

Larry Walker interviewed by Bob Short
2008 May 14
Toccoa, GA
Reflections on Georgia Politics
ROGP-028
Original: video, 73 minutes

University of Georgia
DOCPROPERTY "reference" Reflections on Georgia Politics
Larry Walker

Date of Transcription: September 19, 2009

BOB SHORT: Hello. This is Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, May 14th, 2008. My guest today is the Honorable Larry Walker, longtime Georgia legislator and 15 years the Majority Leader in the House of Representatives in Atlanta. Welcome, Larry. We're delighted to have you on our program.

LARRY WALKER: Glad to be here. I'm honored to be here.

SHORT: Good. We're very interested in learning about Larry Walker. Tell us about your early life. You grew up in Perry, and from there you went to the Georgia General Assembly and stayed a long, long time.

WALKER: Well, I call myself a native of Houston County. Actually I was born in the Medical Center of Central Georgia, Middle Georgia Hospital at that time. But after staying there a few days, I came to Houston County and Perry, and I've been in Perry ever since. I went to the public schools in Perry, excellent schools. Eric Staples at one time, the winningest high school basketball coach in the United States, was the principal and my high school basketball coach. Excellent public schools.

I went to the University of Georgia, undergraduate and law school. I'm a Double Dawg. I've got a law degree and a business degree from the University of Georgia. Married a wonderful woman, Janice Knighton, who had moved to Perry in the tenth grade when she was in the tenth and I was in the tenth. We were high school sweethearts, and we've been married 40-something years and have four children and seven grandchildren and another one on the way.

I tell them I've had the same job for 43 years and I've been married to the same woman about 45 years and been living in the same house about 35 years. So I'm a throwback to a different day in that respect.

SHORT: You grew up I understand in a political family. Both your father and your grandfather were public servants.

WALKER: My grandfather was an interesting man. He was from Danville, Virginia. My grandmother was from Danville, Indiana. And they married and went to Los Angeles. My grandfather was a cameraman at Universal Studios. They went from there to Tombstone, Arizona and homesteaded and ended up in Perry. And my grandfather was mayor of Perry and a well respected Chevrolet dealer, active Methodist layman. My father came there as an ag teacher, a 1937 graduate of the University of Georgia, met my mother, Mr. Charlie Gray's daughter and Hazel Gray...Hazel Nichols Gray's daughter. And my father and my grandfather got in the farm equipment business, and daddy was in the farm equipment business about 40 years. But he was chairman of the school board in Houston County for 20 years. And so I heard that talk at the table, you know. I heard political talk and really at an early age, probably about the eighth grade, I got interested in it and always liked it. And Bobby Rowan says that the only cure for those of us that like politics is embalming fluid, and I guess Bobby's right.

SHORT: Did you think when you won your first race in 1972 that you would serve for 32 years?

WALKER: No. I actually had the feeling I wonder if I can make it two years, I hope I don't mess up and do something wrong. And I hope I'll do good for two years, and not in my wildest

dreams did I think that I would be there 32 years. Some ways I think maybe I stayed a little too long. My father used to say it's a smart man that knows when to put something down and move on, and I kept thinking I might get to be Speaker of the House. That's kind of what I had in mind. I passed up a run for congress, which I think I could have won. I passed up a run for governor. I toyed with that the year Governor Miller got elected. James Carville told me one time, he said you're the only man that worried us; and that was a big compliment. But Governor Miller, I couldn't have defeated him I don't think. He was – had the lottery and the Hope Scholarship going for him. I had voted against the lottery. And as it turned out, Governor Miller was a great governor I think. But I didn't know I would stay that long is the answer to your question, had no idea I'd stay that long.

SHORT: So you were like Governor George Busbee. He once said that he intended to serve one term to build up his law practice and wound up I don't know how many years but he became governor, you know, and he moved right along. You served under two Speakers: George L. Smith and Tom Murphy. How would you compare them?

WALKER: Well, I served one year under Speaker George L. Smith. He died with a stroke in December after I took office in January. But he was very smooth. He was articulate. He was very good with the media. He worked the media and did a good job with it. On the other hand, Mr. Murphy was probably not as smooth, but – and he certainly didn't have good relationships with the media, especially in the early days; but both of them were very – were brilliant. And

Mr. Murphy was one of the smartest people that I ever dealt with. He liked to play that country lawyer role and I really don't understand what this word means and that big word you used...he fully understood what the word meant, and he was a great parliamentarian. I think he knew the rules of the House probably better than anybody in the House with the possible exception of Denmark Groover. And I would say both of them knew it equally as well. But Mr. Murphy was a towering giant of a figure for about 20 years, the most – the largest political influence of anybody in the state was Tom Murphy, and in a positive way I think. I love Mr. Murphy. Didn't always agree with him, didn't always agree with his approach. But I thought he was a great man, and I think that today.

SHORT: You mentioned Denmark Groover. His name comes up very often when we speak of the Georgia General Assembly. Tell us about Denmark.

WALKER: On a scale of one to ten as a legislator, Denny was a ten. He read every bill. He was a great speaker. He was willing to help anybody. He was just a legislator's legislator. He was just the best. And for many of those years, I was the Majority Leader, and he was the Majority Whip. The roles should have been reversed. I should have been his assistant rather than his being mine in my view. World War II Black Sheep Squadron fighter pilot. On a scale of one to ten as a legislator, a ten. Now, as a politician, Denny was probably about a four on a scale of one to ten. He was too frank. He didn't suffer fools lightly. And a good example of that is they had a bill in there one day--I think Representative Ward Edwards introduced it--to

outlaw these nude dancing signs on billboards on the interstate. And of course everybody was prepared to vote for it. It was the thing to do; it was the political thing to do. And Denny told me, he said, "I'm going to speak against this, it's unconstitutional." And I said, "Denny, please don't do that. I said don't do it, just let it go." He said, "No, it's unconstitutional; I'm going to speak against it." Highly principled in that respect. And in fact, he got up and did speak against it. They used it against him in his next election, and he was defeated. But he made it back again. He got defeated, but he came back. And I gave one of the eulogies at his funeral. I got to be very close friends of his. I think he was a great Georgian. He would have made a great governor. There are lots of people like that, you know, that circumstances don't break for them exactly. But Denmark Groover was the best of the best in my opinion.

