

**George A. Smathers**  
United States Senator from Florida, 1951-1969

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**Interview #8: Outside the Senate**

(Tuesday, October 17, 1989)

Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

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**Smathers:** Thank you for getting that information about the Latin American peace force, and that in 1963 I made that speech on the floor of the Senate referring to the fact that some years previous I had recommended that the Latin Americans have their own inter-American peace force. Here it is, I'm quoting me on page 4375 of the *Congressional Record*, where I'm saying "On November 15, 1960, I urged Secretary Herter to call for a plenary session of the OAS to investigate the threat of Castro's communism in this hemisphere, and for the United States to assume the leadership for the formation of an inter-American police force."

Actually, I wasn't aware of that so much as I was that I had made a speech several times about the desirability of having an inter-American police force. What happens is that when you have a dictatorship such as the type that people didn't like with Trujillo, even though I think I pointed out to you that Trujillo actually did a great deal of good along with a great deal of bad, which is the way those dictatorships usually go for a while. They start off and they do some good things, but they end up doing mostly bad things, and they take away people's rights, which is the worst thing they do. But every time we the United States interfere with military power in Latin American, as we started to do with Castro in the Bay of Pigs invasion, we get criticized very badly for it. Then when [Lyndon Johnson](#) came in and we sent the Marines into the Dominican Republic, after Trujillo had died and there was some doubt whether or not a communist leader, Bosch then, who was presumed to be leading toward the communists, would get control. The United States did not want him to do that, and Johnson actually sent the Marines in at that particular time, and stabilized the country, and called for an election, and slowed things down so that Bosch was never elected. It ended up with our friend. . . .

**Ritchie:** Balaguer

**Smathers:** Balaguer getting elected president. But every time we, the United States, do something in that part of the world we get criticized for it. We look like a big bully telling them how to run their business, and they resent it. So this is why I started a long time ago in recommending that the inter-American group that we had in the Alliance for Progress and all the other things that grew out of it, that they create their own police force. It would save a dickens of a lot of money because, for example, rather than the Venezuelans having to raise a lot of money, tax a lot of people heavily to have their own military, and then the minute

they do it, right next door to them the Ecuadorians think they've got to have it, then the Peruvians think they've got

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to have it, and each one has got to get its own military force sufficiently big so they figure they won't be overrun by their neighbor. The truth of the matter is, none of them can really afford it. The truth of the matter is, that money would be infinitely better spent in schools, and hospitals, and roads, and the sort of things that would be beneficial to the public.

I had long ago recommended that there be set up an inter-American police force, and let each one of those countries contribute to it. They would have a thousand, or two thousand, of their own soldiers in this group. It would be run by the Latin American or Inter-American Council, I forget what it was called at that time. In any event, what brings it to my mind is that this past week at the United Nations in New York, the Secretary General has recommended this very same thing. He's asking all the countries of Latin America as well as throughout the world to approve of this idea, of having a Latin America peace force. I did that back in 1960, so here we are 29 years later doing the same thing. It's still a good idea, because that's really the way it ought to go. Then one country is no longer fearful of the other country invading it.

If there is an agreement among those countries that a fellow like Noriega should go, all they've got to do then is say, "Mr. Noriega, go," because we've got a force--and it's a Latin force--that can go in there and remove him. If they don't like the way things are going in Haiti, they say, "Military, we don't like the way you're running it, out you go." And let's have some elections or whatever it is those Latins want to have. But anyway, it makes a lot of sense, so I was very pleased to see that's what the United Nations was now debating and discussing. Now, you've got to ask me some questions.

**Ritchie:** I do have some questions. Looking at the South in the years that you served, when you came into the Senate there was a solid South, today there is a two-party South.

**Smathers:** Right.

**Ritchie:** I wondered how you accounted for the difference in the South from 1950 to 1989?

**Smathers:** There isn't really a great deal of basic economic nor even political change, believe it or not. What's happened is, they've changed parties. The reason that they've changed parties is that the Democratic party has let itself be pictured as the party of the minorities, the blacks, the foreigners, and the people of the South are essentially conservative. They were originally all Democrats, but the

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Dukakis of the world--and this is not any particular criticism of him--but when you read the Democratic platform today it's very offensive to most southern people. I was a Democrat. In a couple of races I didn't even have a Republican opponent. Senator [Holland](#) never had a Republican opponent. He was very conservative. I was very conservative. [Harry Byrd](#) was very conservative. [Dick Russell](#) was very conservative. [John Sparkman](#) was very conservative. [Lister Hill](#) was very conservative about some things. There

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were all elements where we were conservative, I'm talking mostly economically speaking.

