

**Norman Underwood interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
**Norman Underwood**

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BOB SHORT: Hello, I'm Bob Short. This is Reflection on Georgia Politics sponsored by Young Harris College and the Russell Library at the University of Georgia. We're very Odelighted today to have our guest, Mr. Norman Underwood, a longtime Georgia political

campaigner and expert, a former candidate himself, and now a very successful lawyer in the city of Atlanta. Welcome, Norman. We are delighted, as I said, to have you here. You know, you and I are contemporaries. We came along about the same time in Georgia politics. We share a lot of friends, and I'm sure that we have many, many memories that we can share. And I want to do that with you today. But first of all, I'd like to learn more about you. Tell us about Norman Underwood.

NORMAN UNDERWOOD: Well, I'm from Gordon County. The county seat of Gordon County is Calhoun. I grew on a little farm out in the country from Calhoun in a community called Red Bud. Red Bud's not really a town. It's kind of a geographical expression. But we had Red Bud High School. I graduated from Red Bud High School. My father grew cotton and corn for the first part of my childhood, and it got to be a very difficult thing to make a living doing that. And like a lot of farmers in North Georgia, we switched over to the chicken business. So I grew up on a combination of cotton/corn and chicken farm. And I was a 4-H Club member. And to the extent that I ended up having an interest in politics, a lot of that's due to the 4-H Club. Senator Russell had a program in those years in the 60s in which he would invite a couple of people each who had been in the 4-H Club to come up to Washington and go to college. You had to enroll at George Washington University, or maybe Georgetown, and go to school part time.

And I actually went through the University of Georgia on a forestry scholarship. I had been the national 4-H Club forestry champion, and the Homelite Chainsaw Company gave me a

scholarship. So I was in the forestry school at the University of Georgia when Senator Russell's assistant, Bill Jurden, called and said, "We've selected you if you'd like to come to Washington and be one of these 4-H Club patronage workers." So I went up to Washington, and I got there about a week before Kennedy was inaugurated. And Senator Russell had so much seniority, we were able to get very good tickets to the inauguration. And the problem that I had with the Kennedy inauguration is that I did not have an overcoat and the night before it snowed. But because Senator Russell had so much clout, we had tickets, and we sat right up near the stage, the dais, where Kennedy was sworn in. And I guess the truth is that sort of gave me the political bug, just the pageantry and the excitement of seeing that inauguration.

SHORT: Well, there are very few people who really, really knew Senator Russell. Tell us about him.

UNDERWOOD: He was an unusual personality for politics, because he was genuinely reserved. He had a low-key personality, particularly later in life. But he became a student, a genuine student. He read a lot of history. When I was a student at George Washington, I was assigned to read *Don Quixote*, and I regarded that as a chore. And Senator Russell came in on a Saturday morning and I was doing my assignment, reading *Don Quixote*. And he told me that he had read it four times. And I remember then and still am astounded that here's a United States senator who has read that great work of Western literature, had read it four times. So he was a very dedicated person. Was lucky to find his niche. He had the quintessential personality for being a

United States senator, namely that he could make people like him who knew him real well. He was also good at retail politics or campaigning. But the truth is he never had to do much of that after he got elected. And his great strength was that people developed enormous respect for him. And in the United States Senate, that's the commodity that will make you powerful, if your colleagues who know you well trust you. And he was one of the top senators in history, one of the most powerful senators.

One of the things that I learned about him is I wanted to talk about world affairs, I wanted to talk with him about politics and what was going on around the world, but understandably, all he wanted to talk to me about was baseball. So I adjusted my style to that. So every time I would see him or I would occasionally drive him somewhere, I would talk about baseball, and we would have an active conversation. But if I switched over and started talking about what was going on – and this was in the early years of activity in Southeast Asia – he didn't have the slightest interest in talking to me about that, but we would talk about baseball at great length.

**SHORT:** Despite their obvious political philosophies, Russell was extremely close to President Johnson.

**UNDERWOOD:** Well, Senator Russell had a lot to do with making Lyndon Johnson. Johnson became majority leader of the Senate after less than a term. I think maybe four years in the Senate and he became majority leader. And the only possible way you could do that would be to have the blessing of the top leadership, and in this case it was the blessing of Senator Russell. In

the very comprehensive biography that Robert Caro has written on Johnson, he got it absolutely right. He's done the research, some of the research at the Russell Library, on the relationship between Johnson and Russell, and explains in great detail that Johnson had two great sponsors in his life. One was Sam Rayburn and the other was Senator Russell. But their friendship largely survived. It was kind of a melancholy story at the very end of both of their lives, just because politics carried them in different directions. And I remember going to Senator Russell's funeral in Winder in January of 1971. Johnson was back at the ranch and did not come to the funeral, and I always thought that was a sad commentary on what had been one of the most productive political friendships in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

SHORT: So you left Senator Russell's office and George Washington University and attended the University of Georgia.