SHORT: There's a story about Denmark Groover that goes way back to the campaigning of Ernest Vandiver when he ran for governor. It seems that the Griffin people courted Denmark and tried to get him to run against Vandiver, and he refused. And somebody once said, "Well, why didn't you do that, Denny?" He said, "Well, because I can count."

WALKER: Yeah, that sounds like him.

SHORT: Do you remember the first bill you ever introduced?

WALKER: I do, the first one that ever passed anyway. I'm not sure it was the first one I

introduced. But I introduced a constitutional amendment at the behest of our ordinary in Houston County, Clint Watson. He and I got to talking one day about the word ordinary. Nobody knew what an ordinary was, and nobody wants to be ordinary, you know. They want to be extraordinary. But I decided I would introduce a bill changing the name of the ordinary to the probate judge. It was in the constitution of Georgia called an ordinary, so it took a constitutional amendment. I introduced it, got the two-thirds vote in the House and the Senate and went on the ballot, and the people of Georgia voted for it. So I was responsible for ordinaries becoming probate judges, which was, what, I guess about, oh, 30 years ago now.

SHORT: Well, you mentioned Speaker Murphy. Speaker Murphy had an inner circle upon which he relied very heavily. Who was in that group besides you?

WALKER: Well, Bill Lee was his confidante and friend. Calvin Smyre, Tom Buck, Terry Coleman, and I, I would say that was the most consistent inner group that he had during the years. There were other people that were in and out of it. You know, Bob, the legislature is a series of circles. And there's a little circle with five or six people in it, and then there's a circle outside of that that's probably got 15 or 20 people in it. And then there's a circle outside of that that's probably got 40 or 50 people, and then so forth and so on. But in that little inner circle, that was probably the most consistent group. Marcus Collins at one time, Marcus when he was there he was certainly mighty close to Murphy and would have been in that group. But during the period of time that I was the Majority Leader, most of the time – that was after Marcus had

left – it was Bill Lee, Terry Coleman, Tom Buck, Calvin Smyre, and me.

SHORT: What role did the Speaker play in your election as Majority Leader?

WALKER: Al Burruss died during his term of office, and the Speaker supported me. I can't remember that he was actively involved in it. I don't think – I think he – if people asked him who he was for, he would say, "I was for Larry." But in the final analysis, I ran without opposition. And one of the little ironies of the legislature, the other candidate for the job was Terry Coleman. And Terry realized I had the vote and did not run. And years later we both wanted to be Speaker, and I realized that Terry had the votes and I didn't run. I needed 91 votes. I tried to form a coalition between republicans and democrats, and I – if my counting was accurate, I had 87 votes; I needed 91. And Governor Perdue and I had told the membership or the people that were supporting me that if we don't have the votes, we won't make you vote because it was – you know, it was political suicide for some people if they were on the wrong side. And so we never did have the election. But I forced Terry out once, and he forced me out once. And we remain good friends. Terry is a great legislator, really understood the state of Georgia and the budget better than anybody I served with, with the possible exception of Joe Frank Harris. Joe Frank really understood the budget also. He was a budget man.

SHORT: Explain to us if you will briefly what you do as Majority Leader.

WALKER: Well, it's the Majority Leader's job to get people to vote for the majority party's legislation. And you do what you have to do to get it done. You threaten some; you promise some; you put things in a budget for some. It was interesting. You know, Terry was chairman of the appropriations committee, and all he was doing was putting projects in the budget for people, making them think it was his money. And there I was down there threatening them and everything else, and he had a better job for getting elected Speaker than I did. But that's what your job is. And you're the spokesperson for the democratic party, in my case the democratic party in the House.

I want to say this: I served with about five or six Minority Leaders: Paul Herd, Mike Eagan, Lynn Westmoreland, Steve Stancil...surely I'm leaving somebody out...Johnny Isakson; I certainly don't want to leave him out. Bob Irvin. They were all – I got along with them very, very well. I mean, they were good people. They had a tough road to hoe. You go back into the Mike Eagan and Paul Herd days, and they just had a handful of members, and they were constantly on the losing side. And I had great success as Majority Leader, but the man wielding the gavel up there was a democratic speaker, and that made a lot of difference. But that's a long answer to the question, but it's your job to get the legislation through.

SHORT: May I ask you this question: It's a tradition in Georgia for our governors to have their own floor leaders, and I'm sure you've worked very closely with them; but did that in any way impede you and your duties as Majority Leader?

WALKER: Well, you know, I was a floor leader. I was Governor Harris's floor leader for four

years and learned a lot from that. The floor leader is a little bit isolated from the other members. I used to say I'd be – a group would be talking and I'd walk up, and they'd quit talking when I was Harris's floor leader. But again, he was a good friend of Murphy's and it wasn't that difficult. But that is an interesting job, being the floor leader. Actually, I was a floor leader twice because during the last four years of Governor Miller's administration he said he wasn't going to have a floor leader; he was going to let the Majority Leader be his floor leader. So I actually was Governor Miller's floor leader in one sense of the word when I was Majority Leader. But that's an interesting job, being – you're the governor's spokesperson. You're trying to get the governor's legislation through. That was good training for me to be the Majority Leader later.

SHORT: Being a legislator is certainly very serious business, but there also is a fun side. Tell us about breakfast with Marcus.

WALKER: Well, the great camaraderie in the legislature, at least there was back when I was in there, a great...I started to say fraternity, a fraternity and sorority I guess now with more and more very capable women in the legislature. And you make friends that you have for the rest of your life, and there's a great social aspect to the legislature. You know, every night there were all kinds of functions. I'd been to as many as five or six receptions in one night. Frankly, they start running together. You don't know whether you're at the Georgia automobile dealers or the bankers, there's so many of them. And you make these friends, and you keep them forever. And

I've got people today that are very close friends of mine that I made them through the legislature.

And frankly, lobbyists and staff people are the same.

One of my best friends, for example, is Connell Stafford. He was a lobbyist for the Coca-Cola Company. And I talked with Connell several days a week every week of my life. I'd consult with him, I'd talk to him. We got to be friends through the Georgia legislature. So there is a great social aspect to it. I must have seen a thousand come and go in 32 years, if you consider you had 30 turn over a year and I think you would average that much. So that's 960 new people in my 32-year tenure, and know a lot of them. I every now and then see somebody that I know I served with. I can't recall their name, but that's the exception and not the rule. Every part of the state of Georgia, I know somebody from that part of the state because I served with them in the legislature.

