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This is an interview with William A. Grear, commissioner in Belle<sup>1</sup>glade, FL.  
It took place on July, 14, 1975.

I: Mr. William A. Grear, Commissioner. Okay, Mr. Grear. What year did you first register to vote?

G: <sup>Um,</sup> Nineteen sixty--let's see, it was 1965, I believe it was.

I: Sixty-five? All right. Now what year were you first eligible to vote?

G: Nineteen sixty-six.

I: Okay. Now how are you registered?

G: Republican.

I: All right, but they're looking more for whether it was a local registration board or federal examiners?

G: No, it was a local registration board.

I: <sup>a/c,</sup> Did the local registrars ever turn you down when you applied to register?

G: No.

I: Okay. Have voter registration drives been held in the district in which you hold office?

G: Every year.

I: Okay. Now if your answer to the preceding question was yes, could you name some of the organizations, local or national, that held the registration drive?

G: Usually, candidates who are running for office are interesting in registration drives. And each year around about election time, those persons interested in being elected to office--they will organize and get the registration drive underway. There are the Men's Civic League, the Women's Civic League, and <sup>uh,</sup> there's one other organization. The

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G: Elite Community Club--it's a group of fourteen women and this is one of their projects each year.

I: Okay. When were these voter registration <sup>drives</sup> held?

G: They're held each year.

I: Every year?

G: Yes.

I: Now how successful were they?

G: Very successful. I remember in 1969 when I ran for office we had about sixty people with one paid employee who was in charge of the voter registration drive which brought our registration books up for blacks to approximately even with the white voter <sup>register-uh,</sup> registered people. So in the city of Belle ~~glade~~ at this particular time we're running about neck and neck as far as registered voters are concerned. It's about fifty-fifty.

I: <sup>O.K.</sup> Are there any things which prevent blacks from registering to vote in your district?

G: No.

I: Okay. Now here's one that we have to rate. Do you have a pen handy?

G: Uh huh.

I: All right. If you'll just comment briefly on each one that you <sup>can,</sup> put down. Please rate how important you think each of the following items are in preventing blacks from registering to vote in your area--  
economic dependence on whites?

G: Preventing blacks from registering to vote?

I: Uh huh.

G: That's not important in this area. Fear of physical violence from whites--not important in this area. Complicated registration forms--

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G: <sup>kin,</sup> we conduct most of our registration and blacks are <sup>handling it</sup> ~~handled~~ and as well as whites. And those questions on those forms which are, perhaps, complicated for some are explained thoroughly to the people. So I would say it's fairly important. Poor registration hours--no. We have no problem there. We go out on the streets and set up and catch people coming from work, going to work or going to town or what not so I would say that's not too important. Registration not held often enough or registration effects.

I: Re-registration effects.

G: Oh, re-registration effects.

I: By not---

G: <sup>Uh,</sup> Well, I would say in our area, yearly is a pretty good way to keep up with those that are purged from the books for violation of not voting within two years. So we check these fairly and go back and send those people letters or have a personal contact with them. So that's not important here. Indifference of blacks to voting. Now <sup>there</sup> ~~that~~ is a major problem. For many years, as you are aware, <sup>eh</sup> ~~of~~, blacks thought that it didn't make any difference whether they voted or not. So there are some that still have that thinking. So I would say that's very important.

(Telephone rings)

Drawing of district lines, ~~blinds~~. That's not important here. So that covers those seven for you.

I: Okay. Thank you. Now the following questions are asked to gather information on the campaigns. Were you able to campaign freely or were you threatened in your campaign in any way?

G: Never.

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I: Were you ever handicapped by a lack of campaign funds?

G: Well, <sup>uh</sup> ~~in~~ 1969, that was the only time that I have asked for support from the citizens. Since that time, and I've held office two terms since then, I have financed my own campaign which I intend to do again this year. I don't ask anyone for any money.

I: It's the best way. Why did you decide to run for office?