UNDERWOOD: I came back to the University of Georgia, went to law school. And during law school, I was in campus organizations. And on one occasion I met Carl Sanders. He was the governor of the state, but I didn't really know him. But I had, of course, watched his campaign in 1962 when he was elected. And when I got out of law school in 1966, he was getting out of the Governor's Office and decided to start a law firm, hire a couple of young lawyers, and I was one of those that he hired.

SHORT: And now you've grown into quite a large firm.

UNDERWOOD: We've grown to about 650 lawyers, and that's a real tribute to Carl Sanders. There are a lot of law firms in the country – or several law firms in the country that are as big as we are, that have 650 lawyers. But they're not -- I don't know of a single law firm that has grown to that size during the lifetime of the founder of the firm. So that's quite a tribute to him.

SHORT: It is. I recall that 1962 campaign. It was Carl Sanders, a young state senator, had taken on a powerful force in Georgia politics, Marvin Griffin. An interesting thing happened there that I thought was of great benefit to Senator Sanders, and that was the demise of the county unit system. Do you recall the county unit system?

UNDERWOOD: I do. I learned more about it after it was gone, but I do remember. It was a very interesting thing. I think about 130 of our 159 counties had what's called two units, and then several counties had maybe four units, and then I think there were six counties that had six units. But the net effect of that was that the rural areas absolutely controlled public policy in the state. And it was a sacred system. And the Sanders campaign was the first campaign that actually – by the time the election was over, I think the issue was settled. The county unit system had been discarded. But Governor Sanders always says with pride that he would have been under any system, that even under the old system he would have been elected, as it turned out. But that's one of the important issues – elections in our history. Because it sort of was a[audio gap] the guard and was kind of the rise of more influence for urban areas and kind of a

different style in politics represented by Carl Sanders.

SHORT: It also brought a new image to Georgia.

UNDERWOOD: It did. I think Governor Sanders, his style and the style of his wife, I think it did have a lot to do with giving Georgia a different image. And that may be one of the real talents that Governor Sanders always had. He's a person with very good judgment, and I think he sort of had an instinct. He was a young man, 37 years old, when he ran. But I think, looking back on it, that he had a feeling that turned out to be absolutely right and necessary, and that was that the time had come for Georgia to kind of move on from its history. We had had a politics that, truthfully, had always had a dynamic in it that probably can best be characterized as racial. Candidates would try to get elected in part upon the resentments and fears about the future and what was unknown about social issues. And Sanders kind of had a feeling, looking back on it, that it was time for us to move on from that. And that was a very important instinct for a governor to have at that period of time, particularly when governors in other states were behaving in a very different way. And it kind of distinguished at a very important time in its history. And I think, ultimately, that's probably the great contribution that Carl Sanders made to the history of this state.

SHORT: He left office with an 84 percent favorable rating, which meant that he had, obviously, a very successful administration. Do you remember some of the programs that he brought into

Georgia?

UNDERWOOD: I think the program that's probably had the most long-term significance was his interest in higher education. Somewhere along the line, our political commitment to higher education has slipped back a little bit. And Carl Sanders, as a state senator, went to California. And this was long before we had the Silicon Valley. But they had a real focus on colleges there. John Connelly, who had been Lyndon Johnson's most loyal assistant, had gotten elected governor in Texas a couple of years before Sanders was elected. But Connelly was a very practical, very perceptive political person. Governor Sanders does not remember talking to Connelly about this, and I'm not sure he did, but he copied, in effect, what Connelly was doing. Connelly decided that the best way to lift up Texas economically was to put a lot of money into the university system, in particular the flagship university in Austin. And even now, 40-something years later, that decision by Connelly is having a lot to do with Texas. Around Austin, Texas, there's just a concentration of technology, and it's because of the university. And Sanders started down that road here and put a lot of money into revitalizing the university and starting a whole series of junior colleges, as they were called then. I think that's probably the program that's had the greatest influence on Georgia since the Sanders administration. And we'll never know – if there had been a second Sanders administration, we'll never know what exactly the focus would have been. But I've always thought that probably the biggest – the most unfortunate thing about there not being a second Sanders administration was that we kind of missed out on doing what Connelly had done in Texas, which was to really make a major move

with technical education and higher education, the kind of thing that Connelly did in Texas that's made a lot of difference around Austin. But that was the program that I think Sanders probably deserves the most credit for is his emphasis on higher education.

SHORT: The state constitution at that time did not allow a governor to succeed himself or herself, although we've never had a female governor in our lifetimes. Maybe we should.

UNDERWOOD: We will.

SHORT: Anyway, he couldn't succeed himself, so he decided to build a law practice. And that's where you, I think, became close friends, political allies with Governor Sanders.

UNDERWOOD: He hired me to be a lawyer. But after about a month here – I think we had three lawyers. And we had lots of clients, so I think Governor Sanders thought he was going to be on some boards and he was going to represent big corporations. But what he found out is that there were real people with real legal problems walking in the door. So we were extraordinarily busy. And about a month into my career as a lawyer, he said to me one day, "I've got to make a speech to a bar association. Can you write a speech?" And I said, "Well, I never have." But he said, "Would you try?" So I went in my office, and for two or three days and nights I worked on a speech that he gave to the bar association. And after that, I was kind of committed to that kind of work for him, doing a lot of speeches. And then that would have been 1967, and we had a

very busy time practicing law. And he kind of evolved into the next campaign, which was the campaign to be reelected in 1970.