SHORT: But you ate breakfast with Marcus Collins...

WALKER: Ate breakfast with Marcus when the legislature was in session at the 292 Club named after Room 292 in the Sheraton Hotel in Downtown Atlanta. And there were probably 40 or 50 people that periodically came through there every morning. And there were probably 20 to 25 that came every morning. Some came periodically, but some came every morning. I was one of the ones that came every morning. Great camaraderie. Elmore Thrash, you'll remember him, he's in the House. Speaker Murphy, Bobby Roan, Marcus Collins, Newt Hudson, Abbott Massey, I could go on and on. And Governor Miller would come sometimes. Governor Barnes

would come sometimes. But it was lots of fun, lots of funny things said and interesting things said. I might not ought to tell this on camera, but I'm going to do it.

After I'd been going down there for several years I told them one morning, I said this thing is...I'd noticed it used to, when we came out here, we talked about girls; now we talk about hemorrhoids and mules. So I guess I aged in the time I went down there.

SHORT: But during your tenure in the House, you were right in the middle of that famous feud between Speaker Murphy and Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller. What effect did that have on the legislature?

WALKER: Well, it was kind of fun, Bob. I think a lot of it was for the show. They were both – in Richard Hyatt's book about Speaker Murphy I said this--and I thought Murphy would get made at me and never speak to me again, but I think there's a lot of truth to this. And what I told Richard Hyatt, and he quoted me in the book – I was hoping he wasn't going to, but he did. I said Zell Miller was from the old school polished up; Tom Murphy was from the old school. And I think one reason they feuded some is they were so much alike. They were both self-made people, came up hard, hard-headed, determined to have their way. Zell was a Marine, and Speaker Murphy was in the Pacific when he was 19 years old, and Mr. Murphy loved the House and Mr. Miller loved the Senate. But you know, as was evident when Zell became governor, they got to be good friends. And I don't think they ever were as far apart as they tried to act like they were. And I think a lot of it was for the show.

SHORT: As we look back over the years at our governors, the House of Representatives and Speaker Murphy have been very, very influential in the election of governors I guess beginning back with George Busbee, then Governor Harris. As a matter of fact, I think I'm correct in saying in our past six governors have been experienced legislators. How do you explain the relationship between the House of Representatives then and the democratic party still?

WALKER: Well, it was the democratic party. When the democratic party was viable and functioning in the House of Representatives was really probably it, Mr. Murphy was a very staunch democrat. The House was a – when I went there in '73...I got elected in '72, went there in '73...it was a white male democratic body. The vast majority of the people in the legislature were male and democrats, and I think it was the heart and soul of the democratic party when the democratic party was more viable than it is today.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the programs that some of those governors – of course, Governor Busbee took on a rather ambitious administration. I think you would say successful administration.

WALKER: Successful, and when I think of Busbee I think of foreign trade and bringing foreigners into the state, Japanese in particular, building plants here. I also think about our airports. I think Governor Busbee was the father of all the airports over the state, which have been a great economic factor in the state. So that's – when you call Governor Busbee, that's

what I think about, foreign trade, foreign investment in the state and airports.

SHORT: Somebody once told me that you just wanted to do things for George Busbee because he was such a likable guy.

WALKER: Yeah, he was a good guy. He was – he and Governor Harris were both very popular. Both could have got elected for third terms if they had been allowed to serve. They didn't rock the boat a lot. And I think that's what people in Georgia want. We've seen when governors had too ambitious of a program, what happened to them. And both of them knew how to walk that line between accomplishing something but not rocking the boat too much. Governor Harris, incidentally, was a budget man. He knew the budget like the back of his hand. He knew the smallest item to the largest item. That, good sound budgets, and the QBE program, Quality Basic Education program, I think is what I think about when I think about Governor Harris as a governor. Now, when I went to the legislature, I literally and figuratively took Sam Nunn's seat. They gave me his chair. And to my left was a tall, dark-haired, introverted, shy guy named Joe Frank Harris. And to his left on the aisle was Sloppy Floyd from Trion, Georgia who was chairman of the appropriations committee. So I was – it was very fortunate for me that I was seated where I was because I learned a lot from those two people.

SHORT: Governor Busbee was able to – I'm sorry...yes, Governor Busbee was able to get a two-term constitutional amendment through so he could succeed himself. Do you think that a

two-term governor is a good idea?

WALKER: You can argue about that all day. You know, I could argue, well, six years...give them a six-year term, let them serve one term. That sounds good. But they're a lame duck the day they go in. By the same token, when they serve two terms, the second term they're a lame duck. If you give them one term, they're a laying duck the first day. I don't think it's served us badly. I think everybody that's been governor, if my memory serves me correctly, that was allowed to run a second term except Governor Barnes succeeded themselves. And Governor Barnes was, you know, a great friend of mine, I think a smart fellow, and a good governor. Probably took on too many controversial projects at one time. A lot of governors wait for their second term to take on the controversial things.

SHORT: Governor Harris also was very ambitious in his programs. He approached it by appointing commissions like the Commission on Education that resulted in his program QBE. What do you remember about Quality Basic Education?

WALKER: Extremely complicated, a big, thick bill. I was the governor's floor leader, and it was my job to present it on the floor of the house. And I took – I had to go to California for something, and I took the bill with me to read it on the plane. And it's the most success I've ever had in sleeping on a plane, the only time I really ever went on a trip and could sleep. I mean, it was arcane and it took a bunch of egg-head educator types to understand it; and I'm not sure

anybody ever fully understood it. But we passed it unanimously in the House.

I remember Representative David Lucas...there was one red button up there, and one red button.

And I – and at the very last second, David Lucas changed his vote, and it was a 100 percent vote for QBE in the House.

SHORT: Let's talk a little bit about appropriations. As Majority Leader, of course you had a heavy hand I'm sure in deciding what the budget would look like. Tell us about the green door.

WALKER: Well, the green door was essentially Murphy's inner group, when you get right down to it. And the green door, the name came from that song *What's Going on Behind the Green Door?* You and I remember that song, Bob; younger people don't. And eventually they did away with the green door. The news media...the law changed, and – well, I say they did away with it; that's not exactly right. But the conference committee had to meet out in the open, and most of the meetings were in fact out in the open. I'm not going to say that there wasn't some talk at the hotel and sometimes on Sunday afternoon when Dick Pettys was taking Sunday afternoon off...we were over at the Capitol. He could have come in if he had been smart enough to get there. And he was smart, but that's where it come from.

