the Associated Press on a story that they did on an outing sponsored by the Commissioner of Agriculture. I might add, put on with the help of state employees working on state time, and forced labor on their own off time so a bunch of legislators could have a nice horse ride. The AP interviewer went over to a little boy who said, oh my daddy is in the trailer drunk, and named him, but it is usually the little things like that that tick them off. It is mostly the other politicians that yell and scream, the state comptrollers for example. In an interview last Saturday on a radio station [they] described me as a social misfit. I suppose that it is because I do not own any bank stock.

I: Is that why you are a social misfit?

D: I think by their standards, no doubt.

I: It is my impression of the state press corps here [that] it leans on the legislature, the governor, and state administration more than other states.

D: They lean on the executive branch very hard and the legislature to a great degree. One of the things that you can thank the capitol press corps for is the fact that since 1967 no legislative committee, and neither house in the legislature, has ever met in secret. There is no such thing as a closed meeting of a legislative committee.

- I: That is certainly atypical of the South and perhaps the country. Is that principally because of the capitol press corps?
- D: There are so many of us. We were able to harass the legislature for years and I think that there was a provision in the old constitution that said that all meetings of the House had to be open and all committee meetings had to be open, but it did not say that a quorum of a committee could not get together some place and work things out. Well, legislators still get together privately to plan their strategy, but they are pretty careful not to let a quorum of any committee get caught together because that would break the mold of the code. They would not be breaking the law technically, but they would be breaking the spirit of the rule. The Senate still has the option....
- I: But is that not, in your experience, as you look around the other states, the rule?
- D: Unquestionably it is unique. We have a very strong public records law in this state and a very strong open meetings law. All of which are a result of what I would call the aggressive comments of the capitol press corps.
- I: How would you ____ the other states?
- D: ____ uses Florida as an example.
- I: How do you assess Askew [Reubin Askew, Florida Governor, 1971-1979] as Governor?
- D: The man is personally honest and genuinely devoted to what his conscience tells him is the best thing to do. Now there are exceptions. He has a beverage director who is an absolute jackass, utter jackass, and for some reason he seems to be sticking with the man despite numerous documented incidents of the man either ignoring the law or fouling up his department or making the wrong decision. The reason Askew seems to be sticking with him is that the beverage director happens to be a personal protégé of the editor, Don Shoemaker, of the *Miami Herald*. [It is] pretty well documented. This session was a watershed I think. Askew kept his major promises. He was elected in part from corporate tax reform to a corporate income tax and reducing some of the consumer taxes, and that was done. Where I would find fault is in his lack of further imagination on the pack of questions. For example, this session with surplus revenue to spare, it is almost an incredible picture. They had a surplus last year and this year. This year is estimated at close to \$300 million, so they say let us have tax relief. Well the form of tax relief that he picks is to double the people that are over sixty-five that had already lived here five years already are entitled to a \$10,000 exemption from their taxable assessment for school taxes, and the same \$5,000 exemption on city and county taxes that people under sixty-five had for all taxes. His proposal, which is not a new proposal, [which] was permissive

in the Constitution that was adopted in 1968, was to make it \$10,000 across the board for people over sixty-five and to roll back the school millage sealing from \$10 million to \$8 million for all property. There were plenty of us, I suppose I sounded the first call on that, and others as well as a very determined sub-committee of the House Finance and Taxation Committee who felt that this was wrong for three reasons. They were all the classical reasons. The \$10,000 exemption would not do anything for the old people who do not own their homes but who rent them. It would not do anything for younger people who are poor and do not own their homes. It would provide a tax reduction for commercial property, including this motel, as well as for homeowners. So if the cry is homeowner tax relief, there are better ways to do it, ways that would benefit the renter as well as the homeowner. In ways that would not reward the richly elderly homeowner, [and not] the poor elderly homeowner. Principally the circuit breaker plan such as they have in Wisconsin and Minnesota, it could have been done here. Askew would not consider it for a long time. Then he said if the legislature could work something out it would not be a bad idea. Although he gave no leadership in that _____. He picked the tax reduction that was easy and simple, but that did not go as far and be as fair as something like the circuit breaker. This is probably the

I: I am just not familiar with the circuit breaker plan. Is it true that 60 percent of the tax relief, by using it on the 10/8, goes to business?