SHORT: When did he make that decision? Was it early or later?

UNDERWOOD: Well, he formalized it later. But I think from the time he got out of the Governor's Office, he probably always had the feeling that there was unfinished work. And I don't ever remember a time when there was a serious doubt that he would run again. I think there was always the feeling that he had other work to do. And President Johnson was still in office then, and Johnson tempted him with two or three jobs in the federal system and asked him about being ambassador to some country, the Philippines or something. So I think his thought process was, "What is the best thing for me to do?" He had lots of options, but I think he always had the notion to go back into the Governor's Office and build on the experience he had would be a good thing.

SHORT: So in 1970 he decides to run again. His main opponent was Senator Jimmy Carter, who had lost the race for governor in 1966.

UNDERWOOD: Right.

SHORT: How did he plan his approach to that campaign?

UNDERWOOD: Well, I think what you said earlier about his approval rating, I think Carl Sanders had a very high level of confidence based on those approval ratings. Even people who had been Marvin Griffin supporters, many of them had decided that Sanders had been a successful governor. So in retrospect, I think there was probably a very confident feeling that I can continue the work that I've done, that we know that there's a lot of unfinished business, and this was a campaign in which he said, "These are the things I want to do," and kind of laid it out. In the meantime he had an opponent, State Senator Jimmy Carter, who came along who had run four years earlier and had been campaigning the entire time. And it's very important to understand that election, to understand the atmosphere that we had in 1970. In the 60s we had a lot of progressive -- at the federal level -- social legislation. We had the Voting Rights Act and the Public Accommodations Law. And in the history of the country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it's pretty clear that the 60s was a time of great movement forward. What is clear now that was less clear then is that underneath all of this progress, there was something of a backlash. There usually is. But just below the surface of the Georgia electorate there was a kind of churning resentment against the progress that had been made. And Carl Sanders, because of the image he had and because of his friendship with Lyndon Johnson -- who had been the president who brought about most of that legislation -- had a vulnerability being associated with that progress. And State Senator Jimmy Carter understood that very well and played to it and exploited it and won the election.

SHORT: Bill Shipp, who, as you know, is a very famous Georgia political analyst, said this about the Carter campaign. And I'm quoting. He said, "Carter ran a campaign that was groundless and vicious." Do you think that's an adequate description?

UNDERWOOD: Well, it was a campaign that was vicious in the political sense. Carter even then could be an appealing personality. So at the time, it didn't feel so vicious. But you could tell that it was an appeal to not the better instincts of human nature. And there's no question that Senator Carter understood this backlash, understood that if he could use certain symbols to link Carl Sanders with racial progress that there would be some number of people who would vote against him. And Carter played that – knew how to implement that strategy very effectively.

SHORT: Governor Sanders chose to take what he called the high road. He refused to respond to any of the charges made by Senator Carter. As it turned out, don't you think that might have been a mistake?

UNDERWOOD: Oh, I think it probably was a mistake, because since then we've developed the kind of politics that we've had that characterize the 80s and the 90s and the new century. But it's very much of an attack/counterattack politics. And Carl Sanders frankly, I think, didn't think that was necessary. Because in his mind, he felt like that the public knew his record, and I don't believe that he thought that it was possible for anybody to distort his record as governor. And it probably would not have been. I think if State Senator Carter had to run against Carl Sanders

without this underlying social backlash, he wouldn't have been able to beat him on the issue that he primarily attacked Carl Sanders, which was that he had benefited personally while being in the Governor's Office. And there was really no substance to that, and Carl Sanders ironically didn't have much money in those days and had a smaller net worth than Senator Carter. But he didn't think it was dignified to answer those charges. But I don't think that would have beat him. But when you combine that, the attacks on him personally and the attacks on his style – the fact that he had moved to Atlanta and he flew his own airplane and he was jogging before jogging was cool, if you combine that with the underlying backlash against the Civil Rights Act and against what was seen in many ways as a intrusion of the federal government into the affairs of the state, put those two thing together in exactly the right recipe and you get what was a very successful campaign by Jimmy Carter.

And I think you'd have to say that Carter was an extraordinarily energetic campaigner. There are not many people who could have pulled off the campaign with the very same strategy. It's one thing to have a strategy; it's another thing to pull it off. So I think you have to give Carter credit for that. He worked very, very hard. And when the votes were counted, he had done exactly what he set out to do.

**SHORT:** There was a third candidate in that race, Reverend C. B. King from Albany, who was an African American. And obviously he siphoned some votes from Governor Sanders because of Governor Sanders' standing in the African-American community. Do you think that that number of votes that might have gone to Sanders would have made a difference in the outcome?

