

RBRL OHD 003

The Oral History Documentary Series

A Conversation with Robert A. "Bobby" Rowan, Georgia Senator (1963 – 1974) and Public Service Commissioner (1989 – 1994)

Bobby Rowan Interviewed by Sheryl B. Vogt, Frank P. Spence, Greta R. Browning, Mary Ellen Brooks at the Russell Library

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VOGT: This is Sheryl Vogt and we're at the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia. Today is Wednesday, February the 9th, 2005. And we're about to have a conversation with former state legislator Bobby Rowan, who is from Enigma, Georgia, and he was also Public Service Commissioner from 1989 to 1994. So, I will be involved in conversation and several others will as well. And they will introduce themselves now.

BROWNING: I'm Greta Browning, an archivist at the Russell Library.

BROOKS: I'm Mary Ellen Brooks, director of the Hargrett [Rare Book and Manuscript] Library [at the University of Georgia, Athens] where earlier today I had the great privilege and pleasure to talk with Bobby Rowan and show him some of our historical treasures.

SPENCE: My name's Frank Spence, and I'm a long time friend of Bobby's. We go back to earlier years when Bobby just came into the state Senate. And I was involved as a volunteer and past president of Georgia Association of Retarded Children, and director or present chairman of the board of Special Olympics program which were both programs for the mentally handicapped. At that time Bobby championed all of our major special education

legislation at that particular time. And how we've just remained friends all these years since then.

ROWAN: I'm Bobby Rowan. I live in Enigma, Georgia, which is Berrien County, very near Tifton, Georgia. Tifton is better known than Enigma, of course. I came to the state legislature in '63 [1963], and I really sort of never left the political arena having done various things since that time. [A] total of eighteen times my name has been on the ballot. Sixteen of those times I won. The two times I lost I was able to learn a lot more about myself and the process than the sixteen times I won. So, it's been an interesting ride for me, and I'm glad to be here today.

VOGT: To start us off, Bobby why don't you tell us—[Mr. Rowan sneezes]

ROWAN: I'm so sorry.

VOGT: That's OK. Why don't you tell us a little bit about growing up in Enigma back in the 1940s and what it was like at your home?

ROWAN: Well, I grew up in Berrien County. I was part of a big family of Rowans, R-O-W-A-N, pronounced row-ann. There were nine Rowan children. Six of them were boys, and my uncles lived around us. We had a collective community of about two thousand acres of land, not a—you know, having land was important because you could, you never had to move. Our neighbors and friends were mostly sharecroppers who often might have to move.

We never had to move but we had very little more money than they did. My daddy [James Alvin Rowan] had nine children and when the three oldest ones went to war in World War II and came back, we was astonished and told for the first time that we really was poor. We didn't know until then we didn't have any money because we had as much as our neighbors which didn't have any money either. [It was] a great place to grow up because my daddy was a prolific story teller and a hard worker and a strong man of faith. We had land that was good and so we really had plenty to eat and plenty and shared with our neighbors and friends. And we wasn't like the people in town that had to sort of come out and ask for things to eat during the Great Depression. Out here, [we] never got out of the Depression until this war came, because that was when you could sell things for more money: meat, daddy was raised a lot of pork, meat, and butchered a lot of hogs and smoked it. He was an artisan making sausage so we bartered our way through, and during the war those things would bring a lot of money--on the black market, might not have been absolutely legal, but people would buy the meat and the meal from the corn. So our life was OK. It wasn't life without money. We was always encouraged to go to school. My mother [Lois Vickers Rowan] and daddy never had the opportunity to go to school in the teens and twenties when they was growing up, but they insisted all of us children go to school. Daddy had a saying that he says, "I'm going to send you girls to school"--I had four sisters--"and you boys, I'll help you if you want to, but your girls might later in life need to have a vocation. You might need to be a nurse or a school teacher, you don't know who you going to marry. You don't know if it's going to be good. You don't know if you marry them if they then going to die. You don't know if you gotta raise for your children, so I want you girls to be able to raise your own children." And as a consequence, actually, all of us did go to school. The boys went because they'd rather

go to college than get out and work [laughter] and the girls went because they, Daddy and Mother insisted that they go. I think three of them are some economics teachers, one of them was a medical technician. But I think seven of us finally found our way through *this* institution [The University of Georgia] and then the other two went to—one to Georgia Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta] and one to... Anyway, we found our way to an education, mostly related to the teaching profession, but it was a good life.

VOGT: Now, did you ever talk politics around the dinner table? Was that something that you did in your family?

ROWAN: Oh yes, I—we *always* talked politics, and you see we had a long table in our house and I—and this know, maybe in this [refers to book, *Georgia's Modern Day Legislature: A Personal History of Georgia Politics, 1962-1998* (1999)] I've written the rules of the house, which was the etiquette of eating at our table. And if it's not in here, it ought to be.

SPENCE: I think it's in here. It was in here—

ROWAN: Oh, it's maybe in this one [shuffling of books], but this is about my family. Daddy had strong rules about our house. Anyway, it's in here. And first of all, you never could criticize the cook. Now of all the punishments you got, if you say something about the cook, then you was in trouble at our house [laughter]. Daddy and my mother never tolerated—my sister cooked, sometimes she wouldn't. One of my sisters [made] the worst

meal in the world, and some of them did when they started--you couldn't complain. And then, the conversation had to be pleasant. And we sat on a common bench on two sides with Daddy and one end and Mother and the knee baby--there's always a knee baby--over here in the high chair, and Mama could get out and go to the cook stove which was next door and wait on the table and do whatever. Those times were real pleasant times. We talked about only happy times. It's not allowed to talk about despair. If you wanted to raise questions or be angry or talk about something that wasn't pleasant, you had to go to the back porch. If anybody wants to talk, Daddy'd say, "You go to the back porch, if anybody wants to go talk to you about what you're about to say, they can go out there too." Well, consequently we really had happy times at meal[s]. Breakfast was not a time for talking because you had to get up and get ready to go and that happened real early. Milk the cows, you know, take a bath, catch the school bus. And lunch was just a time to come in and let the mules rest and eat something. It was the supper meal. You know, now we have television and everything else but the supper meal was the time of real delight. We had plenty of time. Mother was a great cook. And so we'd maybe spend an hour around the supper table. A lot of it centered around education, at what each one wanted to do or should do. I was somebody always figured out that I had more political interest than my brothers. And that was not discouraged. They didn't really encourage us or discourage us to do anything, but they insisted we do something. They wanted us to make the choice and let them help us. They offered us a lot of guidance about getting off on the wrong track. You know, we had—we never really got in trouble, because getting into trouble wasn't an option at our house. But we had great respect for one another and as we began to go through school, the older ones that got through school

along with what my mama and daddy could do, they helped the younger ones go to school. I helped people younger than me go to school.

VOGT: Now when you talked about politics, did you talk about local politics like in the county or did you talk about state or national politics?

ROWAN: Well, all politics is local. Finally, all politics is local. So, we talked about the...sort of the heroes of politics and it would be different to different people. Like my daddy was an [Eurith Dickinson] Ed Rivers man, because Ed Rivers had paved the road in front of our house and lived at Lincoln. That's the sort of thing makes you want to be for him. And a lot of our neighbors was [Eugene] Gene Talmadge people. And Gene was mostly a rabble-rousing, tough-talking. You know, they'd have fights at his rallies and so forth. And of course you had other people, but we generally talked about local people. You know, county commissioners. The sheriff was always big. The sheriff was real big in the county and being a friend of the sheriff was right important, even to folks like my family who didn't really need the sheriff. We didn't break no laws or anything, but he was important to have. So, we talked a reasonable amount about politics. We talked a lot about the interesting stories of the Bible. Like, you know, I remember Ezekiel and Job, you know, but Daddy was not hard on religion at all. But he used the Bible to make points with clever and interesting stories. If you want to read the Bible just purely for enjoyment then there's some great stories in the Bible. And the preachers that are eloquent from the old Bible, Ezekiel in the Sycamore tree and Job who lost everything only to have it all double and give back to him was a great story of promise and prophecy. Daddy pleasantly was very knowledgeable about

that. He was the clerk of his Primitive Baptist Association for forty-two years. And you know, we didn't--it wasn't radical at all. But we went to church, you know. We had church once a month, Saturday and Sunday. So Sunday all of us went, Saturday some went and some stayed depending on what they had to do at the farm.