D: The split, the \$114 million that the state will have to pay the county school boards to make up for that reduction, yes I would say that about 50 to 60 percent would go to them.

I: Then it is not really a homeowners

D: That is not really a homeowners' relief, it will relieve homeowners to the extent of \$2 for every \$1,000 worth of assessed property.

I: Was it also not intended to raise the state percentage of aid to schools?

D: That was the secondary effect. That percentage has been going up year after year after year.

I: You would then fault him for being unimaginative?

D: In that respect, yes.

I: Would that just be an example of generally being unimaginative? Or is that just an atypical example?

D: That is the one issue, outside of the death penalty which crosses economic and

philosophical lines. That is the one issue where the liberals in the legislature have broken with him over the past four years. So I would say that is atypical of him. These are the same people who supported his corporate tax and were yelling and screaming because he would go for this particular form of tax relief in 1974 rather than something more imaginative like a circuit breaker. Let me explain how the circuit breaker works. It works best where you have a state income tax administration, a state income tax system and filing system that you can turn back on. The circuit breaker makes the assumption that renters pay tax. It is passed along in their rent, so it takes an arbitrary figure. If Florida would have picked that up, it would have been 17 percent. In some states it is 20 percent. What you do is you report your net income and you report what you paid in taxes. If you do not have a tax bill of your own, if you are [a] tenant, then you report what you paid in rent and they figure 17 to 20 percent of that. Then, either on a sliding scale or a fixed scale, the state refunds to you a portion of the tax you pay. If you are a person of modest means and you paid a very heavy tax then you get more of a refund than a person who is wealthy and paid the same heavy tax. This has been proposed in Florida by a number of legislators, including Dick Pettigrew [Richard A. Pettigrew, Speaker of the State House of Representatives, 1971, 1972] who is running for the U.S. Senate. It would have been that you had the state refund you everything you had spent in taxes, over four percent of your income up to a ceiling of, I think, \$150. So if you spent ten percent of your income on taxes, as some old people have been known to do, property taxes that is, you still have to eat the first 4 percent but you would have gotten the other six percent back up to that ceiling. I thought it was a marvelous plan. It did not carry. It was too complex for the legislature to understand in an election year. Secondly, it would not benefit business, and speculative real estate. [That] was not lost on a number of legislators who happened to be in those businesses.

I: Where did Askew's campaign financing come from?

D: The last term?

I: The first race for governor was about \$700,000. Almost as much as Kirk spent.

D: He did not get it from any single specified interest. I think that there were a lot of lawyers who gave to him. The people in Pensacola got him started as a city project. When he was first thinking of running they took up a monstrous collection which has crossed all economic lines. The road contractors, of course, were still staking their hopes in the re-election of Claude Kirk, who had been very good to them. Reubin Askew did not receive any known campaign contributions in 1970 that could be called questionable or so heavily oriented towards special interest as to confuse his own objectivity.

- I: Let us go back and look at the assets that became a problem. You said that his basic assets were honesty, integrity...
- D: I think he had a very genuine deep concern for problems that people have.
- I: So he decides issues based on conscience and you can only think of one example where he may have been wrong and that is with _____.
- D: That is a department, that is an appointment
- I: How do you make that comment, about the way that he appoints people and then uses them?
- D: No, I am making a comment about his general performance in office. I was saying that I would not describe Reubin Askew as a plaster saint. I think that he has made mistakes like all other politicians do. I think that he probably makes fewer than his share.
- I: In relationship to appointments or issues or what?
- D: Both. I think, for example, he has made far fewer than his share of mistakes. Now, he has had some appointments that have been a little bit less good than his issues, although the last appointment that he made was to the state supreme court and it was very, very good. You have to understand that is governed by a nominating commission. The commission recommended three people and I think that he picked the best of the three. But then I happen to be very prejudiced on that issue because I have known the man that he picked for many, many years. He is an officer in my Reserve unit. He used to be an attorney for the Pound Publishing Company. He is a personal friend who officiated the marriage of my associate Virginia Ellis, whose husband works for the governor, by the way. I think that he happened to do all right there. **Joe Cruberberg**, head of the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, is a notable conservationist and that was a very good appointment. The governor was on the right side of the matter of the Department of Natural Resources, which he could not control. There have been some exceptions, but I do not think that he can be seriously faulted on that. Probably the worst appointment he made was when he picked Tom Adams [Lieutenant Governor, 1971-1975] for his running mate in 1970. Everybody has seen the trouble that Adams has been in since. The governor did the right thing when it was uncovered and he fired Adams as head of the Commerce Department. He could not fire him as Lieutenant Governor, but now Adams is running again. Adams and Maddox [Lester Maddox, Governor of Georgia, 1967-1974] have a certain amount of _____.
- I: So you think he does less well on appointments than he does on issues. The