UNDERWOOD: It could have. C. B. King never became a real broad-factor. And it was interesting to watch him. This was the first African-American candidate I had ever seen. And he was a very dignified speaker, and he spoke with almost a professorial demeanor and used very formal language and had a very deep voice and sounded almost like a Shakespearian actor. And I think the African-American community had pride that he was running, but I don't recall that there were huge numbers of votes. But he was always a presence at the rallies and so forth. There was another candidate in the primary who brought a dynamic to it that's unusual, and that was J. B. Stoner. And Stoner was the last candidate of his type that was absolutely unrestrained in his language. And I think that probably played into the kind of atmosphere that was created. We had C. B. King talking in a – we had lots of forums in that campaign, and we had C. B. King talking in a very academic, professorial way, J. B. Stoner in what can best be characterized as kind of gutter language. And we had Sanders who was a familiar commodity in Georgia politics, and we had Carter. And it was just a very unsettled atmosphere. And the people that come out to those rallies tend to be supporters or curious people. There was a lot of catcalling and sort of agitation in the audience, and it was an unsettling time politically. And it turned out if you were the governor who was trying to go back, it was not a good year for incumbents.

SHORT: That year also – well, Carter, of course, won the election. And so did Lester Maddox, who had been governor and stepped down to be lieutenant governor, if that's a step down. And they were settled with each other for the next four years. It was a very, very unusual and colorful

period, don't you think?

UNDERWOOD: It was. It was an interesting period that provided some of the most interesting anecdotes and episodes in Georgia's political history. And in some ways, they had some things in common. They were both extremely energetic campaigners. And Lester Maddox, while he didn't have the same perspective or education as Jimmy Carter, he had about the same energy level. And Lieutenant Governor Maddox, when he finished the Governor's Office, he had a lot of time on his hands, and he participated in a lot of parades. And that's when he really perfected his technique of riding the bicycle backward. And what he devoted a lot of his time to was sort of looking to the future. And it was pretty clear that all the time he was lieutenant governor, he had a plan to run for governor again, to go back into office. And I don't think he knew a lot about the office of governor when he first when in. But like everybody else, he developed a taste for it and liked making the decisions and wanted to go back into the Governor's Office in the election of 1974. And a lot of his personal time, I think, was devoted to that very course of getting back into office in 1974.

SHORT: Now, this is a period that I really want to talk to you about, Norman, because one of my favorite people, George Busbee, ran for governor. Now, George Busbee was a friend of yours. You were his campaign manager. You had probably the most brilliant strategical campaign I've ever seen. And you devised it, so I want you to tell us as much as you can about how you helped George Busbee defeat Lester Maddox.

UNDERWOOD: Well, it was pretty clear that Lester Maddox was going to run again. And it was also pretty clear to most any observer that he had a very solid lock on over 40 percent of the vote. I mean, there was no way that anybody was ever going to keep Lester Maddox from getting 40 to 45 percent of the vote. The question was, did he have 50 percent? And the answer to that was going to depend on 50 percent against whom. So the issue in the 1974 race essentially was will there be a runoff, will the field of candidates running against Lester Maddox be able to hold him to less than a majority, and then who will be the person to finish in second place.

Along the way, though, an interesting thing happened with George Busbee that tells you something about him and about ambition and about politics in general. The Speaker of the House at that time was a man named George L. Smith. Had gone back in as Speaker and was in the Maddox administration a dominant political force. Because the Legislature really began to assert itself and become an independent force, and George L. Smith was part of that. He was an institutional person. He was only 61 years old, but he had a stroke in the fall of 1973, I think, and died. And George Busbee was the majority leader and kind of the *de facto* chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Sloppy Floyd was the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, but George Busbee was the person who had handled the budget for several years. So a lot of his colleagues were prepared to vote for him for Speaker. There was another Georgian who was interested in the office of Speaker, who was Tom Murphy. But I remember one afternoon, shortly after George L. Smith died, George Busbee called me and we met at some coffee shop.

And he and I had been talking about the race for governor, and he said, "I've got to decide this afternoon whether I'm going to run for speaker or run for governor." And I remember exactly what I said. I said, "Well, you can get a footnote in Georgia history, or you can go for the whole page." And he said, "I think I'll go for the whole page." And he pretty much made the decision right there in the coffee shop to not run for speaker but run for governor. So we started devising a plan for him to run for governor.

George Busbee was probably the perfect candidate, as it turned out. All of this is much more clear when it's over. But he was probably the perfect candidate to run against Lester Maddox, because he was likeable and he had a great deal of specific knowledge about the operations of the state government, which Governor Maddox didn't have, even though he had been governor. And George Busbee was, I think, 47 years old, and he was a very nice-looking person and looked good on TV. But the problem was that there was a lot of talented people running in that race. Most people who paid attention to politics would reach the same conclusion, is that if you could finish in second place and get to run head-to-head with Lester Maddox, you'd have a chance to win. So Bert Lance, a very distinguished, hard-working, appealing candidate who had been the transportation – I think then we called it the Highway Commissioner or head of the Transportation Department in the Carter years – ran. And he had the support of what most people would call the business community, the establishment, the bankers. He was a banker.