When the Democrats began to be dominated, so to speak, by northern groups, and particularly New England Democrats, it began to turn southern Democrats off. The southern Democrats find themselves very comfortable with western Democrats. As time has gone on and it's not considered so important today to belong to either a Republican party or a Democratic people, but where people will have no hesitancy in crossing political lines, which we see happening everyday in the Florida legislature. This current legislature there are four members of the House who have just in the last eighteen months declared themselves Republicans and no longer Democrats, because they're much more comfortable with the Republican attitude toward finances, the Republican attitude toward schools, the Republican attitude toward deficit spending, the Republican attitude toward affirmative action programs. They find themselves much more in tune with the Republican viewpoints than with the Democratic viewpoints.

As a matter of fact, if the Democratic party--and you're not asking me for this, I'm just volunteering this--does not rework itself, and come up with a nomination for president from [Chuck Robb](#) of Virginia, or [Bob Graham](#) of Florida, or some reasonable conservative southerner or westerner, the Democratic party will never carry any election in the South. It's just gotten that bad. And the problem is that the Jesse Jacksons of the world, and the people who are constantly talking about the minorities, and constantly talking about how we have to appropriate more money because we don't have enough jails, and you know, all of these social things, and these admittedly good things but dreamy things--that's what the Democratic party has let itself be pictured as nationwide, and that's why they're not winning any nationwide elections. They haven't elected a president--the last Democratic president was Lyndon Johnson, wasn't it?

**Ritchie:** Carter.

**Smathers:** [Jimmy Carter](#), that's right. I forgot about Jimmy. But Jimmy gets up there and becomes pretty liberal right off the bat again. That doesn't sell any longer in the old southern eleven states, or in the midwest, Oklahoma, Texas, or anywhere like that. It sells probably a little better even in California, but it doesn't

sell that well in the South or in the West. So, you ask me the question, yeah we were all Democrats, but [Strom Thurmond](#) I guess led the fight--not the fight--led the flight, I should say, from the Democratic party. He was a Democrat, now he's one of the outstanding Republicans. But you see them more and more.

Bob Graham, whom I think is a young man with a great potential and a lot of ability, but he's having to constantly be careful that he's not identified too strongly with a national ticket, unless he can get [Sam Nunn](#) and a couple of midwestern Democrats to go along with him. He does not want [Teddy Kennedy](#).

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He does not want some of these so-called flaming liberals, most of whom come from the New England states or the upper midwest states. I don't think the Democrats are going to win anything unless they can come back into the more middle of the road type of economic philosophy and political philosophy, and the whole sensible--what people think are sensible programs. Anyway, that's what it is. It's gotten that way, and it's going to get worse before it gets better.

A thing that really has been bad is the writing of the Democratic platform, which has been controlled solely by minority groups. They express their strong minority views, and all it does when you take some of those platforms and take them down into Alabama and Mississippi and Arkansas and Oklahoma and you start reading what the Democratic platform stands for, it turns everybody off. So, that's my answer, and I know I'm right. That doesn't mean that everybody agrees with me. Oh, hell, no, very few people would agree with me.

**Ritchie:** How do you figure the civil rights legislation into the equation? The civil rights bills of '64 and '65 that Johnson got through?

**Smathers:** Well, see, I think that, as I've said to you before that Lyndon Johnson was the fellow who moved all of us along toward more, you might say, more progressive, more broadminded, more open-minded civil right legislation. He did that. Those major civil rights legislation were all passed under Lyndon Johnson, he was responsible for most of them.

Civil rights is no longer a big issue in the South, politically. I mean, every now and then you'll see a little outbreak of something, but it's a minor thing. You see more trouble in segregated districts in New York and in Detroit and in Milwaukee. There's more bad blood demonstrated in New York than there has been anywhere in the South in the last five years. I venture to say you're never going to see--every now and then a few crackpot kids will go out and do something totally asinine, but they're a very limited minority. Most southerners are very, very happy about the way the civil rights thing has gone. They're pleased about it. The southern people as a group don't dislike at all the black people, they grew up with them. You've heard me on this before. They knew them. It was the

black folks who worked the farms, and who developed whatever economy we had. That's why the white folks from the South are more comfortable with the blacks than the North white people are. They've got harder segregation lines now in New York City than they've got anywhere in Florida.

**Ritchie:** But you don't think that the Democrats' identification with civil rights legislation tended to drive some people out of the Democratic party in the South?