VOGT: Now you said that you were involved with 4-H when you were in high school, is that correct?

ROWAN: I would never—I wouldn't be setting here except for an instance that happened to me. Our county agent was W.R. Ty. He was a great man and outside of my father he was the greatest man in my life. He was the county agent, and he came to Poplar Springs School when I was ten years old. And he wanted—I knew that if you joined 4-H Club, you got to travel, you got to go to Tifton and then maybe Albany and places I hadn't been, to the district meetings, and so forth was made aware of all that. And maybe even the state convention if you got good at it. And they had a contest named "Junior Public Speaking." I was ten years old. You had to be ten to be in the 4-H Club. And they asked for volunteers and of course, none of us would do that. I was ashamed to. I really wanted to, but I wouldn't. And kind of a loud-mouthed boy, Webb Henley's boy, who was older--he was in the higher grades--he looked at W.R. Ty and said, "Mr. Ty. Alvin's boy, Mr. Alvin's boy, Bobby, can do that." [He] said, "He talks all the time." [Laughter] So, to shorten it up, I protested vehemently, claimed I couldn't do it, but I was really excited. And I won the county public speaking contest and went to the district and came in second the first year. And the next year, I came in first, and then I went to another category of competition and won the state and went on my

really first trip to Chicago [Illinois] when I was about sixteen [years old] to the DeSoto Hotel in Chicago on the banks of Lake Eerie [*sic*, Lake Michigan].

SPENCE: Bobby, what did you think, coming from a farm in Enigma, Georgia, and going to Chicago, Illinois, for the first time you'd been away from the South?

ROWAN: Well, my first—you know, the thing I thought about most was, “When the hell am I going to get back there?” [laughter] The only thing I was sure of is that I didn't want to stay nowhere that had that kind of weather--and it wasn't really the weather--I walked several blocks up there, and they wasn't no grits in Chicago. [laughter] I couldn't believe you could sell ice potatoes for breakfast. [laughter] No, it was a great experience. I stayed at the DeSoto, which later became the DeSoto Hilton, which now is torn down. I saw my first snow there. We didn't have snow in south Georgia, we do now for some crazy reason.

SPENCE: How did you get up there?

ROWAN: We rode on the train, which in itself was quite an experience. And went with all the other state 4-H Club people. [In] each category they had a winner, like mine was in livestock. We went up there and we stayed about a week in competition, national competition. I didn't win the national competition, but it didn't much matter to me at that point because there was no where else to go. And all got to go to Chicago and that's really what I had aimed for, but winning the competition I would have liked to, but it wasn't a big deal. And I wasn't as good as some of the others. It was a great experience.

VOGT: Do you think that helped you in going for public office when you think of being in a competitive situation with an organization with 4-H which offers a lot of—

ROWAN: Losing the fear of speaking, losing the fear of standing up and saying anything is something that it ought to be taught. Every kid should be forced to do that. My God, you don't have to be—just get up and say and realize that if and when you want to two-thirds of people I believe in every classroom unless they're forced to won't get up and say anything. Because they don't know if they going to say it right. They're intimidated. And by the time I'd made speeches in the 4-H Club, I'd ride the horse in the woods and make my speech while I was hunting the cows and getting up to milk cows, and it just freed my mind to focus on making the speech.

SPENCE: Is that why you continued that when you came to the University of Georgia and belonged to the debate society? You think that helped you in...

ROWAN: I think it made me willing to go in Demosthenian [Literary Society, University of Georgia, Athens] and be part of what they's doing. I wasn't frightened to do it. It was mostly lawyers, you know, but then my friends in agriculture took it over and hung my daddy's picture on the wall until they got more than us that went, and then they threw us out. It was a debating time, you know, it was all in good fun but I think the early years, for anybody, not just me, that's the reason I sort of enjoy this little old book [Rowan's book on how a bill becomes a law] is that I think there's a lot of people can understand this and

realize they can lobby if they want to. It isn't a big deal. And they shouldn't make it a big deal. So you know, it helped me.

VOGT: When you think about what your goals and aspirations were as a teenager in south Georgia and then you came to the university which no doubt broadened your horizons even more, do you think that you changed in your mind what you wanted to do in life or did you pretty much stick to your same goals?

ROWAN: Not really.

VOGT: You were trained to be a teacher, is that correct?

ROWAN: Well, I was actually, I did teach school for two years but I always came to get in politics. I was always going to get my shot at politics. State legislature, I knew that.

VOGT: What made you decide that you wanted to do that?

ROWAN: Well, I thought at that time in my life that a talented fellow like me might be governor or congressman or something. I had great confidence in my own ability. And politics, even today, is where a lot of the action is and back then it *was* the action, you see. That was the county unit system days, and I was perfectly fit for it because I was from Berrien County, and I was not from the city. And I, you know, I was from the roots of agriculture, and I was a school teacher at the time, and it just fit. And I thought that with

luck going in the proper way, I might do something bigger. I always wanted to. That's the reason in '74, I ran for governor.

VOGT: And you think that came out of the conversations you had at your home when you talked about politics around the supper table—

ROWAN: I was fascinated by the races like in '48—and I knew a lot about politics. I knew a lot about the races, you know. I knew as early as I was five years old really that Gene Talmadge got beat in 1942--I was seven--because he had fooled with something called the Board of Regents. I thought it was maybe like snake handling or something, I didn't know what it was but it later, of course, was the University System. And then the '40—Ellis [Gibbs] Arnall got elected in '42 and then they had—then I was old enough to participate in, not vote but take part, in the Talmadge races of '48 and the three-governor [controversy]: [Melvin Ernest] M.E. Thompson and Ellis Arnall and Herman [Eugene] Talmadge. So that really sparked my interest and then—

VOGT: Who were you supporting then?

ROWAN: You mean in the three governors' race?

VOGT: Yes.

ROWAN: Oh, my daddy supported--he was an honorable and honest man. He supported M.E. Thompson. And his theory, his reason, was very simple. We ran him for lieutenant governor, we elected him for lieutenant governor, and he's the man we wanted to take Gene Talmadge's place if he died. He said that's what we ought to do, now. Herman Talmadge didn't run for lieutenant governor and Ellis Arnall don't know how to stay on. So he was real solid in that he supported M.E.

VOGT: Interesting. When you ran in '62, you had been home from the university for a little while before you made that first race, is that correct?

ROWAN: I came home from the university in the—[they] graduated me in the spring of '58, and went in service in the National Guard. I was kindly an honorable fellow like [James Danforth] Dan Quayle [chuckles] as I skipped the draft by going into the service. I had gotten married while I was in the service and wasn't real anxious to fight another war. Not that I mind, you know. My brothers had all fought. I was glad to be in the army, but there's no reason for me to do anything more than serve the six months active duty and then the six years in the guard because there wasn't no war, and there's really nothing, so that's what I done. And as soon as I got out of that I went back home to the farm and got a job teaching school and farming. And I knew then that the next time the election rolled around I was going to run. I didn't think I'd get elected but I thought I'd make a lot of friends and get to know people and two years later I'd get elected.

VOGT: What was your platform? What issues were you promoting?

SPENCE: And who were you running against at the time? Who'd you have to beat?