Incidentally, in those days it was the Majority Leader's job to present the budget on the floor of the house. As a result of that, having to present the supplemental budget and the conference committee report on the supplemental budget, the big budget or the main budget and the conference committee report on it, I presented the budget of the State of Georgia on the floor of

the house 63 times. Sixteen years times four is 64, but one time I had to go to a funeral or something and didn't do it. But I presented it 63 times, which I dare say is a record that won't ever be broken. And we passed it 63 times. And we got so good at passing the budget that we actually had too many people voting for it. We needed a few people to make examples out of, and we got where we didn't have enough examples. They were all voting for the budget.

SHORT: How did the powers that be in the House determine what projects would be funded and where?

WALKER: Well, there were the main things, you know. We owned a myriad of them. We talked about them and tried to decide what we needed to do. And Mr. Murphy was a fiscal conservative. Now, he would say he was a conservative; in my view he was a populist. He was not a conservative. But when it came to the budget, he was conservative. And then there were things that we'd put in for members. We finally came to the realization that we're part of the legislative process, and the governor is getting 95 percent of what he wants and we ought to be able to put in some things that we want. And we put in what they now call earmarks; we called them special projects. They were an infinitesimal part of the overall budget, I mean percentage wise, 1 or 2 percent, maybe less. And we did that in all candor, to some extent on seniority and the people that were on the green door committee that stayed up there over the weekend and at night. And I have been – I've seen the sun coming up when we left the Capitol from working on the budget. And we got more than others, and then people that supported us got projects. And if

they'd been up there a long time, they got more. And then people that wouldn't vote for the budget didn't get anything. And that's how we were able to pass the budget like we did for so many years. It was a well-oiled machine. It worked, and the state government worked well in my opinion. That was a big part of it.

You actually control the legislature with the budget. The Speaker and the leadership control it with the budget. That's where the control and running things and making sure that you get the job done comes from; it comes from the state budget. You know, a fellow might be very interested in what school teachers are being paid; he might be very interested in how much money you're going to allocate to DNR. But what he's really interested in is that new courthouse roof for his courthouse in his hometown or that little league ball field. And he's really more interested in that than he is whether school teachers get 3 percent or 4 percent. And that might not sound good, but it's the truth. And if you put \$25,000 in the budget at that time for the little league ball field, he was going to vote for the budget. He wasn't going to vote against it if he had that ball field in the budget.

SHORT: I've always believed that voters really forget easily how you vote, but they never forget what you bring them.

WALKER: Well, that's right. And these were not bad projects. These were not unworthy things. These were small towns in many instances that otherwise couldn't have had some of these things. The first thing that I ever got monetarily was from Governor Carter. And he called

me down, and he said I want to do something for you; I want to give you some money out of my discretionary fund. And he gave me – I think it was \$8,000 to light what was then an African-American baseball field in Perry at Creekwood Park. And I decided where the money would go, and he gave me eight or \$10,000. And we lit that field for those people to be able to play ball, the young people that we use in the field. And that's the first money I ever got of any kind from the state. I've always been proud of that. Later I probably got \$50 million for the Ag center in Perry, but in a way I'm more proud of that 8,000 than I am the 50 million.

SHORT: Well, with you as Majority Leader and Murphy as Speaker, the Georgia House never got bogged down with emotional issues such as abortion and gun control and school prayer, which are all politically risky and controversial issues. How did you manage to avoid all of it?

WALKER: Well, for one thing, Mr. Murphy – and I learned from him. I learned my politics from him. I was his right hand for years. He never put his troops out to be injured. He was very conscience of not hurting his inner circle or hurting the democrats in the House. He just didn't do that. And he did not – he tried to avoid things that would get him in political trouble. And I think that was paramount in what he did and had a lot to do with us staying in power as long as we did. Gun control, abortion, you can't win on that. There's no way. You're going to make enemies and lasting enemies frankly.

SHORT: The ERA, that was an issue I remember years ago that went away.

WALKER: ERA was one of the most difficult votes I ever took. It was – you know, it's hard to say that anybody's not equal. But the ramifications and the possible ramifications were so great, and my mail ran eight to one against it. And I voted against it. And it's an interesting thing. It kind of died out and has never – never reared its head again. Maybe federal enactments have made it unnecessary. I don't know. But that was a difficult vote for me to vote no to say anybody wasn't equal, although there were reasons for voting no I think.

SHORT: Zell Miller was elected governor in 1990, despite the opposition of Speaker Murphy. And he has a very controversial platform, the state lottery. What did you think about that at the time?

WALKER: I talked about running for governor myself that year. In fact, we were in the Core Georgia today, DOT board meeting. And I made a decision in the Core Georgia in a motel at about 11:00 one night I wasn't going to run for governor. I was up here to speak in the rotary club in the Core the next day. I had to kill a morning in the Core, had nothing to do. It was about a year before the governor's race. And I decided then I just didn't have the--as they say in politics, the fire in the belly to do it. And I didn't. But I had voted against the lottery. Governor Miller was advocating it. And frankly, it was an issue whose time had come. And I think it had a lot to do with his getting elected.

I told people, even after I dropped out, I said Governor Miller...Zell Miller, I didn't say

Governor Miller...Zell Miller won't get elected; he's too liberal. And he had been a rather liberal lieutenant governor, much more so than he turned out to be as governor. But I became very fond of Governor Miller. I think he was an outstanding governor...outstanding governor in the history of this state, not just during my tenure. He knew how to get the job done. He had a good program. He saw it through. He was a great governor in my respect, and I think history will say he's one of the great governors. But the lottery, people were ready for the lottery in Georgia. Now, it didn't pass overwhelmingly, as you know, Bob; it probably didn't get but 51 percent of the vote. And I think the thing that passed it was the fact that it was going to be used for education. And in fact, it has been used for education, largely due to Governor Miller's vision of what the money ought to be used for. It changed the university system in this state. We went from a mediocre university system to an outstanding university system because of the lottery and Zell Miller.

SHORT: During his tenure, he also attempted to change the state flag, the first person since 1956 to attempt that. And he failed. How did you feel about that at the time?