major accomplishments were the tax reform and the land use and management, the emphasis on environmental protection. Is there anything else that has happened in the last three years?

D: Those three are, although there was another major issue that he intervened in very decisively last year. First of all there was the corporate fund that was passed by the constitutional amendment to reform the judicial system, which was simple. It was the two trial court system, he had a great head in that. Last year they passed the little FTC Act, consumer protection act, that gives the Attorney General and the state the same power that the Federal Trade Commission has. The governor's consumer record has been very good. His conservation record has been very good. My point is that with a couple of exceptions, he has appointed some people that I do not think have the interest of conservation that much at heart. The chairman, **David Levin**, stepped down to work on his campaign with his former law partner in Pensacola. [Askew] and Levin seems to have a development orientation.

I: What did he fail to do?

D: What did Askew fail to do? I think one of his most conspicuous failures, and it is no real fault of his, is the fact that we still have a fractured governmental structure, but that is constitutionally and politically oriented. It is beyond his power to change. It has to do with his cabinet system. Another area that he might have been able to persuade the legislature to do something that it has not done yet, would be to merge the parole commission with the prison system. They are competing agencies right now, very jealous and spiteful of each other, you can imagine what that does to the guys in the camp. They stay there _____. There is one newspaper editor who observed that the parole commission's idea of deciding whether a man is ready for parole is to leave him in prison until he becomes a vegetable. He could have pushed a little harder for a reorganization of that. I think that he has been a little slow at reorganizing the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, which is the state's largest. The new director is a very good man, O. J. Keller [Oliver J. Keller, Secretary of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services, 1975-1976], very progressive and admits that they have problems. [He knows that] potential clients fall through the jurisdictional cracks between the agencies. But on balance I would have to say that Askew's record has been excellent, compared to the other Florida governors.

I: How about on the question of race relations?

D: He is superb there. Going back two years, the question with busing, a new school year was going to open and there was going to be more busing. Askew, in a summer commencement speech at the University of Florida, dealt directly

with the issues and none of us liked busing. He said for the sake of the school children, we have got to accept it and not fight over it. He said let us not have any turmoil when the schools open.

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D: . . . helping keep things calmer than they might otherwise have been. He had to face a particular crisis the following year when, aware that George Wallace [Four-time Governor of Alabama, Independent Party candidate for 1968 U.S. Presidential election] was going to be in the balance, a group of Republicans in the Senate joined by some idiotic conservative Democrats stamped the whole legislature into putting a straw ballot against busing on the referendum the same day that George Wallace was running [in the Florida Democratic primary]. The only concession that the governor could make was, he probably could have vetoed the bill, but they would have overridden it and passed it over his veto. The only thing that he succeeded in doing was to get them to add a question, do you believe in equal educational opportunity for all children regardless of their color or their national or religious background. So both questions were on the ballot. Should there be a federal constitutional amendment to prohibit busing and do you believe in equal educational opportunity. Askew figured that on the pages of history, one question would cancel out the other and they did. The equal educational opportunity question actually drew a slightly larger yes vote than the anti-busing question did. But ever since then there have been politicians trying to brand Askew as a supporter of busing. I imagine that is one of the attacks that Jerry Thomas [Florida House of Representatives, 1960-1964, Florida Senator, 1964-1972, President of the Florida Senate, 1971-1972] will use, the Republican candidate for governor.

I: Do you think it will wash?

D: No. For one thing the governor can point out that Jerry Thomas voted against holding the referendum, straight out. However, Thomas was against it for philosophical reasons. He said that a straw ballot is useless and we all know it.

