

Bubba McDonald interviewed by Bob Short
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Bubba McDonald

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics. And we're very honored today to have as our guest the Honorable Lauren "Bubba" McDonald, longtime member of the Georgia House of Representatives and a member of the Public Service Commission. Welcome, Bubba. We're delighted to have you.

BUBBA MCDONALD: My pleasure, Bob. Thank you so very much. It's quite an honor for me.

SHORT: Good. You know something, Bubba? Besides being longtime personal and political friends, we have something else in common.

MCDONALD: What's that?

SHORT: Commerce, Georgia.

MCDONALD: Oh, absolutely.

SHORT: Commerce.

MCDONALD: What's your relationship with Commerce?

SHORT: Well, my grandparents lived in Commerce, Georgia, most of their lives. And I hope you knew them, Mr. Charley Short and his wife.

MCDONALD: Absolutely.

SHORT: But we aren't here to talk about them. We're here to talk about you. You were born in Commerce, grew up in Commerce. Tell us a little bit about your early life.

MCDONALD: Well, I was born in Commerce in 1938. I was born on Thanksgiving Day. And it knocked my father out of a bird-hunting trip, and he was not happy about that. Grew up there. Had an older sister named Shirley, and she's the one that named me "Bubba." She didn't say, "brother," she said, "Bubba," and it kind of took and stook. So I've lived with that all these years. Commerce schools. Graduated from Commerce High School. Unfortunately, my mother passed away when I was 12. She was 39 years old and she had cancer. And my father never remarried. He was in the hardware business. And he married the same year that I married. He married his golfing partner's widow. I married in 1964 to Sunny Nivens, a schoolteacher, a Brenau graduate, from Gainesville, Georgia. And before that time, I was at the University of Georgia. Played in the Dixie Redcoat Band. The Dixie

Redcoat Band. And now it's the Redcoat Band. I played in a dance group called The Twighlighters. I was the trombone player and male vocalist for the group, and made good money back then, back in the mid-50s, '58, '57, '59. Went in the Air Force in '59. Spent some time in the Air Force. I was between the Korean conflict and the Vietnam conflict. I was in the Georgia Air National Guard. And after graduating from the University of Georgia, I went back into the business with my father in the hardware and building supply business.

Well, Sunny and I married in 1964. And right after that, Floyd Hoard was the district attorney in Jackson County, and Floyd was murdered. He was blown to death. And then, at that time, the sheriff was resigned from office, Governor Maddox was governor of Georgia. The ordinary of the county was Judge Griffith. At that time under Georgia law, the ordinary of the county would appoint an interim sheriff until one could be elected. I was 27 years old, and Judge Griffith asked me if I would take that interim sheriff position. Well, it just scared my wife to death, and scared my father, because of the tragedy that had happened. And I turned that down. But in 1968, I got up one morning and, of course, it was very unusual for me to put on a tie unless I was going to church. And my wife said, "What are you putting on a tie for?" I said, "I'm going to qualify." She said, "Qualify for what?" I said, "I'm going to qualify for County Commissioner." And I ran for County Commissioner. I said, "I want to make a difference in this county. And we don't deserve what we've had." And so I was successful in that election.

At that time, Bob, it was the Commissioner of Roads and Revenue. And timing is so

important in everything. Maddox, again, was still governor. And I was invited when I was elected to speak at the first annual Conference of County Commissioners because, at that time, I was the youngest county commissioner in the state. And why a young person wants to be involved in county government, you know. And so I had a keynote speech at the convention. Hugh Logan from Athens, Georgia, was president of the Convention at that time. And there was a vacancy on the 9th District Board of Managers of the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, and I was elected to fill that spot as a freshman county commissioner. Well, I sat at the table with the Ira Breedlove's and the Tom Callaway's from Decatur and all these veteran county commissioners on that board.

Then my neighbor, Mac Barber, decided to run for Controller General, which is now Insurance Commissioner. So this was in 1970. And so I ran for his seat in the Georgia House of Representatives and was elected there and was seated in 1971. George L. Smith was the Speaker of the House. And I remember those times. They had gone through the thing with seating Julian Bond. When I went in to get my seat assignment, George L. asked me if I had any problem sitting next to a black, and which I did not. Bill Alexander was my seatmate on my left. He was a Superior Court Judge in Fulton County. And then J. C. Daugherty next to him. And then Julian Bond was right on over on the left side. And Jack Dunna, (ph) from Toccoa, who was a superior court judge later, was on my right. But I served under George L. And then, of course, George L. passed away, and Speaker Murphy was Speaker Pro Tem and he became Speaker.