ROWAN: Well, the first time I ran against Hansen Carter and [F.C.] Happy Yarbrough. That was under the old county unit system, and I won that handsomely. And then they threw out the race, and they put Berrien and Lanier and Atkinson [counties] in a reapportioned one-man, one-vote district. And I was the winner in the northern part of that area, Berrien, Cook, and Brooks [counties]. And in the Valdosta area there was--Lowndes and Echols--there was a fellow named [Berry Jackson] Jack Sullivan who was about five years older than me. I was twenty-six and he was thirty-one. And he ran against M.E. Thompson, the former governor, for senator. And he beat M.E. So that created some bitterness down there. And when they put us together, then Jack Sullivan and myself had to do a runoff. And I never thought I'd win that race because Valdosta had 50,000 people. But Judge [H.W.] Lott—and the story of that is in my book—he showed me how to win it. And I'd done what he said and I won. And Berrien County, his theory was even if they don't *like* you, your home town folks ought to vote for you, because you are after all a local. Don't go in Valdosta where they don't know you because you'll just stir up interest for your opponent. But in Berrien County the record shows I got 2,976 votes, and I lost forty-four. So it was terribly one-sided. In Lowndes County, my opponent Jack Sullivan got 3,150 and lost--I got 350, so you add the counties together. I won in Berrien County without much trouble.

VOGT: And what was your platform? What issues...?

ROWAN: I was careful not to have a platform [laughter] and really, you know, platforms cause you a lot of trouble. It's promises to listen. And somebody said, "Well, Bob, what's your platform?" I said, "Well, let me tell you something. I live in—this is the roughest end of government. Now why should you stay here and let me tell you what all I believe in if I'm anxious to find out what you want? Now my platform is this: You help me be a good senator. You come to my house and tell me what *you* want me to do. I'm just the one that votes for you. That's all. I'm not that smart. You're smarter than me. Just talk to me, all of you folks out there. School teachers, I've taught school a little but all of you are better than me. I don't want to tell you what my platform is *except* I'll always listen, I'll always be honorable, and I'll always be at work." And that's all I ever say, even at the PSC [Public Service Commission]. I never made no promises, because people don't believe platforms and promises and all that. But you've got to connect to them. And my connection to them was that I wanted them to come to see me. I wanted them to tell me if they had a problem, and promise that I was going to listen to them and help them if I could. And the same thing works today if somebody want to use it now. We've got these fancy PR [public relations] people that does these all kind of characters of things to get votes based on how they make one feel about you, and but I'm not sure that's really necessary. If people like you, they vote for you. If they don't like you, they don't vote for you. You got to make them like you.

VOGT: Now, you made that decision to run for governor in '74 which you, obviously, had aspirations for because that was something you thought about early on. But you could probably have stayed in the General Assembly, even be there today had you wanted to, when

you were not successful in the governor's campaign. Did you think about going back to the General Assembly—did you think about running for it again?

ROWAN: Well, there was a time along about then whenever.... I thought the time was right for me, and I just simply misjudged the race. We'd done polls and [George Dekle] Busbee and [Thomas Bertram (Bert)] Lance and [David Henry] Gambrell and myself all had less than ten percent of the vote. And Lester [Garfield Maddox] had thirty-one percent. So it was really a race of gimmicks. I had a lot of press about the Forgotten Children's Program. [I was] working with Frank and them on Special Olympics and was relatively well known. I knew that. And the things I had done were created a fairly warm attitude towards me, the person. But I misjudged how big this state is and how many places I hadn't been, and how much money it would take to get from one place to the other. I wanted—I felt like Watergate was just coming out, [Richard Milhous] Nixon was going to be kicked out of office, and I thought it was an ideal time for somebody to get on a white horse and ride off into the sunset. So I ran for governor, and I announced I was limiting my contribution to \$250.00. And that had never been done. And I also announced that I would make public *all* my contributions, even down to ten cents or whatever. And that got some favorable press, but it was real soon I realized that you can't beat an opponent to death with an empty money bag. [chuckles from group] So, I really—I had more contributors than any of the other candidates. The average contribution was \$13.86. Now, also, I learned a big lesson. While I announced I had limited my contributions, George Busbee did, too. He didn't bother to tell you that his limitation was \$5,000. [laughter] But his story got as big of news as mine. So I was out the people that was, didn't want me to win that they—I was just out-politicked, and I had depended too

much on my own talent. I thought I was ready for the race, but I just simply wasn't. It was just—but I really realized that. The time I was in the race in '74 for three months, I knew I wasn't going to win. And so, then my goal was to make as many friends as I could and to stay active and get as much press as I could. Since I wasn't going to win, I could say anything. It wasn't going to affect me winning or losing. And I stayed in the press. I had more press than any of them. But the press will kill you so easy. Like the press would write things like: "Bobby Rowan..."—like "George Busbee said today that when asked about his opponent Bobby Rowan." In south Georgia, I was his competition. And Busbee—see, start here with the attack man. I thought he would. That was what I wanted. But Norman [Lee] Underwood and his handlers figured this thing out real quick, and they killed me with two or three press conferences. They staged some questions. They said, "What about Bobby Rowan? He's accused you of sharecropping with Georgia Power [Company]!" And I sort of had, you know. [group chuckles] And George's reply was supposedly, "Well, that no good skips" says, you know, "He's done so and so," but George didn't do that. And I knew when I heard it on the radio I was dead. He said, "Well, you know what? Bobby Rowan would make a great governor. He says that he's a good fellow and a good friend of mine. He'd make a great governor, but he's not going to win because he don't have enough money. He ain't got no money to run this race." And from then on the story was Bobby Rowan, who is not thought to have enough money to win the race... And so they said I didn't have enough money to win the race, and by golly I didn't. So I never found my balance after that and I knew then that I was beat. So I just tried to end it up with as good a showing as I could, not worry about it, and you know, go on to another day. And I never thought I'd get back into politics, really. You know, I'd had my day in the sun. I'd had a good shot at it. It was

friends like Frank Spence and others [who had] done all they could for me. What else do you want? I wasn't bitter at a living soul. [I was] certainly not bitter at Busbee who had defeated me, and I didn't blame him for telling the truth that I didn't have enough money to win. I knew he wasn't smart enough to figure it out himself but I knew that his handlers had told him to say it and that's fair game in politics. Then Busbee appointed me to the Board of Human Resources. And that kept a little interesting coming up here. And after eight years there Joe Frank Harris appointed me the Children's Youth Commission. And then Ford [B.] Spinks didn't run for the PSC and the old itch, you know, I thought I'd conquered the addiction.

SPENCE: You thought you were cured, huh?

ROWAN: I thought I was "cured" as they say in South Georgia. [group laughter] But I decided to run again and that time I run and actually won. It was a hard race but my numbers were really good.

BROWNING: Before we continue, I just want to flip the—

VOGT: So, once you had been appointed to that board you really had no interest in going back to the General Assembly?

ROWAN: No, and I shouldn't have and I wouldn't have because you gotta remember, you gotta be—if you're really going to have friends, and you know, I still have a lot of friends in

my area, and you never run against a friend. So, the people that elected me for twelve years, they supported me in my area for governor. Some of my friends had got elected to the General Assembly, and I might could have won that race. Several times I could have won the race back for the legislature but I'd have to do it by stepping on the toes and feet of my friends. So I made the decision that I would never go back to the legislature because after all, in a century, there's only eight people can serve as long as I served. The people have been kind to me. They didn't owe me any more and so that way it enabled me to, I think, be fairly popular down home and, you know, be a sort of an advisor and consultant to a lot of people that do run. So I never considered going back.

VOGT: While you were there--let's spend a little time talking about while you were in the General Assembly--what legislation were you most proud of that you worked on?