I: So does that mean that race as an issue in Florida politics is dead?

D: Not dead, never dead. It is just an echo of what it used to be.

I: Is that one of the major changes that has occurred in this state in the last ____? What do you think Askew would do in a head to head vote in a presidential primary in Florida against Wallace?

D: I think that he would beat Wallace. I think that it would be close, but I think he would beat him. Every poll has been taken. The poll published by conservative newspapers like the *Orlando Sentinel*, they show Askew with 75 percent

supportable people.

- I: How do you explain that margin? A southern governor who has been in office four years, ____ after the third year or fourth year that his approval ratings had just dropped way down to ____ points. Is that difficult? Also, Is it difficult in the sense that he can run for a second term? You find this level of popularity, based on what, tax reform? What is it that sustains his popularity?
- D: First of all, he kept his campaign promise. No one can accuse him of not doing that. He got tax reform.
- I: But other governors have done that too.
- D: He has continued to project an image of personal ethics. A couple of his department heads have been caught in minor scandals. No one has been caught stealing. Adams was probably the worst example. Adams, [the] Lieutenant Governor, who was trying to run the Commerce Department, was caught using an employee of the department to run the Lieutenant Governor's private farm. The House came very near to impeaching him for that. Instead they voted to censure him instead.
- I: Can you imagine anybody doing so much as yawning in Louisiana for that? That would be considered such a minor ripoff that nobody would report it.
- D: What happened in this case was the press reported it, and I suppose that was one of the reasons that he was not impeached...
- I: In Louisiana, if the press had reported it, no one would have cared.
- D: Who cares?
- I: That would be considered legal graft, which is acceptable. A lot of good government people . . .
- D: It is no longer considered that way here.
- I: Would it have been five or ten years ago?
- D: Claude Kirk was caught doing little things like that all the time. Similar little petty graft and what people were irritated about is that they never really did anything about it. But I think after Kirk, they decided enough was enough. And here for example, the legislature had a long shot chance to exert its independence. They could not exactly get away with it yet against a cabinet member. They still had too much political power. But the Lieutenant Governor had no political power of his own. Besides Tom Adams was sort of a bad name

among the legislature anyhow. The guy had been begging money for years to pay off what he claimed were old campaign debts. Some of us still suspect that they were old personal debts. They just decided that they had had enough of Tom Adams.

I: Was it also the contrast with the standards set by Askew as governor?

D: Yes, I think that had a great deal to do with it. One of the reasons....

I: Martin, when you can point to that as the major [scandal] in four years, when you consider the administration of \$1 billion whatever the government is, that is really kind of small.

D: The stealing has been done by the cabinet. The governor really does not, unless the governor wants to sell a road contract, which this governor has not done to our knowledge. There is not too much that the governor can do except be bribed to sign or veto a bill because the cabinet has so much power. You want a bank charter in the state? You better bribe the comptroller. You want the treasurer to look the other way, you want the insurance commissioner to look the other way, while somebody milks the insurance company? You take the treasurer under your wing, he is the insurance commissioner, he is elected. You want a little bit of hanky-panky on a state construction contract? You have to fix several members of the cabinet because they run the department of general services. That is the one I left out [earlier]--the department of general services.

I: The question that we are looking at is how does he sustain the level of popularity, say 70 percent? Because of the contrast of the people around him? Because of the administrations previous to his?

D: Yes, previous to his.

I: Let me ask you another question on that. You say that he is based strictly on honesty and sincerity. In John Nordheimer's piece in the *New York Times Magazine* on Askew, he quoted Askew as saying that the secret was taking on all the sacred cows at once. Not one at a time, but all at once.

D: Well, he did that.

I: How do you rate Askew as a politician?