G: Well, I felt that there was a need for more communication from the--if you want to put it this way--the West Burrough section of our town which is predominantly black. I felt that there just wasn't enough communication--the needs of the people. And I felt that I could be an instrument by which we could get that communication started and get some of the needed things that we need in this area. Now the west section is not only comprised by blacks, but the majority of the persons living in the West Burrough are black. We had fights in this burrough, too. So it has been my aim ever since I've been commissioner to serve all of the people. And that I intend to do as long as I'm commissioner. But, as I stated, the large percentage of people living in the West Burrough are black. And I felt like that they need more communication with a governing body as to the needs of the people.

I: As you said before you're a registered Republican?

G: Republican.

I: Some of these questions you answered <sup>but</sup> ~~by~~ I'll have to ask you again for the second time.

G: You sure can.

I: Now what were the two or three most important issues that you campaigned on?

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- G: <sup>uh,</sup> There was a need for more housing. There was a need for more drainage and recreation.
- I: Do you think that these problems--these issues were the main problems facing blacks at the time of your campaign?
- G: It definitely was. Housing has improved but we still do not have the amount of housing that we need for blacks in this area. We're working on it now. I have been successful in getting two government programs whereby we have established now what we call Sugar Subdivision East and Sugar Subdivision West, which has provided in the neighborhood of around 400 homes for blacks. But that's <sup>uh,</sup> a far cry from the number of homes that we still need for blacks. Many of them are living in one or two rooms sharing a bathroom where all the occupants in the particular building have to use this one bathroom which is <sup>-is</sup> not good at all healthwise and otherwise. So there is still a great need for housing in this area. And I'm still working on that.
- I: Okay. <sup>uh,</sup> Now the next questions are asked to determine some of the conditions which have enabled blacks to win office in Florida. How were you elected--at large or by district?
- G: District or burrough as they call it here which is the same thing.
- I: I haven't usually heard that word.
- G: Burroughs. Yeah.
- I: I mean I have, but not--Okay. How many people are in your burrough?
- G: <sup>um,</sup> There are about <sup>-about-</sup> let's see, we have--there's about six--seven thousand.
- I: <sup>um,</sup> What percentage of the population in <sup>-his</sup> the burrough is black?
- G: About sixty-five percent.
- I: About what percentage of blacks of voting age in your district are registered to vote?

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G: About eighty percent.

I: Of this percentage <sup>uh,</sup> who are registered to vote, do you estimate--how many of them do you estimate actually voted when you were elected?

G: I would say about seventy percent of them.

I: Do you think you got any votes from whites?

G: Definitely, Yes.

I: Okay. And what percentage of your total vote came from whites?

G: Well, I would say <sup>uh,</sup> about twenty percent.

I: Well, that figures. Okay. In the election in which you won office, how many opponents did you have?

G: One. He was <sup>incumbent,</sup> ~~independent~~.

I: Now was the incumbent white or black?

G: White.

I: What percentage of the total vote did you get?

G: ~~Oh boy!~~ ~~Of what?~~ Laughs It sort of tackles the whole thing, doesn't it?

I: Laughs.

G: I can't remember back that far now. I don't know what that figure was.

I: Do you have <sup>= uh, any</sup> any idea of--in between two numbers as close as possible?

G: I'd say about thirty percent.

I: Okay. We'll put thirty.

G: Okay.

I: Okay. The next section--the questions are going to be asked to determine how well black officials in Florida have been able to benefit those they represent. In what ways do you think you have helped blacks in your district by holding office?

G: Well, it has increased the communication that was lacking as I stated earlier. It has given us an opportunity to show the white community

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G: that blacks can serve you as well as whites can serve you. And as faithful and honest, and that is one of the main objectives of my running for office in 1969. To really show the people that we will serve you just as well and just as faithful as a white candidate. I'm speaking of the total <sup>uh,</sup> population.

F: Uh huh.

G: There are many blacks who shy away from whites even though there is a need for many, many things. They will not go to them. Now by being on the commission, it gives them the opportunity to feel at ease to come and talk with me about any problem which I in turn can share with the commission. And I think this is one of the big things that was missing here when I decided to run. So really, it <sup>had</sup> just opened the door for just frankly putting on the table the needs, the desires of the black community.