Probably one of the most exciting and satisfying things that happened to me legislatively was in my earlier days. Jackson County had a bad problem with car theft. I mean, it was noted as the Car Theft Capital of the World. And it wasn't reflective on the quality of people that were in that county. So I introduced a local constitutional amendment giving the Georgia Bureau of Investigation total arrest authority in Jackson County. The law at that time said that the only the way the GBI would involve themselves is if they were invited in either by the sheriff or the superior court judge or the district. They just didn't go in and start investigating and things of that nature. It was a very, very controversial piece of legislation. It was a local legislation. I remember my colleague Lamar Northcutt was the executive director of the Georgia Sheriff's Association, but he was a legislator from Clayton County. And Lamar objected, of course, to my local legislation. And so it was sent back to committee. Elliott Levitas was chairman of the State Planning and Community Affairs Committee. And Jack Gellar was clerk of the house from Clarksville, Georgia. And they knew how important this piece of legislation was for me. The Georgia Sheriff's Association, of course, opposed it strongly. But they helped me get it back through the committee and back on the calendar, and it passed. And even Lamar Northcutt voted for it. He didn't know it. It was one of those times you're voting on local bills, and he didn't expect it to be back, wasn't paying that close of attention. And it passed. And it passed in the ballot box, six to one, when it was put on the ballot in Jackson County. The GBI came in with the FBI and cleaned everything up, and we eliminated that. That was a very, very proud, proud time in my life. It was very controversial.

Then later, the most other controversial local legislation I did, we had three school systems: City of Commerce, City of Jefferson and Jackson County. And I was going to consolidate all of those school systems. Busbee was governor at this time, and I had some strong commitments from Busbee. The State Department of Education was totally for it. It was put to a referendum, had to be passed in the three different school districts. It passed in two and failed in the county system by about 179 votes. Very unfortunate, in my opinion. It was a very controversial piece of local legislation. I had the windows shot out in my business twice, the plate-glass windows, during that period of time. And unfortunately, it didn't pass, and it still has three school systems in it.

But from the state's perspective standpoint, another great tribute to me was that I was chosen to be in the charter class of Leadership Georgia. Dr. J. W. Fanning, who was quite a person and one of my favorite people. Sam Nunn and I were two legislators that were in the charter class of Leadership Georgia. This was in 1972. And, of course, here we are in 2008, and Leadership Georgia has just flourished all over the state and a great, great program.

Another big part of my legislative life was – still in the mid-70s, Dean Fluellen, the dean of the business school at the University of Georgia, Dr. Fluellen and I talked, and we came up with the vision of the Small Business Development Center, the SBDC. And I did the enabling legislation, or resolution, that created the SBDC, and served on its board until a couple years ago, when I just stepped aside from it. But it was the model that the United States used. Dean Fluellen and I visited with Larry Bramlett, went to Washington, the White House, when Mr.

Carter was president. And Sam Nunn was kind of leading that, and he led the effort at the national level to create the Small Business Development Administration. And so that was another piece of the puzzle that I'm very proud of.

Then Speaker Murphy appointed me as chairman of the Industry Committee. And Industry Committee handles, basically, most utility legislation and other regulatory pieces. And I did that for five years. I remember we had the bill that was to expand the Industrial Development Authority bonds, whereby that if you were contiguous with, like the Merchandise Mart in Atlanta, you could build on tax-free bonds. Days Inn – Richard Kessler went to the Speaker. They wanted to do this with a Days Inn in downtown Atlanta on International Avenue. And the Speaker called me in and said, "Let's help get this bill." I said, "Mr. Speaker, this is a bad bill. We don't need to get this bill out." And he said, "Well, yeah. It'd be all right." He said, "My people from Bremen, they can't afford to stay in that Peachtree Plaza. They need a Days Inn down there." And I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, if we're going to keep diluting this bill, this program, the feds are going to take it away from us." We were getting arbitrage off of it and things of that nature. And he said, "Well, just go ahead and get the bill." I said, "Well, I can't defend the bill on the floor of the House, because I'm opposed to it." He said, "Well, get somebody else to do it. Be sick that day or something." I said, "No, I'm not going to get the bill out, Mr. Speaker." He said, "Well, you're going to force me to have to come to your committee." I said, "No, Mr. Speaker, don't come to the committee." He said, "I'm coming if you don't get it out." I said, "Well, I guess you're going to come, because I'm not going to get

it out, Mr. Speaker.”