D: Pretty good. I rate him pretty good. I think one of Askew's great strengths is to know when to keep his mouth shut. For example, he is not responsible for these investigations that are going on. He had nothing to do with turning in, that I can figure out, with setting the Internal Revenue Service on the comptrollers. He had nothing to do with the investigation of the Education Commissioner. That

began because of a series of articles that our newspaper did. I did not do them, Betty Arsenie did them, pointing out these contracts had curiously gone to a friend of Christians' without bids. She did not have evidence that any bribes had been paid, but she kept hitting hard and hard and hard on it. The only problem is that she is not a good writer. She should have had somebody working with her that knew how to write, but nonetheless, at one point the wire services picked up one of her stories. The *Tampa Tribune* ran a strong editorial demanding that the legislature investigate this and since the House Speaker was from Tampa [T. Terrell Sessums, Speaker of the State House, 1973-1974], Christian suddenly realized, hey they might do this. So acting on the advice of his public relations assistant, the Commissioner said they will probably investigate me anyhow so I will make it look good and I will ask for one. The legislators that did the investigation said that if he had not asked for one there probably would not have been one. So they had this investigation going and it was about to conclude when the liquidators for a bank that had failed down in the Bahamas turned over evidence of a secret account that Christian was keeping down there. That was the key that unlocked the rest and abruptly, the joint legislative auditing committee asked the governor and strongly worded an unanimous statement that the time had come to turn this matter over to the courts. We request that you appoint an outside prosecutor. This was a direct slap at the local prosecutor, who by the way is investigating me now for something that I printed about the supreme court, but our newspaper calls him a pussycat when it came to powerful politicians. That is exactly what he is, he does not want to investigate state government. One of the reasons you have a lot of corruption in state government and in the cabinet system is because the local prosecutors in Tallahassee have never given a damn about it. Anyhow, after the auditing committee and the auditor general who works for the legislature had developed all this information the governor was challenged, he was in a position where he had to do something. No governor wants to go after an equal official who sits on the same board of directors with him, but the governor did not hesitate when the auditing committee gave him a clear choice to do something or not to do something. Not only did he do it, but he picked the best prosecutor in the state of Florida. Ed Austin [State Attorney in Jacksonville] stands very high in my book as an honest man, a good prosecutor, a fair man, a thorough man. He is one of the few prosecutors in Florida who has set up a special unit to concentrate on major crimes and political corruption. The two cracker jack guys did not do that. They know how to do cash flow.

- I: I am having trouble understanding this. You have a very aggressive press. A large press coverage with a lot of investigative reporting. So my assumption is that there is less fraud and corruption in this state government than you would find in most state governments. Maybe my assumption is wrong.
- D: I understand that this cabinet system is covering up a lot of it.

- I: You saying that the executive branch, that is the governor, outside of the cabinet system, has been fairly honest? The corruption has occurred in the cabinet system?
- D: It used to occur in the governor's [office] too. Let me give you a story that has been told to me. The story concerns a former governor, Farris Bryant [Governor of Florida, 1961-1965]. This is hearsay now. It was told to me by a state senator who said that it was told to him by the man who paid the bribe. The man who paid the bribe was an insurance agent in town. He now figures in the investigation of the comptroller. He has been a witness before the federal grand jury. The word is that he apparently slipped the comptroller \$20,000 of the funds of a Miami bank through a false loan that was never repaid. Back when Bryant was governor, Bryant called him in one day and said, how would you like to write the insurance for the road department. He said I would love to. It was a \$100,000 annual premium. The governor said fine, but he said will you do me a personal favor. I would like to have a chance to buy some stock in that bank that you are organizing. So he said, all right I will sell you the stock. So he sold him \$30,000 worth and took a note back. A year later he was called in and asked if he would like to renew the insurance on the road department, and, of course, he would like to. He was also asked how he would like to tear up that note. These things went on. The problem has been and why corruption has flourished in the
- I: Is that particular thing documented?
- D: No. It probably never will be and the statue of limitations has long since run [out] on all parties involved.
- I: Do you think that was commonplace?
- D: Yes.
- I: Are you convinced, in your own mind, that actually occurred?
- D: Yes. Considering the reputation of the state.
- I: Let us get back to Askew's popularity again.
- D: Let me finish one thing about the comptroller. The granting of a state bank charter is a purely discretionary function. He does not have to explain why he grants or denies one. Because the state has been growing so rapidly, the stock in a new bank has automatically been a profit. Both, who are allowed by the organizers to subscribe, are guaranteed a profit. No element of risk whatsoever. The profit is as high as 100 to 200 percent within two years of capital gains on their stock. The comptroller has not had to show charter files to be examined by