F: ~~Good. It's kind of an interesting day.~~ <sup>Ah! We'll have an interesting tape</sup> (Music in background--choral)

What, if anything, has prevented you from doing a better job, especially in regard to benefiting blacks in your district?

G: Well, you always hope that you're fellow commissioners will all work with you, but this has not always been the case with me. I have had possibly two out of the other four who are white that will--have worked faithfully with me. I would have liked to have had 100 percent cooperation, but it just wasn't forthcoming. So I learned to be patient and look for openings where maybe one of the other commissioners were asking for something that I had been asking for in my district and had been denied. I wait for them to ask for the same thing perhaps in one of their districts and then I slip in the door and I get what I'd <sup>for</sup>asked and had originally been turned down on. So you have to be alert at

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G: all times in trying to take advantage of your opportunity. This is it.

I: [inaudible]. All right. We have another one of these questionnaires. Okay. These are to see which prevents you from doing a better job ~~in~~ benefiting blacks.

G: Office has no real authority? That is not important. Out voted by white officials--that's very important. Not enough revenue available--that's very important. I'm familiar with the administrative duties. Perhaps that was important my first two years but not now. I have learned considerably.

I: Uh huh.

G: Lack of cooperation--that's fairly important. Lack of cooperation from blacks. Now you wouldn't believe this, but that's very important. Lack of cooperation <sup>uh,</sup> from state officials--that's fairly important. Lack of cooperation from federal officials--that's very important.

I: Okay. These last three, since we got a strong response on that, would you care to comment on any of six, seven, or eight?

G: <sup>uh,</sup> Here?

I: Yeah.

G: Outvoted by white officials, as I stated previously, many of the things which I thought were important issues and should have received a positive <sup>from</sup> vote ~~my~~ colleagues on the commission, which I didn't get. This sort of vexed me a little, but <sup>as</sup> I grew a little more knowledgable about how to function with my fellow colleagues and as far as government is considered, <sup>why-I</sup> I grew to be patient and, as I said, wait for the openings. Not enough revenue available--this is the one area that really bothers me because <sup>uh,</sup> we do not have any general fund or neither do we have the cooperation of local builders here who could, if they wanted to, <sup>uh,</sup> go out

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G: here and build some more homes and sell them to the people. We - we don't have that cooperation. And I think the revenue is a most essential ingredient of really combatting this problem in housing. I think the federal government needs to come out now with a housing program which will benefit the little people. Now most of your middle income people have bought homes or are in the process of buying a home. Now we're talking about the little people who can't even afford a <sup>a</sup>\$500 down payment on a home. Now something needs to be done in the way of providing homes for them. We no longer have the 231 plan or--we don't have any building program at the present time. And I was hopeful this year that President Ford was going to come out with some bill to help these little people. <sup>uh,</sup> Lack of cooperation from blacks--being a black commissioner and having served for three terms now, you would think that I would have the support of all the blacks, but I do not. Blacks are envious of each other. And I think this is the greatest weapon that the white man has used over a period of years and is still using. And <sup>I</sup> wonder when are blacks going to get wise to themselves and say, "Look, let's support this guy ~~big daddy~~ a hundred percent." And maybe things will get a little better for us. But it hasn't come yet, but it's getting better. It's not as bad as it used to be. Lack of cooperation from federal officials--I've rated that very important because at one time, I'd say two or three years ago, we were classified on the top of being able to get funds for building programs, streets, sidewalks, sewer~~s~~ and so forth, and now we're having a devil of a time just getting an application in and getting it approved. And why the switch all of a

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G: sudden I don't know because I can recall, say, about eight years ago a company came in here--motion picture company--and they shot this picture--a motion picture "Harvest of Shame" and we were rated on the top for federal support at that time. And it never came through. So, <sup>I</sup> see the federal officials <sup>-are</sup> bogging down on their responsibility to the communities who really need the help and should get it.

I: Okay. All right. Are these questions related to what you said about lack of cooperation from blacks. Has criticism or lack of support from the black community hindered you from holding office, that is, do some blacks not cooperate with you because they believe you are only a token in government and have no real authority?