ROWAN: Well, I've often thought about that as I—most all the legislation that's worth doing, as far as I'm concerned, are bills and funding that deals with improving the life of the least fortunate around us. And early on I found my way to trying to solve, as a senator, the problems of Gracewood Retardation Center [Gracewood State School and Hospital]. I felt lucky that, you know, I didn't have any of my family—[it] was OK. But I knew that sooner or later they wouldn't be OK. Some generation of people will come down, and I saw the desperate conditions at Gracewood. And I really had a real feel for wanting to do something about that. And I really think, probably Frank would agree, in the next few years, I was able to—working with others—do something about that. And then I thought that we ought to have a little bit better education. And I worked to fund Maintenance and Op[erations?]-M

and O monies, you know, to give us more money to reduce class size. That was before anybody ever understood it, but I enjoyed that because it's good. But if you asked me the bill that I was most proud of is one that nobody, even today, not even Frank, knows I was involved with at all. It's my personal, personal secret and pride. [It was] working with a lady named Charlotte Wilen who was as far from me as anybody in the world. She was rich; she was Jewish; she lived out on West Paces Ferry (Road, Atlanta, Georgia) and I lived in Enigma, you know, a corn crib, so to speak. We conspired to fund the Indigent Children's Infant Act. And we started a program whereby the infants from people that didn't have any money, the WIC [Women, Infants and Children] program was one of them, or the milk program, and the--where you could go to a doctor. And I learned so much there. I learned that—you give me a pregnancy [in] the first three months and I can give you a healthy baby if I'm a good doctor. You give me a pregnancy [in] the last three months, I can't do much about it. So, it was a nutrition program and it was people that could go that didn't have any money--indigent. Indigent Care and Infant Act or something, I can't remember the name of it.

SPENCE: Is this part of the PKU [Phenylketonuria] testing that came out of that?

ROWAN: That came out of it. We had a lot of testing that for—

SPENCE: To me, one of the things, and Bobby's being modest, I guess, but his sponsorship with the Community Relations Act basically took to institutions like Milledgeville, Gracewood, and said if you--back at that time--if you had a problem with someone in the

family that unfortunately was retarded [or] had some mental illness or something. What'd the state do? That's where they sent them, you know, and they warehoused them. Then, you know, the Community Services Act that basically broke up like 12,000 institution population of Milledgeville and said, "Hey, we can revive this community services closer to the home. So, now you have public mental health centers all over the state. So, somebody can just go down to a mental health institution in Athens, Clarke County, or Watkinsville, wherever and get service. They don't have to go be sent off, you know. To me, that was really changed the delivery of services in the state of Georgia. The PKU testing was, what Bobby's eluding to there is that, you know, through early intervention—in the hospital when they intervened, take the blood, find out that there's deficiency, mineral deficiencies, this type thing, and they can intervene right there and stop mental retardation. And that's through nutrition and all these other things like Bobby said. You deliver the services the first three months of pregnancy and then, you know, intercede there and then when the baby's born you have an immediate testing right there. And so, it's just really remade health care delivery in the state of Georgia on both sides. You have a fellow at Emory University, a Doctor [Louis Jacob] Skip Elsas, who is the head of genetics over there, who actually invented or discovered the PKU testing. And now it's done all over the country, and they modeled here.

ROWAN: We put \$150,000, I think, in that program as a kick-off and it's never let go. But anyway, I don't know exactly why, but I'd watched my friends get roads named after them, pretty soon there's a pothole in it, [group laughs] pretty soon you know you bump in that "Dumb old Bobby Rowan Road. They ought to repair that thing." So I never would agree for anything to be named after me. I didn't want nothing named after me. I mean, not that

I'm different than other people, it's just that it wasn't a goal. But if you watch people in your home community like this little boy that's now about 28 or 29, [he] got in to the little program that I set up. And he rode his bicycle by my house many times as he was growing up, and he was one of the WIC babies and one of his—mother was an unwed mother. And I saw him grow up and I saw the benefits that he had, and I was sort of proud of it. Nobody else knew about it. I sat out there on my front porch, but I was proud of that. And even to this day it suits me for nobody to know about that. There's no benefit to me if they do. But it was a benefit to me to know that I had been a little part of it. Others, Charlotte Wilen done far more than me but I did help her.

BROWNING: How do you spell her name?

ROWAN: W-I-L-E-N.

BROWNING: W-I-L-E-N.

ROWAN: Charlotte Wilen. I think, I hate to say this, but I think that she might have passed away. But she was real instrumental in that movement.

VOGT: Now while you were there, I think women had already broke the barrier to come in to the state legislature, but you were there when the first African American came, Leroy [R.] Johnson. And I think you came the same year, is that correct? So, you saw a lot of change take place when you were there, especially in the 60s, I would say. Who do you think was

the most effective and influential—and that can be two separate people or one person—among the women that you worked with and then among the African Americans you worked with?

ROWAN: Clearly Leroy Johnson was the most influential black politician they've ever had in the legislature. Nobody ever touched him on that. He was so smooth, so nice, and he had such great capacity. In my book I write a story about the way he done it. How he—first of all he went unnoticed. He never got up, never made speeches, but he had this uncanny habit of going to your desk while you was there, you know, before the session broke in, and he very polite, would lean down—big tall, imposing man—he says, “Senator, I read your bill, Senate Bill 79. I think it's a good bill. I want you to know that when it comes up I intend to support it.” And of course you'd say, “Well, I appreciate that, Leroy.” “Well, it's a good bill.” And I believed it was a good bill, you see. It didn't matter if it passed or not, Leroy Johnson. And I noticed him over the first—he didn't have any bills. He didn't have any season. You'd have thought a rabble, a black first would have been loud and vociferous; [he] never said nothing. [He] never got up and made a speech. [He] never made accusatory remarks. [He] never tried to defend blacks or whites. But everyday he'd go around and see six or eight people, always polite, always the same thing: “Senator, I read your Bill, Senate Bill so and so. It's a good bill. I want you to know I intend to vote for it.” Now, he never rose to speak in the early part because—and he didn't always, he didn't go tell you he was going to vote for it every time, because sometimes he'd vote against it. If he voted against it, he didn't go tell you anything. He just very quietly voted against it. As result of that, along the end of the session, he had two or three bills and he come and told me says, “Senator, I'm

afraid I want to warn you. I've introduced a bill which some of my people need but I'm afraid that it might cause you some problems in your district. You've proved to be good for blacks and whites in your district. I don't want nothing to happen to you. So I want you to feel free to vote against me." Well, he knew damn well I wasn't going to vote against him, you know. He'd done too much for me. He'd voted for me so many times so—but he was clerisy and so as a result, nobody could beat him when he really got a movement on. Nobody tried, because he'd built so many quiet, solid friends in the General Assembly and he showed such great respect, you know, offering to let us not vote with him. And then long at the last, the first week of the session—the first year of the session—before we—second year of the session, before we went down to begin our race, Leroy Johnson, about a week before the session was over, come over to me desk one day. He says, "Senator, I've watched. You've really been a good senator for your people." And he says, "You've been a good senator for my people. And I'm going to be traveling down in Nashville and Valdosta and over at Lakeland meeting with some of our friends there, me and the blacks." And he says, "I'm going to tell them what a good job you're doing." Well, that was like having gold in the bank. [It] didn't cost me nothing. I'm not sure he ever went, but I felt good about it. That was just the technique that he used. So, he was the most powerful. Grace [Towns] Hamilton had been on the Atlanta school board, was the, maybe the first, certainly the first black woman in the House. She was very influential, too. And some of the earlier black women that came in... They didn't have ladies' restrooms in the House until about '67 or '68. Not, you know, legislators' restrooms for ladies. And it was not a society—of course there wasn't many women in the whole government then. Iris Faircloth Blich, who later went to Congress, was a state senator and you mentioned—

VOGT: Janet [B. Scarborough] Merritt from Americus.

ROWAN: She came in about '66 or '68. A little later than me. She's a newspaper owner, I think. She was right effective, too. She—her and Billy Blair. Maybe Billy was the newspaper owner and she was something else, but two representatives from there, one was named [William Evans] Billy Blair and the other was Janet Merritt. They were both good legislators. She was good.

VOGT: Now we know that she, because we have her papers here, we know that she was one of the early people to try to change the state flag right toward the end of the time she served during the Carter administration, I believe.