Anyway, I had people like Johnny Isakson, Carl Harrison, Charley Mann from Elberton, Frank Horne from Macon, Sonny Watson from Warner Robbins. Hosea Williams was on my committee. And I really had the Speaker beat when he came up there by my count. But I had two of my friends that feather-legged on me, and they just couldn't handle the pressure from the Speaker, and the bill got out. The funny thing about it was that Richard Kessler had made such a dire need that that Days Inn couldn't do it unless they had these IDBs. It wasn't long that Joe Frank Harris was running for governor. Bo Ginn was running. Saw where Richard Kessler with Days Inn had given Bo Ginn a big contribution to the campaign. And then they had a big article in the paper how profitable Days Inn was and everything. And I showed all those to the Speaker, and he just chomped that cigar and munched a little bit.

But those were fun times. And then, of course, the real caveat was when he called me, and I was at home on a Friday afternoon about five o'clock, and he said, "Son, I want you to be my Appropriations Chairman." And I chaired the Appropriations Committee for the next eight years.

SHORT: Well, let's talk about that for a minute. Let's talk about how your committee and the legislature appropriates the taxpayers money. What's the process?

MCDONALD: Well, of course, you know the Governor sets the budget. He sets the

revenue estimate and presents a budget. The Judiciary presents its own budget to the Governor, and he has to incorporate that into the budget. He doesn't mess with the Judiciary budget. Then it comes to the House of Representatives. We can work within the framework of the revenue estimate. We cannot appropriate outside the revenue estimate. But the budget changes form from the time the Governor prepares it until when it's in the House. And we go through the hearing processes with the different agencies, state agencies, and everything.

A little side note, I get amused about, even today, the media so worried about lobbyists. The biggest lobby we have is government, government itself: the university system, the school systems, the agencies within state government themselves. I mean, during my time as chairman, everybody knew I was in my business on Saturday. Nothing unusual for the chancellor of the university system to come walking in my hardware and building supply business in Commerce, Georgia, or the president of the university or the director of the Agrirama in Tifton, Georgia or something like that. It was just nothing uncommon.

But then the House develops its own version. And of course, there was the infamous Green Door Committee. And the Green Door Committee was made up of some speaker-select people that, once the Appropriations Committee set a budget in place, then the Green Door Committee would look at it and even massage it even a bit further. And then the budget goes to the Senate, and the Senate does their thing with it. And then it goes to a conference committee. And then there are three members from the House and three members from the Senate that literally can rewrite the entire budget right there, after it's gone through the whole process. And

those days sometimes would get very long. You'd get to the end of the session, and the budget would be one of the last things that was hanging out there. My colleague across the hall was Terrell Starr. Senator Terrell Starr was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee in the Senate. And Senator Starr and I worked very closely together. We had confidence in each other. We confided in each other. And of course, Zell Miller was lieutenant governor at that time. And we would get in some stagnation points of hours over \$10,000 in the budget out of a \$7-billion budget or a \$9-billion budget. And I went to Zell and I said, "The Senate's got to have some things – they've got to make changes, and it's going to happen the same as the House." And we set aside an agreement of dollars in the budget which were really miniscule. But when you're looking at, Bob, just like this morning's news today, 2008, May, I noticed that the World Congress Center just spent \$100-million on remodeling the damage from the tornado. That was the same amount of money that was spent to build phase I and phase II of the World Congress Center. Because I was in the General Assembly when they appropriated the first \$30-million to build the World Congress Center, and the second phase was \$70-million. And so we spent \$100-million just to do what we did to build the first two phases of the World Congress Center.

So Zell and I agreed, and I went back with my committee and conference committee. And so we eliminated that what we called "chicken dancing" between the budget process, and I'm real proud. We got budgets out two and three days before the legislative session was over.

SHORT: Let's go back, Bubba, if you will, to your first year in the House of Representatives. Jimmy Carter was governor.

MCDONALD: Correct.

SHORT: Lester Maddox was lieutenant governor. And all of the news during that time was of the bitter feud that those two had going. What do you remember about that?

MCDONALD: Well, it was very interesting. And I spent my first week in the hotel, the – oh, gee – lost the – where everybody stayed.

SHORT: Henry Grady?

MCDONALD: Henry Grady. Henry Grady Hotel. And, of course, that's where Speaker Smith stayed. But I couldn't stand it. I had to get out of there. So I moved to the Holiday Inn, and Speaker Pro Tem Murphy was at the Holiday Inn – Howard Johnson's, excuse me, south of where the Turner Field is now. And Sam Nunn, Carlton Colwell, Elliott Levitas, Mike Egan, Grace Hamilton. President Carter had – going through reorganization of state government. And he had a group of what was called – Speaker Murphy called them the “13 Disciples of Carter.” And we would meet and discuss issues that the governor put before us and

come up with some suggestions and everything. And in that process, there were times I remember that the 13 of us would have a unanimous position on it, and Mr. Carter would go 180 degrees in a different direction.