G: <sup>Um,</sup> Well, that might apply to some people, yes, because I can recall just a few months ago there was a matter of <sup>a trailer.</sup> ~~betrayal~~. Instead of coming to me and talking to me--now I'm speaking about a black person-- instead of them coming to me and talking <sup>about-</sup> to me about how you go about getting a permit, whether a permit was necessary, and all the ramifications regarding the whole situation, they went ahead to <sup>-a</sup> white person who gave them the wrong information. Then, finally, they had to come back to me and say, "Look, would you help me out. I'm in a jam now." Because <sup>uh,</sup> they were threatened with having to move the trailer from where it was. But had they come to me in the first place, I could have solved that whole problem for them, and they wouldn't have had <sup>that</sup> ~~to-~~ well, a matter of time there of indecision as to whether or not they were going to have to move. But, as explained to me by the person, they had heard <sup>a</sup> rumors <sup>about</sup> of me that I was against trailers. But I'm really not against trailers, but I'm against trailers going

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G: into certain areas of my district. Say, for instance, here's a man who's built a sixty, seventy or eighty thousand dollar home. And there's a person who owns a lot right next to them who wants to put a trailer in there. Well now, I won't agree to that. So the rumor got out that I was against trailers which I was not, but rather than come to me, he went to somebody else and he got the wrong information. But after I met with his group and explained my position and got their little problem straightened out for them, now I have their total support. And this is one of the large churches here. So I think I've picked up some support from that one little incident, but there are many many more things that are rumored~~s~~. Such as, with our community development program which will get underway tomorrow. There--I called a meeting<sup>um</sup> two weeks ago to explain the purpose of the program, what benefits would be coming in on the program, and I circulated notices and took my time and hired some little fellows to pass out the notices for the people to come to the meeting. We passed out something like 2,000 notices. I had thirty-six people to show up--blacks. Well, I've learned through the years take the people that show up and do the best you can. Don't give up. Just go ahead and do the best you can. Well, anyway, after circulated the notice to come to the meeting<sup>uh</sup> one young man came to the meeting and he says--because I was complaining about small attendance at the meeting, he said, "Well, let me tell you why you don't have more people here. A rumor was spread that in order to get this money<sup>uh</sup>, you would have to turn in your deed to

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G: your house and all this." And I said, "Well, my heavens. Where did that come from?" But this was circulated by some blacks. Basically, <sup>the</sup> younger blacks. <sup>uh,</sup> I don't seem to possess a real good rapport with them because <sup>uh,</sup> seven years ago there was an organization of blacks here known as Colby. Colby did not see things like I saw them. Colby did have some good suggestions, but their method of implementation was not the way that I would go about it. Now I stated earlier that it has been my aim to show all of the people that blacks can serve you as well as anyone else. Now the way they wanted me to implement the things that they were suggesting was the wrong way and I would not go along with it. So they kind of froze up on me and I haven't been able to re-establish that rapport with the younger blacks that I need. It's getting better but I need a lot more support from the younger blacks.

I: Do you feel that white officials treat you differently from the other officials?

G: Oh, definitely. Sure. I can recall when we go away on business trips and things --one time in Tampa, I believe it was, all of them had rooms on the thirteenth <sup>floor,</sup> and I think they put me on something like the ninth floor. So I questioned this. I'm not one that will swallow everything and don't say anything. When I feel that I'm being mistreated then I'm going to question it. So I questioned that. And they told me <sup>at the time</sup> that it was just a mistake. And after questioning it then I was moved up to the thirteenth floor with them.

I: ~~Who would want~~ <sup>I wouldn't want</sup> to be on the thirteenth floor. <sup>[Laughter]</sup> Do they consider you the spokesman for the blacks, and are you able to raise only certain issues?

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G: Well, in most cases <sup>ah,</sup> any question that comes up, it's brought to me and to my attention. And they expect me to carry it out from there. <sup>Um,</sup> We have a couple of other people; W.C. Taylor, Jerry Roberts-- many times they will go to them. Now Jerry is a younger black. He has a very good rapport with the young blacks. In fact, he was the head of Colby. And he has maintained that rapport with them. So I figure that maybe I better get close to Jerry because he has what I need. So he and I, in the last three years, have been working very close together with each other. If a problem is presented to him, it is immediately brought to me. And then either I will work on it or he and I will work on it together. So I would say that, basically, yes, I'm the spokesman for the black community now.