ROWAN: Yes, she was, and on that day that that came out [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Jr.] came up from Bainbridge and come to the House and Senate to make a speech against changing it--one of the classic speeches of all time. He is so clever. Marvin Griffin was a great stump speaker and he told about riding up that day, coming by Zebulon, stopped at old Zeek Wilkinson's filling station where Zeek didn't have much business but he was glad to talk to me. And Zeek said to tell you folks, "Don't change that flag. Let it fly. Let it stay like it is. We don't need to print new cloth on a flag that's doing all right. Let it stay." And then he went on up to Jonesboro, and he stopped at another place, [to] eat lunch somewhere. [chuckles] It was a classic speech and, of course, Janet wasn't able to do much with the issue then.

VOGT: Do you think it's a dead issue now? Do you think it's going to come back?

ROWAN: It's not an issue in the sense that the talking has stopped, but as far as action, it is a dead issue. There's not enough people that want to get back into that can of worms on either side, really. You know, if you talk to 'em one-on-one they'll have some opinion about it if they think they're being heard, but basically they don't want to fool with this anymore. The flag we've got now has met the test of being approved by two-thirds or more of the people. Roy's [Eugene Barnes] flag looked sort of—it wound up being not accepted. It looked like a pirate flag or something. It was different color and off center. And I think most people agree that the stars and bars in a state like we are with our numbers of blacks that could be offended. And you know, I think most people are reasonable and agree that that should have been changed. So, I think it's an issue that won't ever come back to the point it effects anything. It won't ever be voted on again. I don't think.

VOGT: When you mentioned Marvin Griffin and his speech, it reminded me of the story I had heard about Senator Talmadge when Iris Blicht was going to run for office and this was, I believe, during county unit [system times]. So, of course, they went to talk with the Talmadges about her running. And when they decided for her to run, that they would support her, the advice given to her was to campaign was to stop at every filling station whether she needed gas or not. [laughter] Maybe buy a dollar's worth of gas or something. Get out, go in and talk to the people. Which was very interesting.

ROWAN: And she'd done that.

VOGT: Yes, she did.

ROWAN: She was my congressman. And she was—she didn't all of a sudden ... I think a lot of it had to do with her name. I believe if her name had been "Dorothy," but her name was "Iris Faircloth Blicht." So, as time went on, they forgot less that she was a woman and more that she was some of them Blichts from Homerville [Georgia]. And course, Herman Talmadge is putting all the money in the world behind her. She was real close to Herman.

VOGT: When, let's see...when you were in the General Assembly, did you work very much with the people who did go to Congress? And also, with the various governors that you served under, were there any that you were closer to than others, or what was your relationship?

ROWAN: I really was close to--as personal political friends--to the Congress people, my Congress. I was real close to whoever—please forgive me, I've got to sneeze again. I was close to whoever was governor because the governor, you know, found it mutual for us to be friends.

VOGT: Right.

ROWAN: He needed me, I needed him. I was close to Mr. [James Lester] Jim Gillis [Sr.] or whoever took his place afterward on the highway department; that was a very important job for a politician like me. And Congress, like I would work with my congressmen and work with the senators. When [Richard Brevard] Russell [Jr.] was there and even after Russell, [Samuel Augustus] Sam Nunn, the senators were really, you know, world-class people. In later years they haven't been that effective. So, you'd generally now would call a congressman before you'd call a senator, really. They have so many things to do. [John Hardy] Johnny Isakson might change that because he just got elected and he is very popular.

SPENCE: He's a lot more approachable, it seems like.

ROWAN: Yeah, he's a lot more approachable and he's friendly, and he's nice and he's moderate. He's not one of the wide-eyed conservatives that, you know... He's all right.

VOGT: And he spends a lot of time in the district, too.

ROWAN: Spends a lot of time in the state, yeah. I think—so I think, but I was always connected but mostly my involvement was with the state.

VOGT: When you made that change going from elected office to being appointed, head of the Board of Human Resources, was that a difficult change to make that you—to go into an administrative kind of job?

ROWAN: Well, actually, being a state Senator for twelve years and then be appointed and during that twelve years had sponsored an awful lot of legislation dealing with the Department of Human Resources. Busbee owed me an appointment and he had, or at least I felt like he did, and so we talked about what he'd appoint me to. You know, most people might have wanted to be on the Board of Regents, the Ports Authority, or something else. I didn't want to do it. I wanted to be on the Board of Human Resources because that's where I'd spent my time. But because I had spent so much time as a senator and was then appointed to the Board of Human Resources, where most people on there was appointed for other reasons than knowing much, I was fairly dominant on the board. Me and Ben Anderson from Cedartown [Georgia] who was a doctor, you know, we had a lot of influence because I had the long background of politics and connections across the street, and he was a talented black doctor from Cedartown. [A] great fellow, great friend of mine. So, it enhanced me. I didn't have any problem being a board member versus a senator. Neither one of them paid any money to live and—I could continue the fulfillment of my interest in doing a little, a few things that was noble on the Board of Human Resources easier than I even could in the General Assembly.

VOGT: It was a chance to see where your legislation had become law and how it was being—

ROWAN: I'm sorry, what?

VOGT: How your legislation had become law and how it was being—it was part of public policy at the time.

ROWAN: Well, it was not yet. The Community Services Act, for instance, as Frank mentioned, the Special Education Act and the Children and Infant Healthcare Act and all those acts, by the time I got to the Board of Human Resources, had been in place a few years and there were some changes needed. We had made the Special Education Act far too rigid. We had not let people stay in the normal classroom and be one of the slow learners. We'd been too hasty to get them out in a special program—with all good intention, but it didn't work. Where we'd think these slow learners could learn at be taught a lot more. The fact was that was a real mistake, because the slow learner in a normal classroom learned more from the students than any teacher could ever teach them. And so I began to realize we had made a mistake and was an early advocate for changing that. And we made some changes in that. And then there was one other thing that I didn't like. Whenever I first started with programs for the retarded, they would list in doing the surveys to take to the General Assembly all the people that was in the retardation programs and our population, say, was maybe twenty-three or twenty-four percent black. Well, then the population of the retardation program was much more than that. And I just was appalled they had put that out there. What difference did it make if you were black retarded or white retarded or Indian retarded or anything else. So, one of the things I was able, I think, to do is to [sneezing in background] stop that, the obvious. I know somewhere they know who's black and who's white and all that but the obvious numbers of blacks versus whites in the retardation program, because it affected our ability to get it funded. That people, you know, absolutely wasn't as interested in funding

programs for the blacks as they was the whites. I hope I've said that in a way that—but it's true. I should say it. It was basically true. Now, I think it's changing now some—but anyway, there were things we could do to tweak the programs, and there was a good place for me to be on the human resources board.

VOGT: Your attitudes of what you have expressed certainly seem to be that you were at least moderate if not somewhat liberal in your attitude toward working with blacks at a time when we were going through desegregation back in the '60s and so on, and yet you came from a rural area in south Georgia. Why do you think you were perhaps more open to that than, say, some of your—

ROWAN: Well, I can tell you—

SPENCE: Let me intervene there, to help partially answer it and I'll let Bobby finish it. But I think Bobby addresses that in his book. He talks about his dad and the influence his dad had in the community and the way he taught them to treat their neighbors and friends and—

ROWAN: Well, he's right, and I think it is in the book. I can't remember what I've written in the book, really. When I was growing up, my daddy was often criticized by his neighbors. He was not a liberal person, and he was not a bleeding heart. He just had basic standards of principal that he lived by. And one of them was so simple as to—he said many times to his neighbors and friends that didn't like it--this was in the '40s and '50s--but he defended that, he says, "Any man that works my fields eats at my table." It was a time whenever most

blacks had to eat in the yard or the tobacco barn or somewhere and often ate different foods than we did. But daddy insisted and to his credit, any man or woman—he would say man because that’s the way you done it back then—“Any man that works my fields eats at my table.”

SPENCE: I thought that was a great quote.