**Smathers:** Nope. I don't know of anybody. You know, there were some few rednecks, but they're very few. After '64, when Johnson passed the Civil Rights act, the South still voted pretty strongly for Democrats. There was never a Republican senator. Florida never had a Republican senator. South Carolina

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never had a Republican senator. No, no, that didn't bother anybody. It's just recently, it's these affirmative action programs that they talk about. They continue to harp on them. These leaders of the Democratic party today are actually polarizing the voters, and by doing that they're driving out the moderates into independent parties or into voting the Republican ticket. See, actually, while there were less Republicans registered in Florida, for example, as voters, yet the Republican presidential candidate has been getting elected. Which means what? Which means that Democrats are voting for the successful Republican candidate.

**Ritchie:** Florida has gone Republican in almost every presidential election except '64 and '76.

**Smathers:** That's right.

**Ritchie:** Those were the only two Democratic victories going all the way back to when Eisenhower carried it.

**Smathers:** That's right. Florida will be more Republican than Alabama or South Carolina or Georgia or Tennessee or some of those states because we have such a great number of people who have moved in from out of state. We're not a state of native sons, we're a state of transplants. But most of the people who have come down there have been reasonably well off. Some people think that just only rich people live there, but that isn't the case at all. Our standard of living, I think the average income of our people in Florida today, out of the fifty states I would guess we're somewhere in the top fifteen. But we don't have the overall wealth that a lot of other states have. Massachusetts, or Rhode Island, or Connecticut, they're way ahead of us.

**Ritchie:** When you were still in the Senate, in 1966 Florida elected a Republican governor, Claude Kirk. So the Florida Republican party was obviously coming along. Did that affect you in your political calculations?

**Smathers:** Not really. See, he had been a big Democrat. He had been a very active Democrat. He was a guy who liked publicity and got a lot of publicity. He changed from the Democratic party to the Republican party, and just the mere fact that you can make yourself stand out when you're a candidate, and there are five guys running for governor, if all of a sudden you can make yourself stand out by doing something somewhat dramatic or something that gets a lot of public attention, then all of a sudden you have moved yourself out front. Because now the people in Florida they don't know, half the voters there haven't been there but about three or four years, and they're not sure who's what. So as more Republicans moved in, and as the state really became more conservative, why everybody is moving from the Democratic party to the Republican party.

We're seeing this happen right now. You know, the abortion thing, my golly, as it's becoming more evident that pro-choice people are the larger number

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of people, guys who are running for office now in the last two weeks, I see, originally they were pro-life and now they have taken stands and votes that indicate that they can go both ways. As a matter of fact, Governor Martinez of Florida, who is basically a Catholic. I love Catholics, God knows, Jack Kennedy was a great Catholic and I loved him--that doesn't have anything to do with it--but they're basically pro-life. They have been taught to be that way all of their lives. The Pope says that pro-life is it, so to the extent that they can, why they stay that way.

Now, Martinez, Catholic, Spanish, so on, he thought, I think, that he was going to be really very highly accepted over the state when he announced, "I'm going to call the legislature into session and we're going to have a session on nothing but this abortion issue, and we're going to go pro-life." He offered some amendments which would have advanced the cause of the pro-life people. He suddenly discovered, much to his amazement and everybody else's amazement that wasn't really what the state legislature thought at all. As a matter of fact, they didn't take a pro-choice position, they just adjourned. They didn't do anything. They just said, "Look, we think you're wrong, but we're not going to say it, we're just not going to do anything." So they adjourned, and he couldn't do anything about it. But it was evident that was the way the public is going. But that's the way all this politics is. They go a little with the wind, that's what it should be. This is representative government. They guys are supposed to represent the thinking of the people.

**Ritchie:** As a former Democratic senator, do you think that the South is better off now being a two-party system, or do you miss the old days.

**Smathers:** That's an interesting question, because it depends upon how you look at it as what's better off. The answer is, if we liked the old South, if we liked

the old traditions, if we liked the old habits, if we liked the rural society, obviously we're not better off, because it has changed. Today the majestic oaks, pines, the old homes, you don't see that anymore. The days of "Gone With the Wind" are gone with the wind. You see that in a few spots in Georgia, and Florida, Alabama, and Arkansas. You'll go into Charleston, South Carolina, and see a lot of it. But you don't see much of it, that's all gone. So you ask me whether they're better off today, I think that they're much better off today than they've ever been. Their standard of living is higher for everybody. The level of education is better for everybody.