I: ~~Make sure~~ <sup>Big circle around that one</sup> ~~on that one.~~ What services have you provided blacks in your district that they did not have before you took office? Please give examples.

G: Well, housing, for one. Drainage is another. Health services ~~or where~~ people were reluctant to try to reach out and get those services that whites had been getting all along. As I said, there are blacks that are little shy. And <sup>uh,</sup> when I find a person who needs help, I'll reach out and get those services for them. Or I will take them to get those services. So, <sup>-I</sup> I would say in the way of housing, health standards, drainage. Drainage was very poor in this area. We had a wide open ditch right over here on Eighth Street which was very very dangerous. We've gotten that covered up, and better drainage in it.

I: Okay. Would you please rate how effective you think you have been in each of the following service areas in terms of benefiting blacks?

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G: Police protection--very effective.

I: Please comment on these--feel free to comment on anything you'd like.

G: Well, before I became commissioner, several incidents were reported to me--officers. And this doesn't only hold true for white officers. It was black officers were guilty of the same thing. They were harassing the young people, and they were calling them, "Boy." And they weren't showing the proper respect for the people's rights. And in turn, the people <sup>were</sup> would not show the respect for the officer. So they prompted a lot of things that happened <sup>e</sup> to them. So I called for a meeting with the entire department. And the Chief of Police granted me the request, and <sup>uh</sup> I <sup>-I</sup> just simply talked to them and told them that we're living in an age now that you treat a man like a man. Not like a child anymore. So <sup>uh</sup> after that one speech and the chief backed me up. <sup>Now</sup> I'll have to give him credit. He really backed me up. And he told them the same thing. And he suggested to them if there were any in the meeting who felt like they couldn't do this, then now's the time for you to speak up because I don't think we can use you. So this really fostered better relations between the police department and the blacks. Streets and roads--now there's one of our major gripes. We have not gotten what I feel the amount of streets--and-- well, I'll say street repair and street replacements that we need.

Um, I'm aware that we cannot under our present budget get everything that we need in a few years, but I had hopes that we could possibly get one a year replaced. And I haven't reached that point yet. However, I feel more confident now that we have the community development program going on that we will be able to get new streets or repair those streets that need repairing. So I'd say I've been very effective

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G: there. <sup>uh,</sup> Housing--I'll say somewhat effective. Welfare--this is not one of my major areas of work. However, when I find a citizen--be he or her black or white who I feel needs this service, I will go out of my way to see that they get it. <sup>uh,</sup> This was saying in terms of benefiting <sup>uh-</sup> blacks. I'd say very effective. Employment--now this is very important. <sup>and</sup> ~~I've been~~ very effective <sup>there.</sup> When I became commissioner, we did not have any black department heads. We did not, in many of our functions of government, have blacks working in the departments. I can boast now and say have integrated every department of the city. We also have four black department heads now. So I say I've been very effective in the area of employment. Parks and recreation--I'm speaking of <sup>of</sup> one of the department heads in employment. He is a black and he's in charge of parks and recreation. So I've been very effective there. Water, sewage, and garbage <sup>um,</sup> I would say somewhat effective. We've got problems in that area. Health and hospitals--very effective. Education--now that's a sore spot. I guess I haven't been too effective there. We try but that's a big problem.

I: What were you trying for <sup>are you talking about</sup> integration or--

G: Integration <sup>oh,</sup> that's--integration in my opinion has done nothing for this area except hurt it. Definitely. It's not only hurt the schools. It has hurt the teachers--black teachers who were good teachers and had-- were living here in Belle <sup>glade</sup>. They've had to move away because of this teacher ratio business. And, I'd say not effective at all in that area. <sup>uh,</sup> Younger people--I try to talk to them and show them the value of getting a good education, but here again, as I stated, I do not have that real close rapport with the young blacks that I need. So this is why I have to rely on someone else. Fire protection--oh, very effective

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G: in that area. We've gotten a large number of wooden shacks torn down that were nothing but potential fire hazards. And we have a standard code now that it must be CBS construction. That's the only thing that can be--replace one of these demolished structures. So I've been very effective in that area.