ROWAN: And he stuck to it. And his neighbors called him “N”-lovers, and it never fazed him. He’d never even thought about it. He says, “I don’t care. If you boys don’t want to swap work with me and my youngins”--because we had the big family, see. Everybody wanted to swap work with us because we could go over there and if the house caught fire we could put it out. This is the biggest family around. So, it didn’t matter. He just felt that way, and I think you would class me, as I look back on it, as being a fiscal conservative and on matters of human rights and rights in general to be pretty much a liberal. I didn’t like to waste money or fund projects and I did not believe money solved all the problems. But I think I was, you know, more liberal. But that’s what made my connection of passing laws effective. Whenever I started pushing for the retardation laws, Frank, if I’d had been from DeKalb County or Fulton County, I’d have never got them passed because they’d say, “Well, hell, that damn hick from up here—,” my South Georgia friends would. If old Bobby Rowan went out at night, partied with them a little bit, drank a little liquor and saw them everywhere. They couldn’t make me into a liberal. They could make me into a redneck that they didn’t like, but that’s the most they could make me into. So, I could pass things easier.

There was more the liberal bed, because my friends like Martin Young and others was not going to leave me.

SPENCE: Bobby, I heard you described by a lot of folks at a populist.

ROWAN: I'm a populist, really. If you look at what a populist is, I think I'm pretty much a populist. I don't know why that's not in vogue, but that was a good political movement that ought to have lasted, but I guess big money and radical liberalism got in it's way.

BROWNING: I've going to take this—

BROWNING: Well, if you want to, I can stop.

VOGT: No, that's, no, that's fine.

BROWNING: All right.

VOGT: Let's see, Greta, have you been following to see what—

BROWNING: I have. After you were the head of Human Resources—

ROWAN: I wasn't the head of it. I was on the board.

BROWNING: You weren't the head. You were on the board, I'm sorry. What did you do after—once you came out of that position before you ran for Public Service Commissioner?

ROWAN: Well, I was chairman of a subcommittee of the board and we took up many issues, family and children service issues, mainly, and we was very influential on what that board does. So, I'd come up here a week or two, and we'd figure what we think was better or an improvement and we tried to do it.

BROWNING: So, your lasting effects from your—

ROWAN: Yeah, it was—you know, we tried to divide the division. It took us a while to get it done, but it finally did. And you see a lot of people, even today there are some, that don't know that mental health and retardation is as different as apples and peas. You know, retarded are not mentally ill. They're mentally deficient, they're not—but, you know, everybody tried to treat them, Frank, like they all the same thing.

SPENCE: Sure.

ROWAN: I have friends of mine say, "Yeah, Bobby, I supported that mental health and mental retardation. It's a good thing." They don't really know the difference in the two.

VOGT: Now, why did you choose [the] Public Service Commission--to run for that position?

ROWAN: It was the only thing available to run for, and I needed to make a state-wide race, and ... I wanted, you know, and I thought I could win that race. I'm trying to figure out how to tell this without being totally degrading to myself [laughter]. In 1988, there was an opening on the PSC [Public Service Commission]. And it was a statewide office. I wasn't particularly enamored by it, but I was as free-lancing as government affairs person. And I had colon cancer [in] March of that year. And I didn't have any insurance, but I was real lucky in that the operation they done was quite successful. [I've] never looked back from that day to this. But I didn't know that in '88 when the race started. And I knew I'd never get insurance. I also knew that the PSC was not a bad job, and I also knew—and no, nobody ever knew about the cancer thing—I also knew that if I got elected after having had thirteen years—fifteen years [including] teaching school—if I got elected and won state election, in a month I'd be covered with insurance. Now, insurance is something you can't pay if you've got cancer. So that didn't make my decision, but that weighed heavily on me seeking public office again. If I didn't say that, I'd be less than truthful. Because once I took office, if I didn't get sick in thirty days, I was fully covered. And as it happened, I served the whole time and never got sick. But it was a great assurance to me and that was a motivating thing even though a lot of other things I'd rather have than PSC. But then I took the job and made something out of it for myself, and I think done a good job there.

SPENCE: Well, it became more of a job for you, then, a position.

ROWAN: Yeah, it was a job. It wasn't—it was very much a job, and I took it as such and so... But I doubt that if I had not had the illness, I would have run. Because, you know, you have a

lot of confidence in yourself, but I never realized how much insurance can—I mean, how much health can cost you if you don't have insurance.

VOGT: Right. I think most bankruptcies today are caused by lack of insurance.

ROWAN: That's right. So I ran because it was a good choice to get a job that maybe I needed at that time and had the connections of the health insurance. I knew one thing: if I got it, I wasn't going to get sick for thirty days [laughter]. [You] couldn't have made me sick for thirty days.

VOGT: In the time that you've been involved in state politics, there've been a lot of changes in the state and certainly today we're looking at Georgia as being a true two-party state. What do you think about the changes that have come to pass?

ROWAN: Well first of all, change is always good. Becoming stale in government is always bad. Now, if I—if you asked me to prescribe proper change I don't think I would have done what—I wouldn't have it change just like it is. But I think when it's all said and done, the Democrats will learn a valuable lesson about their performance in the past and the Republicans will learn a real valuable lesson of their performance in the future. And out of it will come a fairly well moderated way of dealing with one another. And when these new Republicans realize that what they've got elected to is not a real power base, it's just another job to do, then I think they'll become better legislators. You know, being elected to the General Assembly, we're all proud of it; I'm proud of having served. It ain't that big. You know, it's not the head

of the World Bank or something. But it's an opportunity to serve, and I don't take away from the dignity of that. If I hadn't been a senator, I wouldn't say that at all. But, you know, people have begun to realize after a year or two that this is a job, those that want to can do it well, and that's it.

VOGT: Do you think there's still a lot of talk is then about there being two Georgias: Atlanta and the rest of Georgia, or urban versus rural. And now today we have so much agribusiness, we aren't seeing much of a small farmer anymore.

ROWAN: Well, there's more than two Georgias. The people think about Atlanta and the rest of the state. But if you take the whole population of Atlanta and look at the way that the people there live, the whole population, and then you look at Enigma, Georgia, my hometown, the indications would be that Atlanta is doing all right and Enigma is not. When it comes to the standard of living, it's just opposite. There's more people in trouble in metropolitan Atlanta with their livelihoods than there are in Enigma. The reason for it is that you can have a good quality of life in Enigma, Georgia, in a \$2,000 mobile home that don't have air conditioning if you're willing to pay the price for doing that. And it can be affordable, but you can live on seven or eight or nine dollars an hour if you have to. It's safe: you aren't going to get robbed or hurt. Your children are not going to get—you don't have to worry about the[se] things. But if you're in Atlanta, Georgia, metro Atlanta, Georgia, and you make seven or eight or nine dollars an hour, you're in real trouble. You can't rent a house, can't pay your light bill, can't pay—you can't do it. You can't live here, so who's to say that—I don't agree with the two Georgias. I think there's two sets of opportunities. Some people in Enigma, like me, has an unusual

opportunity where I do all right. Some of my friends don't have the opportunities; they don't do very well. And that's same with Atlanta. [It is] certainly the same of Athens. You know, I know people—my son has a rare opportunity. He does all right. Then I know some other people that's his close friends that have to really struggle. What we have to have to make it all equal is we have to provide opportunities for better employment, better schools, better healthcare, and it ought to be criminal not to furnish—like, for instance, the other day in the legislature, I noticed they cut PeachCare. Peach Care for Kids is the best money this state ever spends for anything. I'd cut my own salary if it took it to pay the Peach, because that's a program for people that don't have health care and need it. But there was an effort to cut it. Now, I don't know—I doubt that'll stay. It will change around, but there's two or three Georgias. Certainly there's an attitude about blacks and whites that is not complementary, because there is some racism in the state.

VOGT: Well, what do you think now with the growing Hispanic and Asian population and how it's changing the state and politics in general?