SHORT: The Big Mules, they're known as.

UNDERWOOD: He did. And in addition, George T. Smith got in that race. Another candidate was David Gambrell, who had been appointed to the Senate by Governor Carter. And in the '72 race he had lost, but still had political ambition. But here's a person of very considerable ability. And Bobby Rowan. All of those candidates were running in the Democratic primary. And the trick was to try to get in the runoff. And Bert Lance had both the support and some of the liabilities now of many in the Carter group. Because Governor Carter had been activist and there was a lot of benefit to being associated with Carter, but there was also some, as there always is at the end of an administration, you're going to pick up some people who didn't get appointed to what they had hoped they'd get appointed to. So our strategy basically all along was to try to get one vote more than Bert Lance. And we got a few more than Bert Lance, and then Busbee was able to be in the runoff with Governor Maddox.

And I remember that there was one debate, a televised debate, between Governor Maddox and candidate George Busbee. And I was still uncertain as to whether Busbee was going to be able to pull this off, because Maddox just had broad, broad support. But in the runoff – or in the initial election when he didn't get the 50 percent – there's usually an assumption if you don't get to the 50 percent it's going to be hard. But he had a real shot. And there was a televised debate. And the truth is that George Busbee didn't do a very good job in the debate. He was tired. He had come in from campaigning. The questions were not very sophisticated. But I remember watching it, and I said, "Busbee's going to win," because he looked like a governor. And Governor Maddox at this point was older; all of his approaches were kind of shopworn; all of his expressions were well-known to people. And I saw that picture of George Busbee on the screen

and I said, “I think he’s going to win,” and he did.

SHORT: Workhorse, not a show horse.

UNDERWOOD: That was the . . .

SHORT: Slogan.

UNDERWOOD: That was the slogan, and it fit George Busbee perfectly. And we stole it from – Sam Rayburn stole it from somebody. I’d like to meet the original person. But the first time I ever saw that it was associated with Sam Rayburn from Texas. But we had a woman who working in the campaign named Dot Wood who had worked in the advertising agency that had worked on Jimmy Carter’s campaign. And I said to Dot one afternoon, “Do you think we can turn this into a campaign slogan,” and she said, “Let me try.” And it became a very well-known slogan in the campaign.

SHORT: Well, Maddox himself was an issue. He had been on talk shows. He’d gone around the country. And I think that people got the impression that he was more of a showman than he was a political candidate. And I think you used that very effectively, Busbee.

UNDERWOOD: Yeah, I think that’s right. And I think there – slogans work if there’s a grain to

them. And in the case of Maddox, he did get elected because he did have some showmanship. He had a lot of energy and had a lot of endearing personal qualities if you knew him. But in terms of the substance of being governor, he was fairly superficial. But his talent was political talent, and the public knew that. The common sense of the common people is such that they knew that. Busbee came across just what he was, as a very honest and very competent and very real, and he was the perfect candidate to run against Lester Maddox. And we'll never know, but he might have been the only person in Georgia that year who could have beat Governor Maddox.

SHORT: Well, he certainly won the runoff by a large margin.

UNDERWOOD: Yeah.

SHORT: And he was elected Governor. And then you joined his administration.

UNDERWOOD: I was of the job that used to be called Executive Secretary, now called Chief of Staff. And sometimes you get lucky when you think you're unlucky. We started into that administration, and there was a very serious economic recession that developed. So Busbee's great expertise was in the budget. So he put together a budget that he thought was relatively conservative. The Legislature went home early, went home in probably early March. And then the revenue collections bottomed out, went way down, and we realized that we had budgeted more money than we were going to have. And Busbee called a special session for June. And

this made the reputation of George Busbee. Because what he did is what public officials seldom do, he took a great deal of time and explained to the public, "I'm going to have to cut things that I don't want to cut." And one of them was a pay raise for university professors. And it was just maybe a five percent pay raise. But he went through an explanation and used a lot of expressions. One of the expressions was that "we have to bite the bullet," and such things as "there's no such thing as a free lunch." But it was fiscal conservatism. Not rhetoric about fiscal conservatism, but it was managing resources. And the public decided they really liked that. And Busbee, after having a special session, cutting the budget, he became very, very popular. It was a phenomenal thing to see. Because usually it works the other way. Usually if you have to have a special session, cut services, there's a group of people that are going to be made and they agitate against you. And it was one of the great ironies and one of the most interesting things I've seen in politics to see Busbee become so very respected. And it was primarily because – this was his personality, but he explained with a great deal of sincerity why he had to cut these services, and the public liked that and was sympathetic with it.

Not long after that, somebody suggested changing the constitution to let the Governor succeed himself. And that's an extraordinary thing to think about, too. As a sitting governor, usually the Legislature would, when they passed a resolution, a constitutional amendment, they would make it not applicable to the current governor. But Busbee was so well-liked by the Legislature and the public that they changed the constitution, and he ran again and served eight years.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute or two about his programs. As I recall, Governor Busbee, as

Governor Sanders, looked very hard at education – technical schools, job training, that sort of thing. And education was one of his big programs.