SHORT: This was on his reorganization bill?

MCDONALD: That and some of the other things, yes. But it kind of sets the tone as to how Mr. Carter as governor never did have a rapport with the legislature, either i.e. the Senate or the House. I never will forget a time that Mr. Carter was with one of his sons and he had him around the Capitol. Came up to James "Sloppy" Floyd, who was Appropriations chairman, and tagged him on the shoulder and says, "Daddy wants to see you downstairs." And, of course, James "Sloppy" Floyd, number one, that just went – you know what happened there. But anyway, in my opinion, unfortunately, when he got to the presidency, he still had that same problem. He never created a rapport with the Congress. And of course, you look at Carter and you look at Maddox as lieutenant governor, and then you spend time with Tom Murphy as speaker and Zell as lieutenant governor and head of the Senate, and from a public standpoint you would think that they were ready to draw knives and swords and go at each other. They worked close together. I mean, if you were privileged like I was privileged to be behind the scenes and see what was going on, there was great respect on both sides for each other.

And you think back. Think back and look at Georgia. Not because I was there for 20

years, but look at Georgia from 1970 to 1990, and look what happened to Georgia in this period of time, the growth, the expansion, what happened to our university systems, what happened to our technical schools that developed all over the state, trying to put one within 50 miles of every child that wants to go to college or advance their education beyond high school. This happened, our economic growth, even though there was the mid-70s recession in there that we experienced and had to cut back in the state budget and everything. We had the Developmental Highway Program. Completing the interstate through downtown Atlanta was just a magnificent project where we appropriated advance funding to draw down the federal funds. Tom Moreland was the instigator in moving shaker on that. I mean, there was just tremendous things that are there today that were done in that period of time.

SHORT: Let's talk a minute about some of the governors with whom you served.

George Busbee.

MCDONALD: A delight. George was a good governor his first six years. His first term and then two years into his second term. Zell was governor 'til the day he left the office. George wasn't as active. I think he was doing more to build his tomorrow than the state's stuff the last two years. Did a lot for expanding economic development in our state. And of course, these are my opinions. These are not opinions of anybody else. Loved George Busbee.

I remember a piece of legislation the Consumer Utility Council, when I was the Industry

chairman – it was one of those that had a sunset unless you extended it. And I had the bill before my committee, and I wasn't going to let it out. And got a call to come to the Governor's office, and Busbee pushed me real hard about wanting to get that bill out. Representative Sonny Watson from Warner Robbins was my vice-chairman, and he was with me in the Governor's office. And George just got all upset. And what I told him, I said, "Well, Governor, I am not going to let that bill out of committee." And he took his glasses off and he threw them across the room in the Governor's office. They broke into a thousand pieces. And he said, "I will create it by executive order," and I said, "Well, that's what you're going to have to do."

And of course, we were great friends, I mean, great friends. And George was a good governor. Did a lot of good for the economic development of our state. Knew the process, because he'd been in the General Assembly for many, many years. We had something in common, both of us being pilots, and we always had something to talk about. Good conversation.

SHORT: Joe Frank Harris.

MCDONALD: Well, Joe Frank was the kind that just kind of let things happen. You could count on Joe Frank. He didn't get upset. He was very dedicated to his job. Of course, a model person in his character, in his and Elizabeth's character. Not saying any of them weren't, but Joe Frank was there. I had an experience with the Governor, Governor Harris, when the

Superintendent of Education passed away during a legislative session. And I went to the Governor and I said, "Governor, there's a time right now that, in my opinion, you can make a tremendous difference in this state." I said, "Somewhere out there there's a successful corporate head or businessperson that started out in the school of education and has the credentials that would qualify that person has taught a year, to be superintendent of the state schools." And I said, "I think it would great if we went out there and found this businessperson, this businessperson, to come in and manage the educational program in this state." And I said, "I beg of you to do this." But he didn't do that. He appointed from within. And of course, that's fine, well and good. But there was a lot of things I thought would really make a difference.

It's just business. Running a department of education, running a department of human resources, running any of these things, you don't have to be the best teacher or the most experienced in education. You need to know how to run a business. You've got people that you can put into those places in those different areas of expertise if you manage the program. And that's, in my opinion, what it's all about.

SHORT: He was succeeded by Zell Miller. How about Governor Miller?