ROWAN: The Hispanic population will change it immensely, because they're coming in greater numbers than anybody else. And they produce a service that everybody wants. And they're cheap. I'm not sure they produce it all for the better, but it's sort of like my daddy said with the blacks. If they're going to work in my fields, they're going to eat at my table. So if we going to allow the corporate entities of this country to employ the Mexicans, I don't think we ought to kick them around. I think we ought to, you know, decide what we're going to do about that issue. Because once in a while they'll catch a bunch of Mexicans without green cards—

they done it up here in Athens out at one of the chicken things or something—and they'll go out there, and they'll arrest 100 or 150 and send them to Mexico. Well, the man that hired them under those conditions ought to be locked up, too. The press shines on the officer getting these Mexicans. What about the man that owns the company? Do they focus on him? We've got a double standard. Now, the Chinese are a little different. They position themselves a little differently. And so does some of the Indian culture. They do things other than just the labor. Mexicans, a lot of it is labor. But they do work hard and the only reason they're here is because some people really want them and sometimes it's for the wrong reason, like cheaper wages.

VOGT: Now, I know we were talking earlier today and you were saying that you had business interests in Cuba and so one of my questions had been do you think we really have a global economy now in Georgia? That we're really looking outside of our own country to bring industry or...?

ROWAN: Well, right now we have a global purchasing economy, but not a global production economy. We're not producing things to sell to China. We sell some agriculture products, that's true, all over the world. And that's good, but we're not really—when you look at what China produces and sends to us, we're not even in the ballgame. So, I don't think we are. [sneezes] I'm so sorry.

VOGT: Now, the business that you're doing in Cuba, is that related to poultry or some aspect of agriculture?

ROWAN: We have, another friend of mine and I, have an export license to go down there and market agriculture products in certain defined areas: lumber, eggs, bull semen, livestock, chicken, chicken parts, and pecans. We can go down there and sell those products. And that's what we do. We represent the companies that has those products in Georgia and we go down there. And this, you know, it's a good market for ours, because most of these things I mentioned we have in surplus on good years. I mean, if production is high, and if we don't we can sell them some of that. But I like it. It's not a profit center for me as much as it is— everybody needs to have something they do that they really like, and if you ask me what I really like to do, I like to go to Thermopolis in Wyoming, sit out there in the hot springs, watch those mountains. I think it's the healthiest place in the world. Or go to Cuba and spend a few days, see that gorgeous island and walk The Malecón and visit with the Cuban people. They're gracious, nice, and interesting.

VOGT: Let's look at politics in Georgia coming up. What do you think are Cathy Cox's chances in the gubernatorial race? Will anyone besides Mark [Fletcher] Taylor challenge her, do you think?

ROWAN: No, it will be Mark and Cathy.

VOGT: Are we ready for a woman governor, do you think?

ROWAN: I think so. You know, I'm not sure that Cathy can't—that's not to say that Cathy'd be elected, but you know, why aren't we ready? Last time the votes came in, fifty-six percent of the people that went to the polls was women. Now, do you see women walking around saying, "I don't think a woman ought to be governor?" You do a little of that, but not much. I think that'll be—her being a woman—will help her two or three points. It might be what beats Mark Taylor and *then* it might be what beats [George] Sonny Perdue. I think she has a better chance because she is a woman. It depends on the races, but Cathy is ready for the race and Mark Taylor's obviously ready for the race and Mark's got more money than Cathy. But remember Roy Barnes had \$20 million and Sonny Perdue had three [laughter]. So, who can say?

VOGT: Well, can you think of anything else that we should talk about?

ROWAN: Frank Spence.

VOGT: Okay [Laughter].

SPENCE: Don't put him on the table.

ROWAN: [I] thought about some of his early years going to Lake Tahoe [Nevada and California] and places like that. No, no, I really, you know, ya'll are very gracious and kind, and it's still hard for me to believe that anything that I've said could be of interest.

VOGT: I think you've said a lot of interesting things today.

BROWNING: Yes.

BROOKS: Well, I'm sorry I missed some of it.

SPENCE: Well, we've got it on tape.

BROOKS: I wanted to ask you one question if you didn't bring it up before. When you were a student here at the university, what would be some of your fondest memories?

SPENCE: And not Effies. [laughter]

ROWAN: Effies, where is she at? Well, but Effies didn't interest me as much as Louise. No. Oh, I had so many fond memories here. First of all, I made money here. I had a sandwich business, and I pedaled sandwiches at night, four nights a week. [I] had four people working for me. I really didn't pedal then. I managed the making of 'em and got them sold.

SPENCE: Is that right? That's good.

ROWAN: I made more money—

SPENCE: Where'd ya'll sell, through the dorms or what?

ROWAN: We'd go to the dorms at nine o'clock at night and Dean [John David Ellington] Story [III] that you might or might not remember--he was dean of housing, men, housing--and he told me, and he was a good friend when I was campus leader, and so—

SPENCE: Which is the equivalent to the Student Government Association [SGA, University of Georgia, Athens] president now.

ROWAN: Sort of. So, I went to see him, and I said, "Dean Story"-- He helped[?] everybody then—a lot of people needed to work. I was trying to work in the dining hall; I was campus leader and need to spend more time that wasn't that. So, I went to see him and told him, "I want to make sandwiches and sell them in the freshman dormitory at night and in the ag[riculture] dormitories at night (men's dormitories) and at the fraternity houses." And he said, "Well, Bobby, you know, if I catch you..." [laughter] [He] says, "I appreciate—yeah, I know that people do different things. If I can catch you, now, I'm going to just simply have to make you quit. And if you poison anybody, I'm going to have to throw you out of school." [laughter] Well, we started the sandwich business--me and Millard Stewart[?] who was up at Calhoun [County, Georgia] is now—he was a county agent—he and I were roommates, and another boy beside, George Buckingham[?] was worth a few million dollars actually. We started the sandwich business, and from Monday through Thursday we went to all the dormitories until we went all through them and anything we had left we went out to Sigma Nu and Alpha Chi-- there's always drunk and hungry all out there [laughter]. So, you know, and I bought a car, [the] first car I ever owned while I—the money from the sandwich business. And so we had a good time.

SPENCE: So, you've been an entrepreneur all your life.

ROWAN: Well, I've had to do something to survive, you know. I always dreamed that one day I'd get that red Cadillac and Queenie Ola [?] would come back to town. [laughter]

SPENCE: Hey, for the record, can we tell the Queenie Ola story one more time?

ROWAN: No, no, no. I'm not going to tell Queenie Ola any more.

VOGT: Now, do you still have the family farm? Are you responsible for the family farm or is one of your brothers or sisters?

ROWAN: The nine children, we all kept the family farm just like it was, all together. We took different parts of it. There's about 400 acres, so different ones took different parts of it but we kept the house, where I was raised and my younger siblings was raised, we kept it, and we have reunions and things there. And we go there often, like, I go every weekend I'm home to the pond or somewhere. So our family, the nine families, have a lot of history back there and it's all kept just like it was.

SPENCE: Have the other siblings built on their parts of it?

ROWAN: No, there's no houses been built and probably won't. I built a little cabin down at the lake or the pond, we've a real nice lake down there to fish in. I built a little cabin there and then the house will sleep like eight or ten people. And so we have, every October we go back, all the families, maybe forty or fifty people, go back to have "The Farm Day" we call it. And then at different times people can go that wants to and take your sheets, take your towels, turn it on. It's ready to go. We keep it ready to go—heating and cooling. It's all ready to go.

SPENCE: Is it a working farm now?

ROWAN: Yeah, we rent it out to people that farm for cotton and peanuts, raise some trees. On [Georgia] Highway 135 between Lakeland and Willacoochee. Ed Rivers paved that road. [laughter] That's the Ed Rivers Road.

SPENCE: One thing I'd like to have, maybe have you tell before we close it out, is when you were with the part of the debate society here, and ya'll wrote the letter to Fidel Castro. I mean, I think that's a great part of history, I think we need to...

VOGT: Yeah. That's good.

BROWNING: Yeah.