UNDERWOOD: Governor Busbee benefited by following Governor Carter, and the state benefitted by having those two governors serve back to back. The reality is that Governor Carter had started a lot of things. But he served one term, and I think it would be accurate to say in the last year of his tenure as governor, he was focusing on national issues. But they had created mechanisms in the state government. They created such departments as the Department of Human Resources, a very big department. But it was in flux and needed a lot of management. Governor Carter had passed a lot of environmental legislation. And I think probably in terms of the state government, that's Governor Carter's contribution to the state, is that we do have some very effective environmental measures that for the early 1970s were very progressive. But they needed a lot of work to make them work.

So I think what Governor Busbee did, since he had been in the Legislature and knew the state government, he took what Carter had done and applied a lot of real management to it. And everything kind of settled down and coalesced. And had to change some of it, but he didn't go change things just because it was not his. He had no interest in undoing Carter's work. His interest really was in making it function. And public education is always one of those issues that demands the time of the governor, and he put a lot of emphasis on that. But somewhere along the line this country boy from Albany got it in his head that what the state really needed was international investment and trade, so he developed a genuine interest in trade missions and sort

of selling the state. And he became – there's so much involved in life and in public service that's just kind of an accident of time.

But early in Busbee's administration, there was an event at Callaway Gardens. It was called the Persian Weekend, and the Ambassador from Iran was there. The Shaw was still in power. I'm not sure Busbee had ever meet anybody – I'm sure he'd never met anybody from Iran. And he had dealt with very few foreign people in his life. And he had me call Dean Rusk, because he was going to have to go down and do a toast to the Ambassador from Iran. And this person had been in the paper a lot. He had dated Elizabeth Taylor, so everybody knew who he was. And Mr. Rusk came over and told Governor Busbee how to conduct himself in the presence of an ambassador, propose a toast, and sort of went through the protocol. And that was the first Busbee exposure to somebody from an another country. And he liked it, because the same skill that makes people like you in the Legislature will make foreign people like you. And that really was the beginning of his interest in exposing Georgia to foreign business people and became a real centerpiece of his administration, and ultimately probably was his great contribution, was to kind of open up the state to trade. And now we've got one of the biggest, probably the most active, ports in the country. And a lot of that came because of Busbee's work around the country of selling the state.

SHORT: And international banking and an international airport.

UNDERWOOD: Right.

SHORT: So he did a tremendous job with trade. But you left the administration before its end and became a judge.

UNDERWOOD: I became a judge and was on the Court of Appeals. And it's a wonderful job, a wonderful court. I was young and I had been in the Governor's Office, which is a very intense daily job. So being on the court was a quiet job. And in that job you have a lot of time for thinking and probably too much time for reflecting. And so we were coming up on 1980, and a very interesting thing happened. Carter by this time had become president. Carter made the famous speech in the late 70s about the malaise in the country, about the discontent that was felt by so many people. And that was absolutely true. As you approached 1980, you could tell that people were just kind of not satisfied with what was going on. Carter called it a malaise. You could call it whatever you want to call it. But Herman Talmadge was going to have to run for the reelection to the Senate. And since I had a lot of time on my hands. I would talk to people. If I was in the barbershop, I'd talk to people about how they felt about public policy and the country and Senator Talmadge. And a very interesting thing I observed was that almost everybody said, "Well, Herman Talmadge will be reelected. There's no doubt about that. But I'm not going to vote for him." And what I sensed was that there was just a feeling that we're going to move on, there needs to be somebody different.

So I said – you know, I'm young and I'm over here on the court. And if I'm going to have to run for something, I'd have to run for judge. I said, "I think I'll go run against Senator Talmadge."

The problem was, Zell Miller had the same idea, and Dawson Mathis. And the sense that I had that it was going to be a year of change turned out to be right, although not exactly as I had envisioned it. Because ultimately, as we know, the Republican nominee, Mack Mattingly, did capitalize on that very thing that I'm talking about, sort of the discontent with things as they were, kind of instinct to change the guard. And Mack Mattingly got elected in 1980, and that was kind of the beginning of the rise of the modern Republican Party in Georgia.

SHORT: Did you and Zell Miller ever discuss the race before you entered?

UNDERWOOD: I think we may have talked a little. But you know the way people do, I think I probably called him and said, "Are you serious about this?" And we didn't have any formal substantive discussions about it. Of course, I was hoping that he wouldn't run. Dawson Mathis had already said he was running. Dawson was hoping I wouldn't run. But I think all three of us sort of had this same idea that we articulated in a different way. And I think Zell was at this point in his life – he was Lieutenant Governor. And I think the amendment to the constitution had probably been a little bit of a jolt to him, because he had been elected Lieutenant Governor. And he never told me this, but it's rational to assume that he had planned to run for governor. And so they amend the constitution. So here there's not going to be another governor's election 'til 1982. And we were right in the middle of this.