WALKER: I hadn't formulated a position at that time. I never formulated a position until I absolutely had to. I'm not particularly proud of that, but I am proud of where I finally came down on it. I was in the forefront of helping to change the flag. I frankly think that had it not been for me it wouldn't have passed the house. They needed a rural person to advocate changing it. I was that person. I made a speech on the floor of the House that the Atlanta Journal printed

in its totality. But at that time I had not formulated a position. And frankly, was that during his second term or his first term that he advocated that? Do you remember?

SHORT: Governor Miller?

WALKER: Yes, sir.

SHORT: That was his first term.

WALKER: Well, frankly, had he been successful in changing it, he probably wouldn't have been elected the second term.

SHORT: I think that's right. I think you're absolutely correct. It was a very controversial issue that was reopened when Governor Barnes actually pushed for the change years later. And I think at that time you were supportive of that effort.

WALKER: I was supportive of it. There's been a lot of criticism of how it was done. I was the one that told him...I said if you don't roll it out of rules today and vote on it today and you let these people go home, you'll never pass it. I think I was right about that. We passed it with one vote to spare, all we had in the House. And we did, we had a dummy bill sitting in rules, been sitting there for some time. And we went up to rules that morning. We substituted the change-

the-flag bill, brought it down to the floor of the House, voted on it that day. And we broke for lunch, and we didn't have the votes at lunch. So we came back after lunch, and we passed it with one or two votes so spare. And I think it's one of the great things that happened while I was in the legislature. I am a son of the South. You can listen to me talk and tell. And I told them on the floor of the House, I said, "You know, I love--when I watch that movie Gettysburg and those boys go up that hill trying to take that hill, I want these Southern boys to take it. I can't help it. I keep thinking, well, maybe one day they will take it." But...and so it was not because that I didn't appreciate how other people felt, but I think we needed to do it because a third or 40 percent of our population was offended by the flag, number one.

Number two, it was important for the image of this state that we have a different flag. And as it's turned out, we've got a great flag. Now, I'm not -- the one we substituted the stars and bars of the St. Andrews cross for, frankly it wasn't all that pretty. But the one we finally ended up with is a flag that recognizes our Southern heritage, and yet it's not offensive people. I'm very proud of our state flag. Proud of the role I had in it. The final determinant with me is what are your grandchildren going to think about it, what you did. Glad I was part of changing it.

SHORT: Governor Barnes also involved the General Assembly in some controversial education legislation involving the state teachers. Obviously you were not supportive of Governor Barnes in his second term. Do you remember that?

WALKER: I do remember. I think he was very well intentioned in what he was trying to do. I

think he was trying to improve education in this state. If you go back to the Richard Russell days, in every campaign for governor they're going to improve education. Had a difficult time getting our arms around that and doing what we needed to do. And I think Governor Barnes was sincere in his efforts, but he did make a lot of school teachers mad. Maybe not what he was trying to do as much as some of the things that were said about what school teachers were doing. And school teachers were upset with him, and law enforcement was upset with him. And state employees were upset with him. And the flaggers were upset with him; I think that's a rather small group, but they were upset with him. And you add all that together, and he didn't get reelected. But I say Roy Barnes is smart, well-intentioned. I like him very much personally. He's funny. He's fun. He's a good guy. And I think he was a good governor. I think all the governors I served with were good governors.

SHORT: Reapportionment also fell in his lap, and he was criticized for the way that some folks think he gerrymandered the state against the republicans. Is that a true fact?

WALKER: Well, I had a conversation with him about that. I will never forget it. And he told me, he said, "People in Georgia don't care about reapportionment." And I said, "Governor, we've made them care about it." And I think we did. I think we went too far. I won't say Governor Barnes...all of us were democrats. We saw the republican tide coming. Governor Barnes was trying to stem the republican tide. But I think people thought we were being unfair. And I do think...I think we made them care about reapportionment, and it was another issue that

Governor Barnes led to – helped lead to its defeat. Now, he didn't get defeated badly, you know. Even with all of these things we've talked about, he got about 49 percent of the vote. And there was a republican tide sweeping Georgia. If he had not had these things, possibly he would have been reelected. You know, Governor Miller didn't get reelected overwhelmingly in his second term. I think he got about 51, 52 percent. And I don't know...even if we hadn't had these controversial issues, he might not have gotten reelected. But I suspect he would if he hadn't tried to do so many right things. They were right things, but he took on too many of them at one time I think.

SHORT: I know that you and Governor Perdue are very close friends. You served in the same area, represented much of the same constituency. Did you ever consider joining him as he changed to the republican party?

WALKER: No, sir, I never considered doing that. I respect what he did. Obviously, he made the right choice if he wanted to be governor. But I never considered doing that. I was of the school that I'd rather quit than change, and that's what I did. I'd been on that team a long time. As I say at home, I had gotten fat and slick at the democratic trough. The people, Tom Murphy and so many others I could name, Roy Barnes...I could go right back down the list of all the governors...Zell Miller...that helped me, and I just thought that – and for one thing, it's probably time for me to quit anyway. And for another thing, I just had rather quit than switch parties. Now, I'll say this to you: Today I vote for the person. I vote for the person. I don't vote for the

party. I vote for who I think the best candidate is, and sometimes it's a republican and sometimes it's not. But...so I'm not – I was cast in two funny roles. I was cast in a role of being a Majority Leader, and I wasn't all that partisan. And I was cast in the role of presenting the budget on the floor of the house and answering questions about it, and I wasn't too interested in all those numbers. So I was cast in two interesting roles.

Incidentally, after I got out of the legislature, I decided I'd run for the DOT board, and I said I was going to run. And then I got to looking, and there were 28 legislators in the Eighth Congressional District that could vote for or against me. And much to my shock, 23 of them were republicans. My district ran from Covington to Moultrie, and there were five democrats: Dubose Porter in Dublin; Bobby Parham in Milledgeville; David Lucas, Nicky Randall, and Robert Brown in Macon. The rest of them were republicans. Had I known that, I probably wouldn't have ever said I'd run for the DOT board. But they let me run and without opposition, and that was one of the [Indiscernible] things that has happened to me in my political career. I'm very appreciative of that.

SHORT: I know you're very proud of that. That's quite an honor. Let's talk for a minute about party politics. How do you think the republicans were able to gain control of party politics in our state?