The blacks are infinitely better off. They're now the leaders. They're accepted into the schools. There are no schools today that prohibit blacks. When I was in the Senate, you couldn't get a black into some of the schools. Today, why people don't bother with that thought at all. It's accepted. The racial barriers are happily and fortunately breaking down very rapidly. So I have to say that they're infinitely better off. The standard of living is better, their health is better, knowledge is better. We've got more people. So I think that the South has moved out of its Civil War inheritance and has moved into

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the modern twentieth century very nicely, and is demonstrating considerable economic influence and power as well as a lot of political power.

They've always had political power because of the rule of seniority, when Senator [George](#), and Dick Russell, and [John McClellan](#), and Spessard Holland, and these fellows who had been in the Senate a long time, all southerners, and they had stayed there many, many years, [Carl Hayden](#) from Arizona, they stayed there throughout the years and they obtained the seniority. They were very powerful politically and that made the South very powerful politically. I don't think that today the South is as powerful politically in the Congress as it used to be. I'm sure it isn't. But that doesn't mean that the people aren't a lot better off. I think the people in these southern states are infinitely better off than they were. I think there's been great progress in that particular field.

**Ritchie:** We're coming to the end of your Senate term in the late 1960s. Around the mid-sixties you decided not to run again for reelection in 1968. Why did you decide to retire from the Senate at that stage?

**Smathers:** There were several good reasons. One, I'd been in the Senate eighteen years, I could see that. I could not, by virtue of having gotten off the Commerce Committee, at President [Kennedy](#)'s request, I'd given up my seniority and gone on the Foreign Relations Committee, where I was very, very junior. On the Finance and Taxation Committee, which was my big committee, I was behind my dear friend Russell Long, whom I loved and adored and admired, and he's two years younger than I am, or was, still two years younger than me. I had also

pretty well, by getting angry with Lyndon Johnson and telling him that I didn't want to go up in the hierarchy under him, and moving [Mansfield](#) into my place, which I did, I had pretty well blocked that off too. So there I was, not being able to go any higher in the Senate, so to speak, and having no particular great ambition to want to run as a national figure. So it looked like to me, that all I was going to be was just another senior senator, with considerable influence by virtue of my general seniority, but I would have no significant position. That was number one.

Number two of the reasons why I got out, which was a very strong reason, was that a lot of my very dear, close friends were no longer there. Despite the fact that I had debated with [Hubert Humphrey](#) all the time, I missed Hubert, he was no longer there. Lyndon Johnson was no longer there. Jack Kennedy was no longer there. The people that I really did like were really no longer there anymore. [Earle Clements](#) was gone, [Albert Gore](#) was gone, a number of people like that that I had come in with, the people that I had come into the Congress with, either in the House or the Senate, they were no longer there. And here were all these young guys, younger guys. You know, you always look down upon these new young fellows who come in, because they don't know what they're talking about. They've got to learn a lot, and so on, but they were all very cocky, all very bright, and in many ways they wanted to change things around. And it just wasn't as comfortable for me. That was reason number two.

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Number three was that the Congress is very much the same. It lost a lot of its appeal and excitement. You have the same type of legislative problems every single year, the same ones. You've got a budget problem. How do you pass the budget? The military want all this, the social workers want all this. You've got to give something to education. The old people have got to get their money, and they're entitled to their money. Then the tax problem comes in, what are you doing with respect to it? Are we running a balanced budget or not? Then the next big issue is balance of trade with the foreign countries. But those are the same issues that are there today. Exactly the same issues. No different. The only thing they've got are different numbers, that's all it is, different numbers. So you say to yourself, "By God, I've been through this now for twenty-two years. Do I want to spend the next six years of my life doing exactly the same things, except with a few different personalities and the numbers a little different. You've got a different president from time to time, but it's the same issues, exactly the same issues. What are we going to do about salaries? What are we going to do about Europe? What are we going to do about military defenses? Same things. Different, of course, as times change, but not basically different. So that's the real reason. You get bored, you want to do something different

I had never been out in the private world at all. From the time I had gotten out of school I had worked for the government. I'd been an assistant United States



district attorney, which was the best job I ever had. I was in the Marine Corps for four years. Later as a member I went to the House, I then went to the Senate. I'd been doing that all of my life. I'd never been in private practice, or never knew anything really about it. So I thought I'd like to do that. In addition to that, I know when I went to the Congress I was making \$12,500 a year. I had two children, and I had to support a family on \$12,000. Well, of course, \$12,000 went a lot further in those days than it does today. But it still was not a lot of money. Then it got to be \$20,000, then it went to \$30,000, then it went to \$40,000. By the time I went to the Senate it was \$22,500 and by the time I left the Senate I think I was making \$40,000 a year. Well, you know, it's tough to live on that kind of money when you're sending your children to good schools and you're trying to keep up two homes, one in your district or your state back home, mine was Florida, and one up here in Washington. It was very difficult.