So Zell had a interesting approach in that race. It was kind of an attack mode that he was in.

And it turned out that the way people felt about Senator Talmadge was not – they were not mad

at him. There was not much resentment against Senator Talmadge. There was just a feeling that it was time to move on, that the Talmadge era was over. And Zell played that a little differently and attacked Talmadge, and there was kind of, I think, a backlash against that. So Talmadge was able to win that race. Whereas Mattingly did almost nothing with Talmadge. He was just running and not nearly as focused and articulate as Zell Miller.

[audio gap]

One of the things that happened in 1980 that's interesting when we look back on it, Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller finished in second place, was in the runoff with Senator Talmadge, and Senator Talmadge won. And it was a brief but intense runoff, and it was a very disappointing experience for the Lieutenant Governor. But I think, looking back on it, my observation – he's never told me this, but my observation is that this was one of the most important periods and probably one of the most educational things that Zell Miller ever had. And I'm pretty sure that he would not have been nearly as effective as a governor had he not gone through this disappointing time as a result of the 1980 race. And I know that he got angry with me, because in a fit of alliteration, one time I referred to him as "Zigzag Zell." And that kind of thing did not go down well with him at that time. He had a hard time with criticism at that stage in his life and in his career. But he was always very civil and very courteous to me even in the campaign context. And he didn't have to attack me, because he was much better known than me. It would have been bad strategy for him to attack me back. So I just attacked him with impunity, as we would say.

But after the race was over, I would see him for a few months and he was kind of – he was

always cordial, but he was kind of formal. So years went by, and we're coming up on 1990. And this would have been in '88 or '89. And he called me one morning and wanted me to meet him for breakfast at a hotel. And it was one of the most interesting conversations I've ever had with a public figure, because he said, "You have seen me at my worst. But I want to run for governor and I want you to help me, and I want to be a different kind of candidate this time." And I knew right then that he probably was going to win, because he had himself – not some consultant – but he had himself analyze what went wrong and analyzed his own personality and realized that he had had an edge in that 1980 campaign, and he took it too seriously. And he had not had the support of the business community. The business community was not comfortable with him then. He had figured out that he needed the business community, and he was taking an entirely different approach. And that approach carried him to the win and then carried him through the election – I mean, through his administration and made him one of the most effective governors we've ever had. But I'm pretty sure that a lot of that effectiveness went back to the disappointment he had in the 1980 race when we had a free-for-all to try to get to run against Senator Talmadge.

And of course it turned out to be the frustrating thing about that from my standpoint is that what I was sensing as we approached 1980 turned out to be right. I mean, it was a time of great change. It was the changing of the guard. And I had no idea that Ronald Reagan would wind up being elected. But that was the effect of it. The malaise, the discontent that I was getting from people in the barbershop when they were telling me that they were not going to vote for Herman Talmadge, but they were pretty sure he was going to win, that discontent turned out to be

nationwide. And Ronald Reagan was elected, and that was the beginning of the so-called Reagan Revolution. So it was a very pivotal year in our political history.

SHORT: Norman, it's always fun for people like you and me who enjoy politics and campaigns to look back. And I've looked back several times at that election between Senator Talmadge and Mack Mattingly, which Mattingly won, surprisingly. And I observed that Talmadge totally ignored his opponent, and I think that is a mistake.

UNDERWOOD: Well, it was a mistake then because that was a part of Senator Talmadge's persona and image at that point in his career, as it turned out. And you could tell that early on, that people who didn't know Senator Talmadge – we had a lot of people in Georgia who had moved here from all around the country. And they knew that the Talmadge family had been a part of Georgia politics for decades. But they saw this senator who did not put a lot of energy into his campaigning, and it was very easy for them to have the feeling – not of any disrespect or lack of affection for Senator Talmadge, but just a feeling that it was time for a change. And I think that's what Mack Mattingly benefited from that Zell Miller didn't get the benefit of. Because Zell attacked Senator Talmadge. And it was a little bit of a feeling that here is Zell with these sharp, pointed attacks on this senator who's been a part of a family that's served Georgia for decades, and it didn't quite work. And Mattingly did nothing, and a majority of the people in the general election, including all those people who had moved down here and voted Republican, decided to vote against Talmadge. And when they voted against Talmadge, Mack Mattingly got

elected.

SHORT: Then came 1982.

UNDERWOOD: By this time I had done a lot of campaigning and I knew people all over the state. So I said, "Well, I might as well run for governor." But again, we had a lot of people, a lot of very talented people in that race. And once again, the trick was to try to get into a runoff.

And the thing that happened that had such a bad consequence for me was that Jack Watson had been in Washington, and Jack had been in Atlanta – he was from Arkansas, but he knew a lot of people in Atlanta and knew a lot of the same people I did. And so he came down and got 11 percent of the vote, and that left – Joe Frank Harris had pretty much North Georgia. And Bo Ginn had been a good congressman, an energetic congressman. And so they were in the runoff, and Jack Watson and I split the vote that I contended was my vote around Atlanta with people in our age group.