WALKER: Well, it was sweeping the state. I mean, I could – I think that democrats made some mistakes. You know, we held on a lot longer than they did anywhere else in the South. They

changed in Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, all around us. And I think the reason we were able to hold on is because we were doing a good job. We were passing fiscally sound budgets. We were getting the job done. We were going to Atlanta, getting the business done, and coming home. And so we held on a long time. But I think it was a national thing that happened, and I think that we, of necessity as a party, probably became more liberal because a lot of the people in the party wanted us to be more liberal. And we had to be more liberal. And as we became more liberal, we lost a lot of our constituency. And the people in Main Street, Perry and the small farmers in Dooley County and those kind of people that have always voted democratic thought we were too liberal. I don't think we were near as liberal as they painted us to be, the republicans. But it's amazing we held on as long as we did, but we just held on as long as we could, and it changed.

SHORT: Many states require party registration to prevent crossover voting in primary elections.

Do you think we should do that in Georgia?

WALKER: Well, I never have thought so. I haven't thought about it in a long time. I frankly am not as attune to party politics as I used to be to some extent. I don't know. I think you can make arguments on either side of that.

SHORT: Some disenchanted democrats believe that the Georgia Democratic Party is too urban and too minority controlled. Do you believe that?

WALKER: Yes, sir.

SHORT: Do you think that the party structure could be changed in any way to bring back those disenchanteds –

WALKER: Well, I say that...when I say that I believe that you've got to have somebody to step up to the plate. And frankly, the democratic party right now doesn't have a very – they don't have a very strong bench. And we just had qualifying for reelections of the General Assembly or elections of the General Assembly; a handful of candidates is all the democrats put forth is to oppose republicans. And there's just not a – there's not a strong bench now. Well, things change. They could change. They're not going to change in my opinion much during my lifetime. I don't think we're going to see the democrats take over the House or Senate. I do think an outstanding democrat could get elected governor of Georgia, but I think they've got to be outstanding. And I think they've got to be middle of the road, and they've got to articulate what mainstream people in Georgia think.

Governor Miller is right...he's right about what he says about why we lost out, and he's right about what it takes to get elected governor of Georgia. And it's got to be what people talk about at the supper table. It's got to be what they're concerned about. And sometimes he says it a little stronger than I would, but I read his books, you know, and I agree with about 90 to 95 percent of what he says. I think he's on the right track as far as what democrats would have to do to take

back over. I don't think they're going to take the legislature back over in my lifetime.

SHORT: In past years the republicans in the Georgia legislature used to complain about mistreatment, and now the democrats are complaining about mistreatment. How long do you think it will take, if ever, for the House of Representatives to be sort of less partisan?

WALKER: Well, it's getting worse; it's not getting better. I mean, it's getting worse on a national level because it bottomed out. It's kind of like the economy. I don't know whether it's bottomed out or not. It's way out of hand. As Mr. Murphy used to say, it's out of the banks...way out of the banks. And there was a time in this country when the President of the United States could call a handful of people to the White House...Senator Russell, Sam Rayburn, Everett Dodson, two or three more. And he'd say, gentlemen – and they were all men back then – "We've got a problem; let me tell you what the problem is." And they'd say, "Mr. President," it didn't matter whether he was a democrat or republican, "We'll take care of it." They'd go back and take care of it. They did what they thought was in the best interest of the country. That doesn't happen anymore, and it's way, way, way out of hand. But it doesn't seem to me to be getting better; it seems to be getting worse. And if you don't believe I'm right, you wait to see what Senator McCain and Senator Obama – if that's who the nominee is...I suspect it will be – what you see from them in the next few months.

SHORT: Do you believe in term limits?

WALKER: No, sir.

SHORT: Why?

WALKER: Well, the people ought to be able to elect who they want to. They've got an opportunity every two or four years to limit somebody's term. One of the problems we have in the state legislatures today is no institutional knowledge. You need institutional knowledge. I'd been in the legislature ten years before I ever had any kind of a leadership position. I'd learned a lot in the ten years. I had watched Marcus Collins and Tom Murphy and Joe Frank Harris and all of these people...Robin Harris, and I could go on and on naming people. It takes a while to learn. And I'm just – I'm not for term limits. I noticed that the republicans that were very much for term limits were for term limits until they got in power, and you haven't heard that mentioned since they got in power. I think they're right now and wrong then.

SHORT: Well, since the makeup of the legislature obviously will depend in the future on the whims of political parties, do you think that it would be wise to create some sort of maybe constitutional commission to work on reapportionment and keep it out of the hands of –

WALKER: Well, Bob, reapportionment has become increasingly difficult. And the reason is there's so much information available to everybody. The first reapportionment I went through

was done on papers in people's back pockets. And there weren't but just a few people that really, really understood. And it was pretty easy to get it done because they'd tell you and you pretty well had to go along with it. Now everybody has information about everything. They know every household. They know who's in it, whether they voted last time, how they voted, democrat or republican; race, sex. And they know that you are fixing to pass a plan that they're going to have difficulty getting reelected in. And it's getting more and more difficult. It remains highly partisan and more and more difficult. I don't know what the answer to it is. The plan that we're operating under now I think the courts drew it up. And I don't know whether it's better than what political people would do or not. But something needs to be done about it. What the answer to it is, I don't know. I really haven't given it that much thought lately, and a commission might be the way to go.

SHORT: After you left the legislatures, you mentioned that you became a member of the State Board of Transportation. And of course, transportation today is a hot button issue just about everywhere...traffic, standstills in some of our major areas, and even today coming here I ran across a lot of traffic today. What seems to be the problem?

WALKER: Well, Atlanta some say is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the country. The state of Georgia is the fourth or fifth fastest growing state population rise in the country. 100,000 new people in Georgia every year...a new Augusta or new Macon every year. That's number one. Number two, we don't have enough money to get the job done and in DOT. I was

in state government a long time. I know every agency always says they don't have enough money. But I'm telling you it's true with the DOT. We've got about \$2.5 billion. We need about \$4 billion to do the job. When you say why is that, Larry? Well, number one, right-of-way acquisition costs have risen dramatically. Material costs to build roads has risen dramatically. Sophistication of roads has risen dramatically. You've got environmental hoops to jump through. You've got historic hoops to jump through. And it just takes a lot more money to get the job done, and the money has not kept up with the population growth and the complexity of what we're dealing with. Now, we're going to have to go to alternative sources of transportation. I believe that commuter rail will work. With the gasoline price increases, the population increases, the frustration with sitting in traffic like perhaps today, it's going to make people more inclined to ride trains. And I think we're going to see that happen. But it is a very complex situation. I came out of the legislature where I perhaps was wrong...I mean, I know I was wrong sometimes. But I always thought I knew where we needed to be going. I went over to DOT, and I tell you truth. Sometimes I don't know what we need to be doing. It's a Gordian knot – it's very, very difficult. We've got a good board, good people. I think we've got a – the new commissioner is very good. I'm pleased with her, and we're working hard on it. But whether or not we're going to solve it to the satisfaction of the people, I don't know.