the press or anybody. He has not had to explain why he grants or denies a charter. The situation is made to order for corruption. Apparently the Internal Revenue Service has found a great deal of it. In terms of the governor's office proper, I think that he has been running his [office] clean. He may have people working for him that are not. If they are not we have not found out about it. And to a certain extent Askew's own reputation for honesty has probably kept the press from looking at him as closely as we would have looked at a governor who came in with a reputation of being a crook, as Haydon Burns did, as Claude Kirk quickly established. Getting back to Askew's popularity, I cannot explain it, but perhaps the reason that I cannot explain it is that I am not out talking to the people. I am up here covering government and there is a fundamental difference. I think that the editor of a small weekly newspaper anywhere in the state would be better qualified to explain why Askew remains so popular, than I am.

I: I will go by the press meeting and ask a few of them.

D: That is a good idea. They are out there. We tend to get awfully myopic when we are covering this state government year in and year out. We tend to forget, as you have described in the other southern states, how things are so different in terms of open meetings or the casual attitude towards honest graft.

I: I think that is probably more peculiar to Louisiana than the other states. There are differing degrees in other states. Why do you think Askew is running again? What does he articulate are the goals that he wants to achieve?

D: He has not done that yet. He said that he was not going to give any campaign statements until after the session.

I: Is that a result of being politically astute?

D: I think he wants to pass his program.

I: You mean he wants to be president?

D: Yes I do. I also do not think that he wants to run for it. I think that Reubin Askew rather cherishes the idea that the party is going to turn to him in an hour of great need and say Reubin we need you. That is not going to happen.

I: If he ran in the presidential primary in Florida and defeated George Wallace who was the governor and immediately gained a considerable amount of momentum, would he not?

D: I think that he would defeat George Wallace.

I: Let me ask you a question that concerns me much more. I ask this really as the devil's advocate. With his deeply held religious convictions, does that concern you at all, him being that deeply religious?

D: No.

I: You don't think that there is any chance in his case, knowing the man and having observed him for five years, that fanaticism could develop? He is not that type?

D: No. One of the issues where I disagree with him is capital punishment, he favors it and I do not. There are some people that I could cheerfully pull the switch on. It is not that I am a goody, goody it is just that as a social policy, I think that you can make a mistake. That is what bothers me. Another issue where his religious views have blinded him is in the matter of liquor regulations. It is always open to scandal because you have a monopolistic quota system for package stores. You have all these licensing and quota systems set up to control the sale of alcoholic beverage, which he thinks restricts their availability. They do not restrict their availability. Both the legislative study and his own planners in the department of administration have had no axe to grind. They have recommended that it would be a more honest system, less vulnerable to graft, and less susceptible to manipulation by **Lawrence Chains** if you had no quotas and just let people open liquor stores wherever the zoning laws and the supply and demand factors would justify them. The immediate effect of this would be to make all the licenses, licenses in Florida, have a loan value. Banks have been known to lend \$30,000 just because there is a liquor license. Not on the building, just on the piece of paper. They can be sold from anywhere between \$30,000 to \$60,000. There are some chains that have bought up licenses and not used them, just to keep the competition out. Nobody is permitted to apply for, when a new quota opens up, when the new census justifies more licenses, no one is permitted to get one if he already has one. That is fiction, because as soon as he gets one he can turn around and broker it to someone who has a whole chain. So even if they make these things non-negotiable, it would be less subject to manipulation. But to remove or repeal the quota entirely and take the property value out of the license, would be a very wholesome thing. Because Askew has this deep Presbyterian religious attitude against drinking, he is afraid to support any move that he thinks erroneously might make it easier for people to drink. He is not a prude, in the sense that, for example, he has staff members who drink. They are not drunks, but they drink socially. He will go to parties, and I have been at parties with him where everybody was drinking and he was not. He would be drinking orange juice or Coke, something like that. He does not indicate personal disapproval of people who do. He is also one of the few governors who refuses to serve it at the [governor's] mansion. He says I do not mind people drinking in their homes and I do not mind going to their homes when they drink, but this is my home and if I do not believe in liquor than

it would be hypocritical and wrong of me to serve it. So there have been a lot of jokes in Tallahassee about going to the governor's mansion and drinking apple juice. I respect him for it.