I: Okay. Have you been able to get federal funds for your district?

G: Yes, <sup>uh,</sup> not enough. And I <sup>can attribute</sup> ~~contribute~~ the lack of federal funds to our engineer who I thought--and here again, we must rely on our engineers for many services which we're not familiar with. And this is one of them. He did not pursue or his company did not pursue getting federal funds for us. And I don't know why yet, but anyway, I spearheaded the drive to get rid of the firm and we have fired that firm. And we're in the process right now of looking for another firm to take over our engineering.

I: <sup>Um,</sup> <sup>^</sup> Would you please list some of the more important federal grants that you have received? And the amounts if possible?

G: <sup>uh,</sup> We had one recently of \$75,000.00--sewer. <sup>Um,</sup> We are presently working under the Community Development Program which we will get \$447,000.00 each year for the next five years. Let me think. A couple of years ago we had a federal grant. Oh, that was pertaining to sewage, too. <sup>Dolphon-</sup> We had <sup>^</sup> Dolph Rand ~~^~~ Company. We had a contract with them which was federally funded to check our sewage system for leaks and this sort of thing and repair the leaks. <sup>I think that ran some--</sup> ~~In fact, Rand~~ <sup>^</sup> --I think it was in the \$200,000.00 bracket a month. And that's basically the federal programs that we have been able to <sup>uh,</sup> <sup>^</sup> participate in. Hopefully, under a new engineering fund we hope to get more sewage treatment plants and streets <sup>- and</sup> <sup>^</sup> this sort of thing--homes and whatever else is

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G: available to us.

I: Okay. Have you as an elected official or as part of a local committee been able to bring industry or retail stores into your area?

G: No, we're in a very unique situation here in that we do not have a railroad access out of here. <sup>um,</sup> Frankly, our sewage system would not be large enough to promote too much industry other than what we already have in the way of farming. So we're <sup>-we're</sup> sort of handicapped.

We had at one time a--the firm of Minute Maid wanted to come in here.

But the <sup>uh,</sup> sewage problem plus the shipping problem was the big reason that we didn't get it. So I <sup>-I</sup> imagine we will remain <sup>uh,</sup> in sugar and farming.

I: Okay. Have you been able to see that blacks are hired fairly in local government?

G: Definitely. That's been my major concern. And promoted.

I: Would you like to elaborate on that?

G: Well, we had several blacks who had been working for the city ~~for~~ any number of years in our water department, our street department, our <sup>um,</sup> let's see--water department, I would say in our building and grounds department who had the capability of being leaders, but they were being passed over. They would hire a new person and bring them in over the old employees who had experience and know how. And I <sup>I+-</sup> put a stop to that. <sup>^</sup> It was a long process of trying to get my point across and arguing with them, but eventually I got them to see my point. And I've been effective in getting this problem straightened out.

I: Okay. Has federal revenue sharing helped your district or not?

G: Yes, indeed. <sup>uh,</sup> I've been concerned with recreation, which my colleagues--

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G: I'll say some of my colleagues, were not in favor of. And at certain, <sup>uh,</sup> meetings they would state as much--that they felt that it wasn't the city's responsibility to provide recreation. And that's where I differed with them because I feel that it's every city's responsibility to provide recreation for its citizens. Revenue sharing--we have been able to somewhat clear up this point, <sup>To</sup> many--for many of the projects which we were not federally funded for, revenue sharing has helped us, <sup>uh,</sup> in our new sewage treatment plan--in streets. We are spending now on the average of <sup>[fifty to seventy-five thousand dollars]</sup> \$50 to \$75,000.00 a year on streets now. So I can see in hopefully a period of time here, we will be able to get some of those needed streets that we've--that I complained about earlier that we were not getting. So--<sup>and</sup> <sup>uh,</sup> in the area of alcoholism-- federal revenue sharing monies have gone to help those programs which I feel a great need for, because alcoholism is a sickness, <sup>and</sup> it needs to be treated. Revenue sharing has helped the school system. Since private schools came into the city of Belle<sup>g</sup>slade, our public school has been hurting. It's <sup>gone</sup> ~~been~~ lacking for a lot, <sup>that</sup> ~~but~~ we were able to get some contributions from the doctors, the farmers. We no longer get those contributions anymore in our public school system. It all goes to private schools/ now. So the programs by which <sup>blacks</sup> were benefiting from when we had this, <sup>uh,</sup> what you would say integration of the school, we no longer have, <sup>So</sup> blacks are getting less out of these programs. Federal revenue sharing has replaced that--those monies that the doctors and the farmers no longer give to us. So it's helped tremendously.

