

# Despite hospital scare, Carter shows no signs of slowing down

By Bob Keefe

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

**Baltimore** -- The man from Plains walked into the room beaming the same toothy smile that helped get him elected president, shaking hands with everybody he met as if he were running for office again.

At 86, Jimmy Carter's back is crooked and he moves slower than he once did, as would be expected of any octogenarian. And as his recent hospital scare proved, he's more frail than he was back in his long days of working peanut fields or the even longer days working campaign trails.



Yet Carter said he has no inclination of slowing down anytime soon. Keeping active -- along with eating right and marrying well -- has kept him in as good a shape as he's in, he said.

His two-day stay in a hospital in Cleveland last week after becoming nauseated due to a virus was nothing, the former president said in an interview here Tuesday.

"I think everybody has a virus every now and then," Carter said, adding that he felt fine. He seemed as perky and lucid as ever. "But when a former president has a virus and gets nauseated on the airplane coming into Cleveland, it makes news all over, even though it's not worthy of a whole lot of attention," he said.

As if to prove his point, Carter spent a couple of hours Monday and Tuesday hammering nails and sawing wood -- at one point in the rain, no less -- while helping build Habitat for Humanity houses in Washington and Baltimore. When he later spoke to a luncheon crowd and met with reporters, he was still wearing a denim shirt, jeans and tennis shoes.

Carter is proving to be one tough old Georgian. How many other 80-somethings in the past few months have helped build houses, helped free imprisoned Americans from North Korea and traveled the country on a book tour?

Carter, whose birthday was Oct. 1, chalked up his resilience up to his lifestyle -- and to his wife Rosalynn, who was by his side as he sat down with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and a few other media outlets at a Baltimore hotel.

"Rosa and I have now been married 64 years," Carter said. "She's a wonderful dietitian and also a great cook, so she makes sure I eat the right things. And then we get a lot of exercise. And we get along fairly well with each other -- most of the time.

"So I think a happy marriage, eating right, getting a lot of exercise and having an exciting, adventurous, unpredictable life ... has given me a very great blessing," he said.

It's been nearly three decades since Carter dropped out of politics after a single term in the White House. These days, he'd rather talk about the difference Habitat for Humanity has made, or about eradicating guinea worms or other causes that his Atlanta-based Carter Center is working on.

Yet when asked, he'll talk politics. And as a Democrat, Georgia's most famous politician said he's worried.



"You know, I can't mention Georgia with any particular assurances because I think the governorship is a straight toss-up," said Carter, the state's governor from 1971 to 1975. "I'm a Democrat and I hope a Democrat wins, but the polls I've seen show that it's neck and neck."

The national picture, he said, is clearer.

"I think in the overall election, Democrats are going to suffer a severe loss both in the number of House seats and in the number of Senate seats," he said.

"There's a good chance, looking at the present polls, that Republicans will take over control of the House and come close in the Senate."

Republicans like to compare President Barack Obama's time in office with Carter's only term, painting them both as failed presidents.

Yet Carter said there's something very different about his presidency and Obama's.

"I think President Obama has faced in the last two years the most sharply divided, partisan-dominated Congress in history," Carter said. "And I would take that even to the time of Abraham Lincoln. I think [Lincoln] probably got more support from the opposite party than President Obama has been able to get."

That, Carter said, is a problem he didn't have to face. His relationship with congressional Republicans was fairly good, and he accomplished more with Congress than many presidents.

"I had great bipartisan support, which President Obama has had to suffer without," he said. "The Republicans -- I think to the detriment of the well-being of our country and of our government -- have just decided to freeze out any support for him within their control."

Even so, Carter said he thinks Obama has done a good job, and the nation's 39th president predicted the nation's 44th president could have two even better years ahead of him.

"My guess is after this November election it's going to be disappointing for Democrats, but I think it might be better than it is right now," he said.

"I think President Obama is going to face a mixed Congress, but maybe he will have even more success in the [next] two years than he's had in the first two," Carter said.