ROWAN: Well, I guess you'll have to allow me to attempt to capture the moment. The moment I believe you'd find to be in '57. Demosthenian Literary Society met every Monday

night and debated topics of interest. Castro had been all over the United States talking about the tyrant and dictator [Fulgencio] Batista [y Zaldívar].

SPENCE: I remember seeing him on television on The Jack Parr Show in 1957 and he was welcome to the United States as a liberated—

ROWAN: He was very popular here.

SPENCE: Very popular.

ROWAN: So we formed a little organization here, at least, there was one formed—I shouldn't say "we" because I'm not sure I was that involved. There was a Castro movement here and the Demosthenian Literary Society, being the vocal body that discusses with great intelligence all matters, we took it up. And we debated it, you know, maybe on two or three occasions but there was one night when I moved for a vote on the whole issue and I moved that we, Demosthenian Literary Society, write a letter to then Governor Marvin Griffin and asked him to immediately dispatch a company of National Guard troops to the mountains of Cuba to assist Castro in freeing the people from Batista. And, of course, we debated that thing long and hard but it passed, you know. Well, I forgot all about that. That was in '57, '58. Thirty years later in '88, I was over here campaigning for reelection and one of the people in the audience, just out of the blue, asked me said, "Mr. Rowan, what do you think about Castro and communist Cuba?" And you know, what would you think? Your mind's not working anyway, and you don't know what the hell he's wanting to know for, and what does it matter--just get the question behind you and

let it go. I said, “Well, you know, I’m not in favor of communism. I’m not in favor of Castro. I believe in the capitalist system of government, and I’m sure that soon it’ll all be overthrown.” And then, would you think, he whipped out a sheet, two sheets, and says, “Would you like to read this?” [He] says, “Your opinion has changed.” And I read that and sure enough I had advocated, you know, the National Guard troops and all that. And I didn’t know exactly what to do so, I remember what I told him though, I said, “Well, you boys perhaps are going to have to come in and see me one at a time. I’m all crossed up on that issue.” [laughter] I never would get more closer than that.

SPENCE: Did you say that that was brought up when you went to Cuba?

ROWAN: No. I made a copy of that when I was down there selling chicken.

SPENCE: Yeah.

ROWAN: That was brought up in ’88 when I was—

SPENCE: Yeah, I know. I said, later when you were down there in—

ROWAN: Yeah, that’s a famous thing in Cuba because I made a copy of my statement’s motion and everything and the results and took it down there to President [Ricardo] Alarcón [de Quesada] who was head of the assembly down there. He’s the president of the elected assembly much like our speaker of the House [of Representatives] in Washington [D.C.] and he took

thing and showed it to Castro. He told me when I went back down there later, you know. So, I get good warm treatment down there for being an early supporter of Fidel. [laughter]

VOGT: I have to ask one more series of questions for our forthcoming exhibit that we are having here on rural electrification. And being on a farm, and of course, you were born in '36, I believe—[in] your earliest memories of electricity, do you remember a time when you didn't have electricity?

ROWAN: Oh yes, yes, yes.

VOGT: And do you remember what it was like for you when the lights came on?

ROWAN: Well, the lights didn't come on first. The year was 1939. I was four years old. And we didn't have electricity in our whole community, but REA [Rural Electrification Administration] started running the lines and it was with great anticipation because electricity was the thing that got us out of where we was. The Aladdin lamps and—you know, was pretty good, but they wasn't as good—anyway. There was great excitement about it coming and my mama—the thing that was so good for us, as I mentioned we were a big family, when we plugged in that electricity on the back porch, daddy had gone that day to Willacoochee and bought on credit a GE [General Electric] refrigerator from a man named Cory Belk at a hardware store. He brought that thing home and plugged it in, let it run a little while to be sure it was a cooling, and we took the babies' milk out of the well for the last time. Now, that was by far the biggest improvement in our life we ever had was electricity, as far as comfort. Now,

you see, up until then we had to milk the cow and then put the milk down in the well and drawing it up if you hit it against the side and it broke the glass jug, you know, you could get in real trouble or you had to go milk another cow. The youngin' sitting over there crying. So, getting the milk out of the—it was symbolic that we got the baby's milk out of the well. We didn't actually put in electricity in the house like lights, plug-ins, until the fall when we had some money. But mama and daddy went to town and bought on credit a refrigerator and set it up on the back porch and got somebody—the man that come out there and really run the electricity for a fee, [he] come back that evening and night and run one plug and plugged in that GE refrigerator. And that was a—that changed all of rural Georgia.

VOGT: Right.

ROWAN: We was really second-class citizens until electricity come along, because then you had water and bathrooms and take a shower and heat water, cook—it just changed everything.

VOGT: Changed a lot of your chores, too.

ROWAN: A lot of the chores. We'd have to tote water forever for our big family, you know. And drawing water.

SPENCE: Where'd you draw your water from?

ROWAN: We had a well. We had wells everywhere. [If] one'd go bad, you'd have to go up and haul water from the other one and they—I always laugh about the first job a little boy on the farm has to do. I don't know if I should really—this is OK though. [laughter] The first job a real little, little country boy has to do on the farm is the chore of turning the chickens around on the well at night. [laughter]

BROWNING: What is that? I don't know. [Laughter] Sorry.

SPENCE: They're pointed in the wrong direction. [laughs]

BROWNING: Oh, I see. I see.

ROWAN: Well, you know, the chickens would in fact jump up and light on the well curb unless, you know, we wouldn't let them do that but they was times they would, you know. And they always joked about it—if you don't—your job's going to be turning them chickens around every night at dark. But it was electricity done so much for everybody really.

VOGT: And you eventually had it working the farm, like incubators and other things that you would have for—

ROWAN: Well, we never—our business was mostly, you know, we had water. The big advantage was we had more than one well, and we'd always run a little electricity and have a pump. But before that, we had a couple hundred cows. We had mules and horses. We had—

people needed to take a bath and mama's doing the cooking and washing the clothes. We'd— somebody in our house was drawing water all the time. And after we had pumps to put water to the mules, water to the cows, water to the kitchen, water to mama, water to take a bath in, and electricity to heat the water. See, we'd have to draw up three or four wash tubs of water and set it out in the sun and then when it got dark at night you'd just run out there where it was warm—the water was relatively warm—and take a bath. Didn't take you long either—it was pretty cold. [laughter] Electricity changed all that. We didn't use it to run machines much, but we didn't have machines much.

VOGT: That's great.

BROWNING: Anything else?

VOGT: I don't know of anything else. I think we've [unintelligible]. Well, we want to thank you for talking with us today. It's been a pleasure.

ROWAN: Well, you can tell I've enjoyed it.

VOGT: Yeah, we've enjoyed it too, very much.

ROWAN: I have enjoyed it.

VOGT: [We] appreciate your coming.



SPENCE: Well, Bobby, we appreciate you and appreciate your service to the people of Georgia.

ROWAN: Don't make me feel bad. I had fun doing it [laughter].

SPENCE: We're all better off. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]



Bibliography

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Robert A. "Bobby" Rowan

b. November 17, 1935

d.

Occupation:

Public Service Commissioner, 1989-1994

Georgia Senator, District 8, 1963-1974

President, Enigma Farm Bureau, 1962

Service in the U.S. Army and National Guard

Farmer

Teacher

Democrat



Subject Analysis

RBRL OHD 003

Robert A. "Bobby" Rowan

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- School
- Family
- Meal time
- Political conversations at home
- Biblical conversations at home
- Church
- 4-H involvement
- Junior public speaking and it's affect on his pursuit of political office
- Debate Society at UGA
- Time in college
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- State Senate race 1962
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- Work of the Georgia General Assembly
- Children and Infant Healthcare Act
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- Nutrition programs for pregnant women
- African Americans Breaking the color barrier in the Georgia General Assembly
- Women in the Georgia General Assembly
- State flag changes
- Political relationships
- Board of Human Resources
- Programs for the mentally challenged
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