I: Was there an upsurge of private schools all around town?

G: Yes, definitely. Definitely. When integration came along, private

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G: schools--they boomed in this area. And they're still booming.

I: Okay. Have there been any black protests, sit-ins, boycotts, or riots in your city in the last ten years?

G: No riots. We've had sit-ins, yes. Very effective sit-ins--integrated all the restaurants. <sup>um</sup> We have had no major problem of violence in the city of Belle ~~g~~ <sup>β</sup>lade. We have had threats. Chief Goodlit and I have worked very cooperatively together. And many attempts to start something, he and I had met with five or six hundred citizens--angry citizens. And <sup>uh</sup> predominantly, most of them are the younger citizens. In the middle of Fifth Street up there at 3:00 in the morning and we would stand there and talk with them. We found that we weren't getting anywhere talking to a group. We would invite the leader of this particular protest or demonstration to join us with seven of his colleagues whom he would pick. And we would sit down in somebody's restaurant or something--wherever it was available at that time in the morning, and try to talk the situation out. So we have averted any major disaster in our city.

I: Okay. Issues-- I think we've covered that question.

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I: ...the assessment of black politics in Florida in general. Briefly, what is your opinion of Governor Askew?

G: Governor Askew, in my opinion, has done a little, I'll say, towards-- in his past administrations, to help blacks in the state of Florida. I see an uptrend in perhaps his thinking in this latest administration of his to employ blacks and give them <sup>the, uh,</sup> the representation that has been needed in the state of Florida for far too many years. I hope that he will continue on this <sup>uh,</sup> plan of his to surround himself with those blacks who are capable of doing the job. And hopefully, this will pass on to the next administration--whoever the governor will be. And I think this will do a lot towards solving many of black's problems in the state of Florida. You need that governmental support. You need it. And <sup>where else</sup> ~~where else~~ should it start but at the top and work down. So if you don't have it at the top, how can you expect it at local levels. And I think this will do a lot for local <sup>um,</sup> municipalities in the way of looking at black candidates for commissioner and whatever else that they're qualified to be in, in getting them elected or appointed. So I hope he'll continue this.

I: <sup>Um</sup> ~~Okay~~. What is your opinion of other state officials and state representatives?

G: <sup>Uh,</sup> I have found that if there is a problem dealing with our municipality, we have been able to go to our representatives from this area and we have received favorable response <sup>for them --</sup> from them.

I: Do you think that winning and holding office in Florida has been worth the effort? Could you please explain your answer?

G: Oh, definitely. <sup>Uh,</sup> I have, for one, been a person all my life that liked to help people. And I really enjoy doing what I'm doing because it

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G: still gives me the opportunity to help someone each day. And being in this position, you can help more people. It's just surprising when you get the title of commissioner the things that you can do that, uh, before being commissioner you just didn't get to first base in <sup>-in</sup> doing a lot of the things. So it has <sup>-it has</sup> helped tremendously.

I: Okay. These questions now are asked to compile an overall group profile of black elected officials in Florida. No individual answers will be reported. Um, here's your basic? question \_\_\_\_\_ type of office held ~~commissioner~~. Commissioner ~~commissioner~~?

G: ~~I'm~~ a Commissioner.

I: Now the date you were first elected?

G: In 1969, September <sup>- September</sup> 16, which was my birthday.

I: And <sup>um,</sup> the date you took office?

G: November 1. (Telephone rings)

I: The number of times you've run for office?

G: Three times. This will--I'm presently in my fourth campaign.

I: Now your age. I can give you categories here <sup>[Laughs]</sup> if you'd like.