MCDONALD: A delight. Of course, as you know, I ran for governor in 1990 when Governor Miller was elected. There was Roy Barnes in the race, Andrew Young, Lester Maddox. On the Republican side, Johnny Isakson, Greeley Ellis, Bob Wood. And the

experience for me in that period of time was just awesome to go around the state of Georgia. I would even find myself at times defending Zell when we would be in a debate on monetary things. I remember Governor Barnes was getting on Zell about some salary bill or something, and I whispered to Zell, I said, "He's the one that introduced it in the Senate," and had a good time. Of course, I was flying my little Cessna 182 Skylane, and my good friend Zell and Roy and those were coming in on the King Airs when we'd go to different places around the state. And I'd get out as pilot and then get out as candidate and do the thing, then get back in. And I'd watch them go off into the sunset in those big turbo prop jobs, and here my little 182 Skylane. But it was a great experience, a great experience.

Zell was a great governor of Georgia. Zell was a working governor of Georgia. Zell taught me an awful lot. Of course, I became president of Georgians for Better Transportation after I finished that race for governor, back in my business at home. And then the group of business people came to me and asked me if I would head up GBT, and they gave me the latitude to make sure that my business, my own business, was number-one priority. And I did that.

And so I worked very closely with Zell. I remember being called into his office when Wayne Shackelford was being promoted to be the Commissioner of Transportation, and Zell wanted us to give an endorsement for Wayne, which we did gladly do so. But you got to hand it to Zell. He was a go-getter. Still is, proudly. Thank goodness.

And, of course, you know the story that I was still working in my business and president of GBT, and I got a call from the Governor to come see him. And this was in 1998. I had just

sold my business in May of 1998, the hardware and building supply business in Commerce. My son, Lauren III, did not want anything to do with the hardware business. He graduated from the University of Georgia, political science major. I asked him, I said, "Son, what are you going to do?" He says, "I want to be a funeral director." I said, "Do what?" And he had to go three more years to get his certification to be a licensed mortician and funeral director. And so when he came back, we looked at home where I've lived all my life, but the numbers just weren't there to do that. So we went to Cumming, Georgia, and went into business there in '97. Cold turkey. Never been in the business before. Didn't know 25 to 30 people in the whole county there. Of course, Forsyth County had changed so much over the period of time. And we knew that 80% of the population hadn't lived their 20 years. There was only one other establishment in Forsyth County. He'd been there 70-something years and was very popular. And it was a real struggle for three years. I mean, it was a real struggle for three years. I mean, it took a little time.

But I'd sold my business in May, but the buyers didn't want to take over until August of '98 and didn't want it to be known. But I knew when Zell offered me the opportunity to serve on the Public Service Commission – but I first turned him down. I told him I just didn't think I wanted to get back into it. I went back home, got a call from him again to come back. And he said, "Let me tell you, Bubba, what I'm looking for." He said, "I'm looking for someone that has run a successful business, and you've done that." He said, "I'm looking for somebody that understands state government, and you do that." And he said, "You can't turn me down on this job. I want you to do this." And he said, "I've got people beating the door down wanting this

and you're standing here turning me down." I was leaving going on a blue marlin fishing trip that afternoon. And I told him, I said, "Well, Governor, I'll call you before the weekend's over. I called Johnny Isakson on that trip. Johnny was, again, in the 1990 Governor's race with us. Then he was appointed by Zell to chair the state's school board. And this was when the Schrenko and all the confusion was going on on the state school board level, and Johnny was brought in there to calm the waters. And this is the mark of a good leader. Zell Miller, he goes in and he picks out talent to do different things. A lot of people are scared to pick out talent. They're scared that they'll show them up or something like that. Not Zell Miller.

But anyway, so I was on the trip and I called Johnny. I said, "Johnny, what kind of support did the Governor give you when you went to the school board to try to solve those problems?" And he said, "It was just absolutely great." I said, "He was just fantastic." And I said, "Okay." And I told Johnny what my situation was. And so I called Zell. He'd given me a cell phone to call him, and I called him and I said, "Well, Governor, I'll accept the appointment." He said, "Good. I want to swear you in Tuesday morning at 10:00." He said, "I've got to get this over with." Anyway, so we went forward from there.

And I told him, this was in June of '98. Well, he was going out of office in December. Well, the Commission, it laid on its platter the gas deregulation. The General Assembly had passed gas deregulation. It was Sonny Perdue's legislation as a state senator. And then it was the Public Service Commission's job to implement the program. Well, I got there right at implementation time. And, of course, it was a drastic change in the delivery of natural gas, and

controversial and all this kind of business. And a lot of hearing hours and a lot of ears bent. So in December, I was talking to Governor Miller in December, and I said, "Well, Governor, it took me six months to figure out why you wanted me to do this." And he said, "Bubba, what do you mean?" I said, "You just got even with me for running against you for Governor in 1990, didn't you?" Of course, we had a big laugh about that and everything.