In those days there was not the honorarium availability that there is today. I'm glad that there wasn't. I'm glad that you went to make a speech in those days because the citrus growers invited you to make a speech and you did it for political reasons and not for pecuniary reasons. There was much less of this business of a senator becoming reasonably famous and going on some kind of a lecture tour. They didn't have much of that in my day, for which I'm grateful. I think you're a better a senator.

I think currently today the Senate, the Congress, has got to think about putting a definite limitation on this business of outside honorariums and these outside speeches. Not only is the money influence, and it shouldn't be, but look

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at the time that these guys spend flying to California to make a speech, going to Hawaii because the Dental Association is having their national convention there and the doctors like to hear you talk about why you don't want government encroachment. Or they'll have a meeting down in my state at Ocean Reef. So they invite five senators, all of them from the West Coast, [Robert] [Packwood](#) from Oregon, when he was chairman, they wanted to hear him, so he goes, but he's away from his work. This is why every now and then you see them work all night. But you see many days that they can't get a quorum. If they were back in their own districts, it wouldn't be as bad, but they're not necessarily back in their home district. That ought to be eliminated. And we didn't have a lot of that.

Now, you ask me the question, why did I get out? I wandered a little bit there. I got out because number one there was hardly any place for me to go up in the Senate. Two, my friends basically were gone. Three, it lost its excitement and appeal for me. So I decided that I wouldn't run. I thought the thing to do was for me to announce long in advance so that nobody says he was run out of his job. So while everybody thought that Smathers has just got reelected and everything is

going along fine, and I was very popular and had a lot of influence in my state, I thought, now this is the time for me to make my move, and so I did.

**Ritchie:** There was some mention in the papers about your health at that time too. **Smathers:** They talked about that. Really I didn't have a health problem. I think I wasn't feeling very well, but compared to the way I feel today, I was feeling then a hell of a lot better. I saw that, but I didn't ever talk about that.

**Ritchie:** You were succeeded in the Senate by a Republican senator, [Ed Gurney](#). What was your impression of Gurney as a senator?

**Smathers:** You know, I didn't know Ed hardly at all. I had never met him. He had been a Congressman, I think, for a couple of terms, and I had met him to shake hands with him, but I hardly knew him. I wasn't very fond of Gurney. I didn't think he could get elected, and didn't think he would. I was surprised when he won. But that again shows you that the sentiment of the more conservative people of Florida was beginning to rise very strongly, and so he got elected. I didn't have anything to do with that campaign. I can't even remember who was the Democratic nominee.

**Ritchie:** Was it Cramer?

**Smathers:** No, Cramer was a Republican.

**Ritchie:** Oh, that's right.

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**Smathers:** I can't remember who it was. Oh, I'll tell you who it was Dick, who got elected senator later, from Miami. [Dick Stone](#).

**Ritchie:** Stone got elected later.

**Smathers:** Stone came in at sometime after.

**Ritchie:** Yes, later on. He came in after Gurney.

**Smathers:** I don't remember who was the Democrat. It wasn't Leroy Collins, was it?

**Ritchie:** Yes, I think that's right.

**Smathers:** I think that's who it was.

**Ritchie:** Well, your term ended the same time Lyndon Johnson's as president. Did you have many dealings with Johnson towards the end of his administration?

**Smathers:** Yes, while he was president I saw Johnson all the time. After he retired, and I retired, we didn't see each other very much. I got very busy and stayed here, he went back to Texas. I became a lobbyist. I organized the American Horse Council. I became attorney for the Association of American Railroads. I became attorney for the waterways. Man, I had more damn business! I was so busy I couldn't believe it. I loved it. And I made a lot of money. That's the only money I ever made.

**Ritchie:** Before we get into that, I just wanted to ask if you had a sense that Johnson was depressed at the end, with the way things had turned out.

**Smathers:** Yes. Johnson was a very sad fellow. That's the reason, I'm sure, that I didn't go to see him. He was always so lugubrious when you went to talk with him. He was a fellow who continued to want to abuse his enemies. He spent a lot of time telling you about who was a big son of a bitch and who wasn't, and all this stuff. He lived completely in the past. I saw him a couple of times, but it wasn't fun to see him.