SHORT: There are two ways: Raise the gasoline tax or appropriate from the general fund.

Should we do either or neither?

WALKER: Well, we've got the lowest gasoline tax in the country. Now, having said that, we've also got sales tax. If you factor the sales tax into it, I don't know whether it's the lowest in the country or not. We've got to have other revenue. I think that's for the legislature and the governor to decide where it's going to come from. You know, we've got another thing called public private initiatives, concession finance, where private people build roads; private people might build commuter rail. I don't see anything – if you're going to have...let's say you're not going to have a road from Gainesville to Perry through Atlanta, but you've got a private concern to come in and say, well, we'll build a road from Gainesville to Perry. It will be a toll road. What's wrong with it? You're not going to have it anyway. And I think you're going to see more of that kind of financing in the future, and I think you're going to see more toll roads in the future. Some people are opposed to them. Exactly why, I don't know. They don't have to ride them if they don't want to. They can ride 85 and, you know, 75. But that's another possibility, is private money being used, which is the way roads started in this country, incidentally. The initial roads were private roads.

SHORT: Speaking of interstates, how familiar are you with the proposed I-3 that's from Savannah to Knoxville through Augusta?

WALKER: Not very. Maybe I should be, but I'm not.

SHORT: Well, you know, there seems to be a large cry for some sort of interstate between

Savannah and Augusta. But past that, there's a lot of opposition because it would go through the mountains of North Georgia, and you know how the people up there are about the environment. So I don't know whether that's alive or dead. But there is one report that the circumferential highway between – around Atlanta...the northern arc is –

WALKER: Which is another thing that helped beat Governor Barnes.

SHORT: That's true, that's true. That that is being renewed. Is there any...

WALKER: Yeah, there's talk about that.

SHORT: Do you think it's necessary? Do you think it will help?

WALKER: Well, I'm not really familiar enough with it. I haven't studied it enough to know. But just as a concept, I think it would help, yes, sir. I do think it would help. Something has to – I started to say something has to be done...some things have to be done, not one thing; but there are several things that will have to be done to alleviate this horrendous traffic problem. We're going to always have traffic problems because we're a growing state, a prosperous state, one of the great states in the country. But we also try to alleviate it.

SHORT: Good. Well, before we leave the DOT, let me ask you this question: Back in the term

of Carl Sanders, Governor Sanders, he got legislation passed to remove the appointment of board members from the governor to the legislature. Was that a good idea?

WALKER: You can argue either side. That's one of those beauty-in-the-eye-of-the-beholder kind of a thing. I don't know. I think it's worked reasonably well. There's been some controversy about it. But frankly, there's controversy about governor's appointments. And I think it's – I'm happy to be working for 28 legislators. I'd be happy to be appointed by Governor Perdue. Either way...I mean, I think you can argue either side of that.

SHORT: How about the selection of the commissioner?

WALKER: Well, it definitely should be a board function. She's working for us. I think she's good. We've got a new commissioner, Commissioner Gina Abrams, two degrees from Georgia Tech, very much data driven, bright, articulate, committed to positive change, not without some controversy in the election and since the election. But she's good. She's going to be outstanding given time, and she's getting her feet on the ground. And I think – and what I hear from people, just citizens, I think they're impressed with her and they like her. And there's been a little controversy, as you know, about her; but the people that are talking to me are saying they think it's much to do about nothing.

SHORT: Are we doing too much in the way of incentives in bringing new into the state of

Georgia?

WALKER: Probably not doing enough. Probably don't have a – we're probably not doing enough, Bob. We need more industrial development in the state. We don't need to be – for example, I'm from Houston County, and Houston County has become a bedroom community. And without industrial jobs...and it's certainly not keeping pace with the individual homes that are being built there, and they cost you money. They don't – we need those industries and industrial jobs to help pay for all these other people to move into the county. I don't think we're doing too much. I think, if anything, we're not doing enough.

SHORT: How do you see Georgia economically down the road?

WALKER: Good. When I went to the legislature, Georgia was a backwater state. When I left, it's one of the great states in the country. There's been a dramatic, dramatic improvement in Georgia and the quality of life in Georgia. It's a story that never has been told like it should have been told. Georgia was a backwater state. Governor Sanders did a lot to change the image of the state, started us on the right path. We had a clear choice when he was elected. He got elected, and he was a great governor. I've talked about Governor Miller and the ones I served with. I talked in particular about Governor Miller. Governor Sanders was another great governor in the history of the state of Georgia. I think he was extraordinary in every respect and had a lot to do with changing our image, getting us on the right path. We made great progress.

SHORT: One of the interesting things about the new flag was Denmark Groover, who sponsored the legislation to create the old Georgia flag in 1956, and made a speech on the House of Representatives in support of the new flag.

WALKER: Well, some said, you know, that the '56 flag was not defined, it was not a continuation of the South's position, the ruling people in the South's position on issues. Denmark Groover, who was then out of the legislature and was sick, not a well person, came to Atlanta with my law partner and his close friend and Garland Byrd's son, Chuck Byrd and came before the rules committee that morning that I talked about. And he said surely it was defiance of the federal court. That's what it was about, and it needed to be changed. And I think that was a big factor in getting the rules committee to pass the bill out and later pass it on the floor of the House. I think Groover had an opportunity to correct where he thought he was wrong years before...what, 50 years before. And he was big to do it, and it helped pass and get us a new flag. You know, I used to – people would ask me what are you going to do about the flag. And this is not something I'm proud of, but it's the truth. And I'd say to them you know what I'm going to do about the flag. The truth of the matter is I didn't know myself until I was confronted with it and had to actually take a position. I didn't know what I would do. I'm glad I was part of trying to change it. I think I took the right position, just like Denmark Groover; when he had a chance to change his position, he did so. I'm glad Denny did that before he died.

SHORT: What was your most exciting day in the legislature?