SHORT: Well, I would say, and I might be wrong, but I think that the Public Service Commission's decisions probably affects the pocketbooks of Georgians more than any other agency.

MCDONALD: Well, it will equal up to any. And there's a misconception, Bob, to some degree about the Public Service Commission. We operate under the policies that are set by the General Assembly of Georgia and the Governor. But the responsibility is, you have a company, i.e. a Georgia Power, that you regulate, and you have the consumer over here. I'm a consumer. I'm as big a consumer as anybody out there. But the law says that we have to find whereby that the company, i.e. the monopoly, that we're regulating has a right of return on equity, a fair amount. Now, our job is to go in and make sure that they are running the business in the most frugal manner that they can run and deliver the service. And then when you think and look at the population growth of Georgia over the last 50 years, you just don't go out here and build a generation plant in two weeks. You've got to be way out there in front. And so

this is where the confusion comes in. And when the power company – and the state passed a fuel clause where if coal goes up or natural gas goes up, the power company can pass that on to the consumer. It's the only place they can pass it to. And that's state law. But we have to make sure, the Commission has to make sure, that it's done – their bid process, their purchases. Like in my business, in the hardware business, the best way that I can serve my people is to make sure that I'm buying at the right price so that I can sell at the right price. And I have to make a profit. I can't stay in business unless I make a profit. Well, the power company can't do it either. So the Commission has a balancing act to do.

And then when you look at the other side of it, you look at the industry, the economic development of your state, if you don't have a proper resource of almost a guarantee of 25 years or 50 years down the road, you're not going to have any economic expansion. One of the key players in economic growth, whether it's a China company or a Korean company or an Alabama company moving to Georgia, is, hey, I've got to have a reliable source of energy. And people want that light to come on when they flick that switch. And so yes, it's a balancing act, and it's a very responsible position to be in.

SHORT: Well, the Public Service Commission is often criticized for lobbyists. Is there any reason to be concerned about that?

MCDONALD: Well, if you're a Christian, you go to church to hear the preacher, and

the preacher shares different views on the Scripture. If you are a businessman, you go to an advertising agency that's specialized in this to get you the best marketing plan that you can do for your business. Now, to be a public service commissioner, to be a legislator, if you don't depend on the people that are working – yes, there are those that have their selfish position. But that's what you are supposed to do, is to hear their position, hear this position, look and research to your best degree that you can with your staff, looking both sides of it, inside out, upside down, and then make a decision. In electricity, you can follow the money line. Electricity's the same today as it was 50 years ago. That kilowatt is the same thing. There's different delivery of it. There's different methods of generating that kilowatt. But it's the same. Natural gas, same thing it was. It comes out of the ground. It's the same. Delivery systems have changed, but natural gas is the same gas that it is.

The telecom industry is a total different ballgame. It changes every day, and it is most, most difficult to keep. David Burgess, a former public service commissioner, a graduate of Georgia Tech, he was a staff employee with the Commission for many years. David knew more about telecom than 12 commissioners thrown in the same barrel over the last 15 years in his own mind. David could have just been anything he wanted to in the telecom industry, but he loved working in state government. And these are the kind of issues, Bob, that whether you're – does the President of the United States, does he make every decision just on – he's got experts that he listens to in different fields. He listens to General Petraeus on the Iraq situation like that.

So back to your question. Lobbyists provide a function. Is it abused? Sure, it's

abused. But who's the abuser? As a legislator, you can do what you want to and let that influence. But if people know your character and they know that you're going to make a fair decision, they're not going to always get their way. The company's not going to get its way. My first rate case, when the Georgia Power Company in 1999 reduced the revenues of the power company over \$800-million. Where'd that go? It went back to the consumer. We were paying less for electricity on a per-kilowatt hour when I left the Commission in 2002 than we were paying in 1990. Now, today, 2008, that's not the case. The high cost of natural gas has gone up. Crude oil changes every day. And you've got gas-fired generation systems. You've got coal-fired generation systems. The cost of transportation. Diesel fuel gone up; trains run on diesel. Getting coal from the mine to the hoppers of the power company. The amount of money that has been required by your generation companies from the EPA to change the emissions. And it cost X-billions of dollars to reduce emissions by this much, and then they want it reduced this much more, and it costs three times more to reduce it that much more than it cost to do it this way. Hey, it's an exercise.

SHORT: What do you think about nuclear power?