**Ritchie:** Was he a man who expressed much regret about things he had done?

**Smathers:** No, he did not regret--of course, the Vietnam war was something that absolutely destroyed him. That became his overriding disappointment. I thought he thought too much about it. He kept trying to explain how it really was, rather than what it was pictured to be. Every time that I saw him, which was, as I said, not very many, he came to Miami one time I think, and I went out there to a birthday party for him before he passed away.

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There were a lot of people there, and I was able to talk with him sort of quietly for about fifteen, twenty minutes one afternoon. He was going back, "Do you remember when so and so and so and so?" and "You remember that Westmoreland coming in there and telling me how we could win this war?" and "You remember McNamara and them saying we're going to win the war?" I said, "Sure, I remember all that, Lyndon." And he said, "Well, you know the thing about it that burns my ass to this day is that they kept suckering me on." That was his attitude, and he just wanted to talk about those kind of things when he'd see a guy like me. I guess he talked that way to other people too.

It got so, it really wasn't much fun. You know, we were out and it was better to talk about what might be going on in the future. He didn't want to talk about that. It was pretty evident that the guy was not going to live very long. I don't think he wanted to live very long. But he dwelled too much on his failures and not enough

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on his successes. That's always been Johnson and most of his friends. That has been their problem. They still have a fight with Jack Kennedy. They're still resentful of certain people in the Congress that they were unfortunately jealous of. And there were so many powerful and positive things that Johnson had done that he ought to have spent his time just on that. Now, [Lady Bird](#) has been great about talking about the positive things. I get to see her a good deal. But Lyndon was sad.

**Ritchie:** When you left the Senate, you did actively become a lobbyist in Washington with a variety of activities. How different is it dealing with Senate now that you're on the outside, trying to persuade them to vote for legislation?

**Smathers:** Well, actually it was really--now, see I've been out almost twenty years. When I first got out it was really a lot of fun. Obviously the mere fact that I could go back to the Senate, and still could go on the floor, I still could park in the Senate garage. You could eat in the Senate dining room. You had all those privileges and prerequisites that you had when you were a senator. So I could make a big impression on a couple of clients, let's say from Ohio or from California or somewhere. I'd say, "Come on, I'm going to take you to the Senate for lunch." Then I'd see all of my friends and I'd introduce them. By God, these guys would go back and say, "That Smathers is really something. He knows everybody over there." I could send them a big bill, and hell, they'd be happy to pay it. And actually you could get a good deal done. I think I explained to you earlier about [Scott Lucas](#). I was always aware that if you've been a senator you can get in to see the senators a lot more quickly than you can if you're just a normal lobbyist. In addition, you're also a big campaign contributor. I used to give a lot of money to everybody's campaign.

Anyway, that was a lot of fun. And then to make a lot of money for the first time, to have some money, was really a lot of fun. Quite enlightening. I mean, you get a feeling: gee, I can go most anywhere I want. If I want to go to Europe this summer, have a vacation with my wife and go to the French Riviera, I can go. It's no big problem. I can ride the Concorde, and that sort of stuff. So that

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was fun. Now, what happens is that that goes along pretty well for I would say maybe ten years. Then as finally your friends retire, new guys come on. Now, these you don't know so well. They have heard about you, and you have read about them, but you don't know them. You go to see them, if they're let's say on the taxation committee, where I had spent most of my time while I was in the Senate, and most of my lobbying time, going to see [Dan Rostenkowski](#), and going to see [Sam Gibbons](#) from Tampa, whom I had kind of grown up with and had nursed along, anyway that was all easy. But when you got to see these new fellows that you didn't know, and you were having to explain to them a little bit who you

were, and they were sort of looking at you, you know, and you had to be very proper about what you said and what you did. But it still goes along pretty good.

Now, then you stay out and it's now twelve years have done by, and so now you've got turnover of almost two thirds of the Senate. That doesn't mean that your guys aren't still there, but you are less and less influential. Now, when a matter comes before you, let's say like the waterways, when a question would come up about a bridge tax. Every time they opened a bridge over the Ohio River, how much should the barge man pay, and how much should the other people pay? You were trying to represent the barge people, and so you had to go see the people on the Commerce Committee as well as the taxation committee, and you didn't know any of them. So you'd send word, and they'd see you because you had been a former senator, a former Congressman, and that gets a little more embarrassing. They're usually younger than you are, and they don't know too much about you, you don't know anything about them really, except what you've looked up in the book before you went over there to see them. So that gets to be less fun, I think. I mean, in my case it got to be less and less fun. What happens is, I think with people like myself, that you get less and less in a lobbying position.