WALKER: I think the most exciting day was in 1979. I hadn't been there very long, and there'd been a bill sponsored by Representative Peggy Childs. We made Georgia On My Mind the official state song. And Ray Charles came to the floor of the Georgia House. A piano was set up down front. He played and sung Georgia On My Mind. Hoagy Carmichael, who had written the music for Georgia On My Mind telephoned from Los Angeles at 10:00 in the morning, and I remember him commenting about how early it was in California. He wasn't used to getting up that early. And it was almost magic in '79 because everybody in the House could hear it. It was some kind of electronic hookup, and we could all hear Hoagy Carmichael talking. And we passed and celebrated Georgia On My Mind as being the official state song, most bang for the buck money that any state ever got for a state song. Somebody told me that Georgia paid \$600,000 for the right to use that as its official state song, and it's really sung all over the world and played all over the world. And when people hear it, they think about the state of Georgia. That was an exciting day I'll never forget.

SHORT: As you look back...

WALKER: The second most exciting was when we changed the state flag. I mean, it was electric in the House. It was everybody watching...I've got a picture myself in my law office in Perry watching the vote on the board, and it was obviously extremely close. And I think we

passed it by either one or two votes. One republican representative, Austin Scott from Tifton, voted to change the state flag. We needed Austin's vote. I've always admired and respected him since that time for voting to change the state flag.

SHORT: Well, over a very long and successful career, what do you consider your greatest accomplishment?

WALKER: Well, I was involved in getting the Ag center in Perry. It's been a tremendous success. 700 event days a year...some days none, some days five or six. Almost a million visitors to that facility a year, young people showing their livestock, et cetera. But I really think the greatest accomplishment is when Representative Sonny Watson from Warner Robins and I talked and decided that we were tired of the bickering between Perry and Warner Robins and we were going to try to see what we could do to make the county work together. And I went to Sonny, and I said, Sonny, you're from an old family in Warner Robins; Watson Boulevard...Boss Watson was the first mayor of Warner Robins, Sonny's granddaddy. And I was from old Perry, not as old as Sonny. My daddy came there in 1937. And I told him, I said if we'll work together and talk about the county working together, we have three development authorities in the county. We told them we weren't going to deal with three anymore; we'll deal with one. And the county I think started working together then and has since, and it's been a tremendous asset to the county. I'm proud of the role that I played in seeing the county come together and work together.

SHORT: What would be your biggest disappointment?

WALKER: Oh, I had so many wonderful things happen, and the biggest disappointment is not all that bad. I wanted to be the Speaker; came close to being the Speaker. But, you know, sometimes you wish for things that you – when you get them, you wished you hadn't have gotten them. And Terry Coleman got elected as Speaker, and he had two diverse groups. He had urban democrats and rural democrats, and it's very difficult to get those two groups to work together. I think he did a great job of that. I think he was a good Speaker. But if I would have gotten elected, I would have had urban democrats, rural democrats, republicans who were supporting me, and the governor who was supporting me. So I would have four, three groups and the governor, to try to please; and I don't know whether I could have – that would have been a very difficult situation. I wish I had had an opportunity to try to see if I could do it. But the last two years I was in the legislature I didn't have any leadership position, but it was two of the best years I spent there. I visited people. I helped them draw amendments to their bills. I didn't have a lot to do. I just tried to make friends with people. They gave me an office, and they put me in the office with Lynn Westmoreland, who was the Minority Leader. I think they laughed about that, but Lynn and I got to be really good friends and are real good friends to this day. And I think that had a lot to do with me being elected to the DOT board without opposition. So those were two good years for me. I guess if I had a big disappointment though, that was it.

SHORT: I can't let you go without talking about Sam Nunn. You knew Sam very well...you know Sam very well. Sam of course was a great United States Senator, and you were very close to Sam.

WALKER: Was and am close to him. Do his legal work locally in Houston County. Great American. Would have made a great President. The country needs him. A lot of people in politics have what I call the Sam Nunn problem. The Sam Nunn problem is you've got to be so liberal to get the democratic nomination that you can't win the general election. To win the general election, you've got to be so conservative you can't get the democratic nomination. And it's a tragedy. And I don't know who's going to get elected President, but I'd like to see whomever it is use Sam in the cabinet. I think he'd make a great Secretary of State. Frankly, Sam is like me. He's getting to the upper end of his ability age wise to do these job, but he's still razor sharp and knows people all over the world. He's respected for his nuclear threat initiative, been talked about as a Nobel Prize winner, and would be a tremendous asset. And if Senator Obama gets a nomination, he would be wise to tell people, "I'm going to use Sam Nunn as my Secretary of State or I'm going to use Sam Nunn as my vice president." And I think it would help him tremendously, would get a lot of the middle-of-the-road voters. We've got to get back to the middle of the road. The people in the middle ought to run this country, not the people on the fringes. But that's not what's happening. We let the people on the right run it for a while, the extreme right; then we let the people on the extreme left run it for a while. And we need to run it out of the middle. We'd have a better country if we did that. I think Sam Nunn could help

bring that about. Fine man. Great American.

SHORT: How would you like to be remembered?

WALKER: My wife asked me not long ago, she said what do you want on your tombstone? And I said just put on my tombstone he made a difference, and I'd like to be remembered as somebody that made a difference. Hopefully in a positive way. That's the way I'd like to be remembered.

SHORT: And there's no way that you could be drafted back into politics?

WALKER: Well, Bobby Rowan said, I'll end where I started, that the only thing that kills those of us that like politics is embalming fluid. And I think that's very, very highly unlikely. I've enjoyed it. I've had my time. Again, I think about what my daddy said: A smart man knows when to put something down. You don't have as much as energy at 66 as you do at 46...you just don't. And having said that, I think people with gray hair can contribute a lot. I think we need more of that on the state level and certainly on the national level. We need more wisdom. I don't...if you ask me on the national level who is a wise person...in the United States Senate who is a wise person, I'd have a hard time coming up with a name. I'd say Sam Nunn is wise. And that's what we need. We need some wisdom. Maybe people are just as wise, I don't know, and the media tears them down so you don't think they are. But I can't think of anybody in the

United States Senate I would characterize as wise. I think certainly years ago we had, you know, Carl Vinson, Richard Russell and Sam Nunn. I think we could talk about wise people. I don't see that much anymore.

SHORT: Well, you've been a great public servant.

WALKER: Thank you.

SHORT: And we are delighted that you are with us today.

WALKER: And thanks to my constituent for letting me be elected 16 times. I'm deeply appreciative of that.

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