MCDONALD: It's got to happen. We have a nuclear plant in Georgia. It was very costly. We've got to look at France. It needs to be boilerplate. Not build a nuclear plant and manufacture each part on its own. You've got to have boilerplate, Westinghouse, that develops

a nuclear system that can be in Alabama or Tennessee or wherever it is, where – it's mass production of these things. And to be privileged to be on the Electric Committee of NARUC when I was on the Commission. NARUC is the National Organization of Utility Regulators. I was appointed by the President to – well, on the electric committee, I was chairman of the Subcommittee on Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Waste. I've been to Yucca Mountain in Nevada where nuclear waste is to be buried. The scientists – to me, it's foolproof. It's amazing. It's amazing. I've been to the Atmos Industry in Idaho where they have split the atom, and they're recycling and reusing nuclear spent fuel.

Then the President of NARUC appointed me to serve on what's called the NEL Committee. The NEL Committee is the Nuclear Electric Liability Insurance Group, and they're based out of Bermuda. But they insure nuclear plants all over the world. And their reserves at the time when I left in 2002, their reserves were over \$7-billion that they had in reserves. And they were refunding premiums to nuclear plants over the world, because their reserves were so full and there had been no accidents and it was so safe. The technology has brought it to a safety – well, it's the cleanest, in my opinion, and it's just something that – again, it's the need that we have for tomorrow's generation. Yes, we still look at solar. We look at wind. We've got to continue the technology that's available out there and new technology. But nuclear has got to expand.

SHORT: Well, getting back to the politics of it, do you think that the voters can be

trusted to elect the right people to serve on the Public Service Commission, or should they be appointed?

MCDONALD: Bob, I would never take anything away from the voters. It's just like why I have never wanted to support term limits. In my opinion, term limits remove the voter of the responsibility of exercising a right as an American to express themselves. You may have someone that has done a fabulous job and you have a six-year limitation on their service and yet, because of that limitation, they can't go forward. I think that term limits are not good. I know everybody says, well, incumbents – our problem now, in my opinion is that we're trying to over-regulate public service at all levels. We're in 2008. A congressperson shouldn't have to run every two years, in my opinion. It's so costly, and you don't get the job done. Congress needs to limit their days like the Georgia Legislature does, go back to being a volunteer Congress and have so much time. You'll get the same amount of work done. They could have six months up there and six months at home, and we'd get the same job done. Don't ever let the 40-day legislative days expand in Georgia. We won't create a bit more progress by doing that. And it's just getting people to give themselves. And it's an awesome responsibility when you give yourself when you have families.

I've had the privilege of speaking to incoming legislators about their coming in. And they would be sitting there with their spouses. And I'd say, "Look around the room. You've got professional people. You've got businesspeople. You've got families. You've got

husbands and wives. You've got sober people. Some of you are going home drunk. Some of you are going home with a broken marriage. Some of you are going home because you've lost your business or lost your practice, because you get too involved and you let your ego and everything run away with you." And this has happened. I've served with them. I could call their names of people, just great people, that let their involvement get away from them. You've got to have a strong discipline. And that's not only in a legislative branch or a commission of public service or in government. That's life. You've got to have that discipline.

SHORT: Well, you in, I believe, what, two years were forced to run again – or to run for election for that seat that you were appointed to.

MCDONALD: It was four-and-a-half years.

SHORT: Four-and-a-half years.

MCDONALD: Well, I had to run within six months.

SHORT: Yeah.

MCDONALD: I had to run the next cycle of election. And I was elected to that. But

Public Service is a six-term term.

SHORT: But you were overwhelmingly elected to fill – was it the remainder of an unexpired term?

MCDONALD: Correct.

SHORT: Yeah. So then you ran again.

MCDONALD: Right.

SHORT: But unfortunately you were defeated.

MCDONALD: Well, it happens. If you don't want to get tackled, don't play football. I have had a wonderful time in public service. One, I had a wife and a son that were very supportive. They were understanding. The wife took the phone calls at night when I was out doing something else. I had a wonderful experience in that time in my church as choir director, elder, doing these things. I was fortunate in having a business that was profitable. I had good people, had good people working with me that made it possible that I could do some of these other things. And it'd be so bad to be in this world by yourself. It would be so bad. And

when my toes have turned up, Bob, raise a glass and say, "That old boy had a good ride."

Because Georgia has been so great to me. And I've experienced seeing it grow and the quality of growth. And the county that my business is in over there, *Forbes* magazine just a short time ago recognized it as the 13th most affluent county in the nation. Timing, good decisions, hard work, discipline, makes things happen. And the opportunity's out there for anybody. Out there for anybody.

SHORT: We didn't speak of Roy Barnes. How was he as a governor?