G: Fifty-two.

<sup>OKAY.</sup>  
I: Your occupation.

G: At the present time or--

I: Before elections.

G: Before elections? I was <sup>-uh, I was</sup> owner of my own barbershop.

I: All right. How long have you had job as a commissioner?

G: I've been here three years.

I: Now, your father's occupation?

G: Musician.

I: Really?

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G: Uh huh.

I: Where is that?

G: Columbus, Ohio.

I: And was he--

G: He's retired now. He plays all instruments. He plays anything, but <sup>the-in</sup> in the orchestra his major instrument was clarinet and saxophone. But he plays all of them.

I: Was he in a symphony or--

G: No, he had his own group. He had a twelve piece band.

I: Wow.

G: Yeah. He's retired now, <sup>though,</sup> He gave it up three years ago. Daddy's eighty-two years old now.

I: And he retired three years--

G: Yeah.

I: That's very good. Okay. Education <sup>uh,</sup> grade school, high school, completed college?

G: No, I haven't completed college yet. I have two more years to go.

I: Oh, <sup>you're</sup> ~~are you~~ in the process?

G: Yep, I'm still going to school.

I: Hmm.

G: I went back to college at the age of forty-two because I saw the need for more education.

I: Where <sup>uh,</sup> around here? Is there a branch of something?

G: Yes, Palm Beach Junior College.

I: Oh.

G: And Florida Atlantic University.

I: Right.

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G: They still give courses out here, too.

I: Oh, I didn't know that.

G: Yes. Uh huh.

I: Salary received from your elected position?

G: <sup>uh,</sup> We get \$500.00 a month.

I: Were you active in the civil rights movement of 1960-66?

G: No, I wasn't, surprisingly.

I: Church to which you belong?

G: Catholic.

I: Okay. Are you an official in your church? And if so, what is your position?

G: No, we do not have officials in our church. [Chuckles]

I: I don't know. <sup>[Chuckles]</sup> Are there other community organizations or activities that you are involved in?

G: Yes, I'm a Mason, an Elk, a men's civic group, a member of the athletic council of Glade Central High School. <sup>uh,</sup> What more can I say--there's so many--formerly on the <sup>uh,</sup> mental--not mental health but Health Advisory Council. I was president of that one year.

I: Okay. Now for some of the final <sup>revised</sup> questions. What effects have running for and holding office had on you personally and on your family?

G: Tremendous. <sup>well,</sup> Well <sup>uh,</sup> in several instances, my children, as perhaps well-- as well as my wife--in my opinion, when the vacancy at the junior high school was created, I felt that she should have been named principal of that school and I still believe because of my political affiliation this was responsible for her not getting that. My children have been subjected to criticism <sup>uh,</sup> sort of--well, shunned from the <sup>little</sup> ~~well~~ ~~the~~ peer groups. That's basically what has happened.

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I: Your children are young or--

G: Yes, I have a daughter, fifteen and a son, twelve.

I: And they're that aware--<sup>uh,</sup> their<sup>um,</sup> peers are that aware of the issue.

G: Sure. Definitely. Yes.

I: [Fades out]

G: Uh huh. My daughter has been able to overcome this somewhat, but my son is going through the process right now and it affects him tremendously. <sup>uh,</sup> And he's talked to me <sup>no later than --</sup> no longer than a couple of weeks ago about a problem. He and another young fellow in the neighborhood were playing together and <sup>well,</sup> you know, as children do. They fall out. And this particular young man's parents became involved and stated to him, "I'll hit you and your old commissioner father, too if he says anything." So when I went down there to talk with him, he denied saying that. But I don't think my child would have told me that had it not been said to him. But <sup>uh</sup> <sup>-these</sup> these are things that happen.

I: I would think that he <sup>would, uh -- he</sup> wouldn't have any problems with your being commissioner. I guess I was thinking wrong.

G: Yes, he has major problems--both of them.

I: Last question--this is for our benefit. Do you know of any other black elected officials in this area that have been in office since 1974?

G: <sup>In --</sup> In this immediate area?

I: Right. Because we have a list and we might have missed somebody.

G: No, not in this immediate area.