I: George _____, he had the same problem, you know how he would handle it? What happened was, people would arrive at his house for dinner stoned because they knew they would not get a drink, so he figured that was really bad, so he started to serve liquor at his home and at the executive mansion. That is the way that he got around it.

D: Nobody dares go to Reubin Askew's home stoned.

I: You are saying that the imposition of that mores on drinking, [and] perhaps the one on the death penalty, is related to his religious convictions?

D: Yes. I think so.

I: How does that make him dangerous?

D: It does not.

I: How does it limit it in that?

D: Mainly because he does not try to force his views on other people. He does not make the people who work for him sign a pledge either. I have never seen him look down on people or act as though he disapproves of people who drink. He has been able to draw the line between his own personal conduct, his own personal behavior, and that of other people. I would say that the great majority of his personal staff drink socially in his presence.

I: Then you think that the major thrust of his deep religious convictions, in so far as public policy is concerned, is in the area of social concerns?

D: Mores. Yes.

I: Do you think it is enough to inhibit him?

D: Inhibit him from doing what?

I: From making rational judgements about public policies?

D: No, he is saying that it is more of expanding his social consciousness, if I read correctly what you are saying. I do not see Reubin Askew as a religious zealot. I see him as a deep religious man, but not as a religious zealot.

I: Do you think that the national press corps, if they started to cover him in depth,

would see him as believable?

D: I think so. The people like the Nordheimers have gone away impressed.

I: Are they going to see him as believable? Is it too good to be true?

D: Not at first.

I: Did you?

D: Did I? Yes, because I covered him in the legislature. I saw him as believable, I did not think he had a prayer of a chance until two things happened. One, in 1970, he was from Pensacola, remember he was not known. He had been a very hard working legislator for twelve years, but nobody knew that, no one down state knew that. He did two things [that] made him known very quickly, one was his corporate tax platform which reversed the position that he had taken in the legislature, and which he acknowledged that he had reversed. The other thing that he did was get Tom Adams as a running mate. Tom had been on the scene for years and had a large legion of devoted followers, although Tom was controversial. It was a calculated risk that Askew had to take. He could not get anybody who was well-known to run with him. They did not think that he had a chance. Tom Adams, who had already decided to get out of politics anyhow, was the only person who would take the risk, going down in defeat with an unknown politician from Pensacola. When he got in the run-off, it was all over but the shouting. Everybody knew, Claude Kirk knew, the night that Reubin Askew got into the Democratic Primary run-off, that it was all over. I do not know if Kirk knew it, but all of Kirk's people knew it because they were at his headquarters that night. When Askew and Chiles together got in that run-off, that was the upset. Both of them had calculated their strategies just towards making the run-off, because they knew from that point on it would be down hill. And it was. 1970 was a very fascinating year. Let me give you another example that Reubin Askew is not a religious zealot to worry about. He may be a _____ Christian, but all his law partners in Pensacola were all Jewish. In fact, [it was] one of the things that Reubin Askew kept getting hit with, he was the target of some anti-Semitic campaigns. David Levin's law firm, that has been used against him, never enough to hurt him, so he is not a religious bigot. That is the important difference to draw.

I: Do you see a national future for him?

D: If he is willing to go for it. Last time I talked to him about it, he seemed to have this concept that he would not go out and seek it. I think that is foolish. I think he would like to be president, but he is foolish.

I: Do you view the thing, like waiting for divine providence? If he should have it, he

will have it?

D: He might, I do not know. He also might be very cannily and cagily waiting until after he is re-elected governor before he lets himself

I: That is my question

D: One of the things that killed Claude Kirk . . .

I: You think that he is quite capable of that?

D: I think he is capable of it, just by common sense having read recent Florida history. As soon as Claude Kirk was elected governor he started running for the Republican vice presidential nomination. At least Claude knew his limits. He knew that he could never be president. He was openly campaigning for the vice presidential nomination. In fact, at one point, he even had bumper stickers printed up that said Nixon/Kirk.