MCDONALD: Roy is as intelligent of a governor as Georgia's ever had. Roy's a brilliant person himself. Roy and I had some difficulties on issues. I don't know whether it was a carryover from the Governor's race that he may have felt like, because I was in that race, that it diluted his position of being a winner, or even in the runoff, when Andy Young and Zell were in the runoff together. I don't know. But Roy, in my opinion, smart, was more political in his governorship than most of them. I think Zell was far more business and less politics. Joe Frank was pretty much stable, and his politics weren't that strong. I think Roy was weighted more political than he did as far as the business is concerned. One thing I love that Roy did is, and my wife was a 30-year classroom school teacher, and she didn't need tenure to continue her work in school. And I think when Roy got the legislation passed that abolished tenure in the education system, it was a great piece of legislation. Of course, when Governor Perdue came in,

he brought it back in. But that was gutsy. And 80% of our teachers are great teachers and dedicated teachers. But as an appropriations chairman, when we would do a deservingly raise for schoolteachers, we had to raise the bottom at the same time we raised the top. And in business, you don't do that.

SHORT: Well, the flag issue was gutsy, too.

MCDONALD: Oh, yes, very much so. Very much so. Absolutely.

SHORT: And some people think that those two things that you mentioned helped Roy become defeated by Governor Perdue.

MCDONALD: And I guess you can look at some successful businesspeople. Arrogance has a little bit to do with it. Roy had the reputation, to a small part, of being a little arrogant. But I can't take anything away from his abilities and his intelligence. He was and is a very intelligent person.

SHORT: Well, before we move along, let's talk a minute about Governor Perdue. What is your impression of his tenure?

MCDONALD: Well, I've known Governor Perdue a long time. He and I are both pilots, and we've had opportunities to experience those fun times together. And I think Sonny has been a good governor. I think that his heart is well in the right place, and he has also been a man of character in his leadership program. Hey, we can all point at things that we would do differently from what he's done. But you can take Zell as Lieutenant Governor or Zell as Governor, or Speaker Murphy as Speaker. When you're the one that makes the decisions, you're not going to make them all right and you're not going to make them all to please everybody. But overall, in the whole grade, I think Sonny's been a great governor. He's presented Georgia well. We've experienced some nice growth in our state. He's dedicated to our educational system. So, yes, I give him high marks. Same as I would give Zell. All of them. Georgia's been fortunate to have good governors. No scandals. Haven't had scandals in the government, like Louisiana, Alabama, New Jersey.

SHORT: Hey, Bubba, think about this: Georgia's last six governors have come from the General Assembly. So they knew government, don't you think?

MCDONALD: Absolutely. I mean, your best neurosurgeon comes from experience. And when you go out there to have your head operated on, you want somebody that has been down the road a little bit. At least I would.

SHORT: You came out of retirement, so to speak, from politics back into politics in 2004. Was it?

MCDONALD: 2002.

SHORT: 2002, when you ran for the State Senate?

MCDONALD: Oh, that was, yeah, 2004. Excuse me.

SHORT: 2004?

MCDONALD: Yeah.

SHORT: Ran for the State Senate, this time as a Republican.

MCDONALD: Correct.

SHORT: You had changed parties.

MCDONALD: Correct.

SHORT: Why?

MCDONALD: Because the Democratic Party was collapsing nationally. I haven't voted for a Democratic president since Jimmy Carter. My conservative views, my philosophies – I had a change in life in '97 with the right to life issue. When my son got in the funeral home business and I was sent down Northside Hospital – and I wasn't pro-choice; I wasn't pro-life. I was just moderate. But when I picked up a fetus to bring to our funeral home, I looked at that and I said, "How can you do this?" I changed.

SHORT: What do you think has happened to the Democratic Party in Georgia?

MCDONALD: Bob, I think more (audio gap) happened that much about the Democratic Party in Georgia as it is being a Democrat with the way the Democrats at the national level are running the thing. I think you get a drip down position. I mean, there's some great people that have served and are serving under the Democratic label, I guess, just as dedicated as they can be. Sonny Perdue was a Democrat for a long time, just like me. And others, I can just go down the list in the General Assembly that people have changed. And I think it's been more from the national standpoint. Zell's book, when he talked about it, when he was in Washington, he was very, from my perspective of him, disenfranchised with the Democratic Congress, and especially

the Democratic leaders in the Senate. And so I think that a lot of that has dribbled down to disarray. And it's happened because the people have changed. Georgia was a Democratic state forever, but it's a Republican state now. And it's because the values and the views – and I still think that Washington leads these and causes people to pick and choose.

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