And then you get asked for everybody's campaign. There's not a fellow who runs who doesn't get your name on his list, and you have requests for funds like you can't believe. Every senator who's running, whether he ever knew you or heard about you, the people who raise money, who are pros, the pros do it all. They get your name and they figure because you're lobbying you're specially vulnerable to have to give money, and you feel like you do. Half the money that I was making I was spending on all kinds of fellows' campaigns, Republicans and Democrats, if they were on important committees. Well, that gets to be less fun, and less fun, and less fun, and I think what happens to us as we get older, just like in my case, I began to go back to Florida and have my interest back home. I bought into a number of orange groves, and I'm now a pretty substantial orange grove operator. We have over a thousand acres of orange grove, and I love it, just love it. Then I have an automobile agency that my son runs. I'm in a couple of law offices, still have a law office in Miami that I may from time to time introduce people to--actually, I'm helping my older friends go to the law office to have their wills drawn. That's the most influential thing, or important thing I'm doing these days, as far as the law office is concerned.

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So I think that it's a natural progression. When the new generation comes in, and the new fellows come in, you don't know them as well, it gets a little more embarrassing for you to go over there. All of these fellows who have been in the Senate, we're very proud people. We don't want to ask some young guy who's thirty-five years old, and you don't think he knows too much anyway, and he's very important now because he's the United States senator, and you're trying to say, "I want to tell you this is the way the real world really goes. You've been in

politics all of your life, you've been in government, but you've really never spent a nickel on anything of your own, because the government's always paid for it. So you've got to learn what the other world's like." It's hard to tell these fellows that. Just like I'm sure it was hard for some of them to tell me that when I was there. So you get so you'd just as soon not do it. And if you've got enough money, you just finally quit doing it. That's what's happened to me. For all practical purposes, I don't represent anybody with any special interest. I have a couple of law cases that I've got a couple of lawyers here who do some good work, and that's what we're doing. But I'm mostly handling my own affairs.

**Ritchie:** When you were lobbying, did you specialize in anything in particular?

**Smathers:** The answer is mostly taxes, because I came out of the Finance and Taxation Committee, just like Russell Long today. Russell has been out now three years, and he is so happy. We see each other all the time, and he is so busy. He calls me up and he's making me put up money for all these guys on the Finance Committee. I'm having to make contributions to [David] [Boren](#) and all these guys, and I'm glad to do it, they're good men. But Russell will say, "Come on, now, we've got to do this for so and so." Now, in time, that will wear off. The traveling to New York, I was on the board of Paramount Studios, and Gulf and Western. I was on the board of the Pan-American Banks. I was on the board of the Winn-Dixie Grocery Company. I was on the board of one private high school, and one University of Florida group, and that sort of thing. I was on the board of a commercial bank, and I owned two other banks that I bought after I got out of the Senate, and made a little money, one in Ocala and one in Bradenton, and so on. That's all fun, because it's new. It's interesting, and you meet new people. It has some excitement to it. But I like to do that much better than I do the lobbying bit. So I just don't lobby.

**Ritchie:** Did you find that when you were lobbying that the corporate people with whom you were dealing had a good sense of how the government worked, or were they pretty innocent when they came here?

**Smathers:** They were pretty innocent. A lot of these big corporations, obviously, they have a man who stays here all the time, and he is the guy who tells them what to do in a way. Now, he is the fellow who will say, "Go hire George Smathers, because this is a transportation matter and he's had a lot of experience. He was the subcommittee chairman for all ground transportation, which includes trucks and railroads. So go hire him." So I'd get a lot of

trucking business, lobbying work. You'd get the legislation that they'd like to try to get. Then tax matters, yes, I was on the Finance and Taxation Committee, had a lot of that. For a while I represented the Chamber of Commerce of Mexico, that was a lot of fun. I represented the sugar industry from Venezuela, that was a lot of

fun. Who else did I represent? I had a couple of clients in Central America. But that was fun, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. As time went on, and I had enough money, it go so I didn't want to work that hard, and didn't. Then I had a big law office for a while. Then I began to lay back and these fellows began to work for me. They took those various clients that I had assigned them to work on, and most of them just stayed with that, and to this day the American Horse Council has got the same fellows that I had. We're very friendly, I see them all the time. They worked for me. Railroad Association the same way. So that was fun, that has been a lot of fun. I've had a lot of interesting experience.

**Ritchie:** You mentioned the Scott Lucas story about a senator with whom you had worked, that you felt an obligation almost to see. But is there a reverse on that sometimes? Do you think that some of the senators resent former colleagues coming back to lobby them on issues?