I: To me, he has the political instincts to realize that this could be a viable strategy. To me, if I was trying to think of a strategy for him to become a democratic nominee for president, I would do exactly what he has done. I would shun all national publicity, I would avoid appearing on *Meet the Press*. I would make my record as governor of Florida, get re-elected big and then I would run in the presidential primary in Florida which would be the second primary. If you beat George Wallace in Florida, you are going to be off and running.

D: That is why I said earlier in the interview, that Reubin Askew had the good sense to know when to keep his mouth shut.

I: Is there anybody on the Tallahassee press corps that is openly hostile towards him?

D: Yes, there are [some]. I think that you will find [that] they are a minority of course. Dave Schultz of the *Palm Beach Post* is not particularly hostile toward Askew, but he is especially hostile to the beverage bill. Somehow he holds Askew responsible for that. Then your Jacksonville press is not too terribly friendly to the governor. David Lawrence of the *Orlando Sentinel* does not dislike Reubin Askew personally, rather admires him, I think, but is continually doing hatchet jobs on the Askew administration. That is the line that his paper expects of him, or he thinks that his paper expects of him. However, since the *Orlando Sentinel* hates Tom Adams with a passion they will probably endorse Askew in the primary. The Jacksonville paper is the only one that I can see him losing at this time in the Democratic primary. They are already setting the scene for that. You have to look at their ownership to understand why. The railroad...Seaboard Coast Line Railroad.

- I: They are being hit by the corporate tax?
- D: Oh, they fought it bitterly. In fact, at one point Askew had gotten the president of the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad as an individual to serve in his committee that was promoting the referendum on the corporate tax. The man quietly resigned from the committee. We discovered later that he resigned because Winn-Dixie had threatened the railroad that if you do not get Tom Osborne off that committee, we will see if we cannot find another way to ship all the stuff that we ship on the railroad. We have enough trucks of our own to do it. That is what was done. The Davis brothers, they controlled Florida for years in their partnership with Ed Ball [Head of St. Joe's Paper Co. and DuPont holdings in Florida]. They do not do it any more and they have not quite gotten used to it.
- I: Will they be looking for a candidate of their own?
- D: They have one, Jerry Thomas.
- I: So you are saying that Thomas' major financial support will come from the Davis brothers? Who are the Davis brothers?
- D: Winn-Dixie.
- I: I know they are Winn-Dixie, but how many are there?
- D: There are two. Although the other people who do not like the way things are going and are not making as much money as they would like to will be supporting Thomas too. And Republicans will be supporting him just because of plain party loyalty.
- I: Will he run into much Republican resentment for being a recent switcher?
- D: No, that is because so many Republicans are recent switchers. To be anything in this state you had to be a Democrat. That has changed now. You can have viable political future as a Republican.
- I: He switched fairly recently. When did he switch?
- D: When Spiro Agnew [U.S. Vice President, 1968-1973] was here in late 1972, I think December 1972 or January 1973, I am not sure which. He was the highest ranking convert they got and virtually they only wanted Agnew's visit here to encourage mass defections by Republicans. But it was an utter disaster. It just did not happen. The thing that will hurt Thomas is that he is unspeakably vain. He is impressed with his own importance. One current joke about him is that if he is elected they will lay a red carpet between the [Governor's] mansion and the capitol. He actually introduced the science of heraldry and pageantry to the

Florida state senate. It had all the same little old formal rituals of all southern legislatures, but never saw any need, never in the glory days of the pork chop gang, did they see a need for a senate seal or coat of arms, but they got both under Thomas--single handedly.

I: The Pork Chop Gang was the name derived from the reapportionment. As first applied, what did it mean?

D: You had, even under the old constitution, a requirement of equal representation, at least in one house, that was never met. So starting in 1955, LeRoy Collins kept the legislature in almost continuous sessions trying to achieve it. I think three times they voted out constitutional amendments that were not complete reapportionment. Some ways were worse than what we had. But the people voted [it] down three times in a row. This fight went on for years and years and years, but at one point when they had a group of senators who had taken a blood oath not to let the people get control of the legislature and I think in a fit of frustration one day Jim Clendinen [journalist, *Tampa Tribune*, July 13, 1955 issue] of the *Tampa Tribune* wrote an editorial about them, describing them as the pork chop gang and it stuck.

I: End interview, Martin Dyckman. No more transcription.

[End of the interview.]