**Smathers:** Well, I'm sure that there are probably one or two, but I've never seen any. Now, you mention it, and I'm sure in a hundred guys you're not going to find all hundred agreed to anything. I'm sure that there's some senators who resent a fellow coming in and lobbying them about something, particularly if it has a financial consideration. I don't think if somebody went to a member of the Judiciary Committee and said I'm opposed to the president's nominee for the Supreme Court and I don't represent anybody but myself, I'm sure they wouldn't mind at all. If you went over there and said I'm against this because we think this fellow is going to rule a certain way, and I represent a big private financial institution, he wouldn't like that too much.

I'll tell you, the senators and the Congressmen are such adjustable creatures that you just can't believe it. They're not going to get mad at anybody who comes to see them except on the rarest of occasions.

**Ritchie:** I recall that Senator [John Culver](#) got upset about former members who were lobbying.

**Smathers:** Did he? Well, now he got to be one of the biggest lobbyists. He's here in this same building, down here with a big law firm. Same way with [Joe Tydings](#), he's in the same building, and so on. They're still lobbying. I think I was very fortunate in the lobbying work that I did, and that I had enough sense to take my money and invest it in real estate in Florida, in orange groves and other real estate, and it's all turned out beautifully.

**Ritchie:** Looking at what's happening in the United States Senate and how it's been operating in the last few years, does it look like the same institution to you that you served in, or is has it really changed?

**Smathers:** I think, from what I hear, and I have not been over there this year. That's not exactly correct, I've been over there for lunch maybe two times in the Senate dining room with some friends. I've only been to see Bob Graham. I've been to see Sam Gibbons, but only socially. And politically I'm helping Bob Graham. I want to keep him. I think he's a splendid public servant and deserves to be helped, and has got a bright future. If ever there is going to be a southerner elected president, in my view it won't be Albert Gore, it will be Bob Graham. He's got a lot going for him because in addition to all his natural attributes, he's got the *Washington Post*. His half sister-in-law is Kay Graham, so that's a pretty powerful institution to have going for you. But he's a very talented and hard working and devoted and dedicated guy.

I see [Bill Nelson](#), who was my son's roommate. He's the Congressman, you may remember, who was one of the astronauts who went off around the earth. He's running for governor. I hope he becomes governor, I think he'll make a good one, and I'm helping him. I go over there to talk a little politics with him. I go to see Bob Graham and talk politics with him. I'm not talking to them about helping me in any way, because frankly I don't need any help at this point. I say that thanking the dear Lord. So, that's about it.

**Ritchie:** What I'd like to do is come back one more time to do that one interview that we lost because of the tape recorder malfunction. That was mostly about Lyndon Johnson as majority leader. So if you wouldn't mind going back over some of those questions. . . .

**Smathers:** No, I'll do that. I want to help Lyndon Johnson get the recognition that he deserves. It bothers me that just among my friends, when I start talking about Lyndon Johnson they all kind of turn their nose up, "Oh, that rube," you know, "that ham bone," that sort of thing. It really does bother me. I go in these groups and they still remember Jack Kennedy as a very attractive guy--they couldn't name you any one thing that he really did except that he was just good looking, and he was beautiful, humorous, and a fine speech-maker, and everybody liked him. They remember [Nixon](#) mostly, unfortunately, because of the Watergate, they don't really remember that he was the guy who opened up China. He was the guy who did a lot of things. He was kind of like Johnson. He was never recognized for some of the big things that he did. But when the opportunity presents itself, I feel better about trying to let people know about how really important and influential Lyndon Johnson was. Because in my career he was far and away the man who accomplished the most, by far. That's covering forty years. He was far and away it, and yet he doesn't get any credit.

**Ritchie:** Well, I saw in the *Post* on Sunday that Robert Caro's new book is due out next spring, and he now projects it to be a five-volume biography of Johnson. He's published one, this is the second one, and he's thinking about three more volumes after that, so maybe at last Johnson will get his due.



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***Smathers:*** Yeah, well, I hope so. Because I think in all frankness and candor and honesty, the guy who performs, the fellow who accomplishes, the fellow who opens doors, he deserves to be recognized for the good things that he did, and not just to be remembered as sort of a lumbering, overbearing, sometimes crude individual who tried to dominate everybody he was with. All of that is also somewhat true, but on the other hand, he should not be denied the recognition which he deserves for the things that he really did, because he really did a lot. All right, sir.

***Ritchie:*** Thank you, senator.

***Smathers:*** Thank you.

[End of Interview #8]