But Joe Frank was probably the right candidate for that period of time. There was kind of a feeling that we'd had a lot of government after Carter and Busbee. And Joe Frank had been in the Legislature, and he was a little bit like Busbee. I mean, he was kind of a low-key personality in the Legislature, and that had worked out well. And so you're fortunate in politics if you can run when your personality type is the one that's needed. And Busbee was absolutely the right personality type, even though Bert Lance would have been a very effective governor, I mean, a very talented person. And I think Joe Frank was probably the right personality type for that time.

Somebody told me one time that – I was making a speech in Gainesville or somewhere, and somebody said, “We don’t have that many problems.” They didn’t want to hear that much about it.

SHORT: It’s hard to find your niche when there’s a big number of candidates.

UNDERWOOD: When there’s a lot of people, yeah. One of the things that is interesting when you look back on politics is that there are little movements that happen in campaigns that you can sort of tell this has real significance. And this goes back to 1980, but I’ve thought about it for all these years, and it’s a moment in time when I realized that – this was in the summer. This would have been in July or August. And most of the feeling then was that Carter would be reelected. It’s hard to beat an incumbent president. But I was making a speech in either Ringgold or – it was a North Georgia town, and it was to one of these small civic clubs, like an Optimist Club or a Lions Club or something. There were only about 20 or 25 people there. But not very long before that we had the hostages in Tehran. And President Carter and the military had had an operation to try to rescue the hostages, and they sent some helicopters across the desert in Iran to try to rescue them. And they ran into storms, and the helicopters crashed. So I was making a speech in this little Optimist Club. And I got finished and I said, “Anybody got any questions? Any comments or anything?” And I had been saying there were some things wrong. And one guy stood up and said, “We can’t even get three helicopters across the desert.” And everybody applauded. This was a direct criticism of the United States military, and

everybody in that little civic club applauded. And somehow that just was a jarring thing. And I said President Carter is going to lose. Because if you've got people like this applauding the idea that our performance is just not good – and that turned out to be right. So you have these little moments that come up in campaigns when you think back on it that are highly significant.

SHORT: Did you devise a strategy for race for governor, being the strategic guy you are?

UNDERWOOD: Well, the problem that I had was that I couldn't say too much about how the state was messed up, because I had contributed to the status that it was in. So my strategy was to summon the state to a higher ground, to say that we need to go in this direction and to try to make the point that the caliber of the public service and the quality of the government and the decisions that are made with the budget have a lot to do with where the state goes. And I think, as it turned out – and my idea was to just outwork everybody, to go to every single county, to meet a lot of people. And that had been a workable formula in previous elections, but at this time – I mean, we can look back and see that we were sort of making the transition to the television age, but I didn't have enough money to do television. But Joe Frank did some television ads. And Bo Ginn did television ads. And I did some television ads. But there was not one galvanizing issue. And there seldom is in a governor's race. Zell Miller in 1990 came up with the perfect issue with the lottery. But in a governor's race there is seldom one issue, because what a governor does in the final analysis is do the budget and make recommendations for economic development. And everybody knows that's important, so you can't just say that all

of this is important. And there was not a galvanizing issue on behalf of anybody in that race.

And I think Bo Ginn was a very popular congressman, but it was very difficult to translate that into statewide popularity. And Jack Watson was touting his experience in the White House, and I was touting my experience in the State Capitol. And we also had Buck Melton and some real qualified people running.

SHORT: So you no longer sought public office, but you remained involved in politics. And as I recall, Governor Miller and Attorney General Bowers tapped you to be the attorney for the lottery, which was Zell Miller's big, big issue and big, big program.

UNDERWOOD: I did. There's a lot of work when you start a lottery. The interesting thing about that is that Governor Miller himself made virtually all of the policy decisions, and they turned out to be really effective decisions. And what happens in most lotteries is that, when the funds from the lottery are earmarked for education, the Legislature sort of subtracts that from what they otherwise would appropriate for education and then uses that money for something else, so that you don't really get that much of a boost to educational spending. And Governor Miller came up with a mechanism to prevent that and came up with a program. The Hope Scholarship program is one of the most acceptable and one of the best public policies that we've ever had in the state. But I took very seriously the responsibility of working with the Attorney General to make sure that the lottery was legally sound, that it was started in the right way. And we had a lot of turmoil at first, because in the lottery business there are a lot of people who want

to administer the lottery, and the play hardball and they come in with a lot of lobbying. So I told Governor Miller, “I will do everything I can to make sure that everything’s aboveboard,” and it’s worked out that way. We’ve had a very good administered lottery all these years.

SHORT: And it’s made money.

UNDERWOOD: It has been very effective in funding, particularly, the Hope Scholarship.

SHORT: Well, I know that ex-Governor, ex-Senator Miller holds you in very high regard, and I think that his appointing you as chairman of his judicial selection commission – is that the title?

UNDERWOOD: Yeah.

SHORT: During a time when there were federal lawsuits is proof that he has great faith in your ability. Do you remember that case?

UNDERWOOD: The Brooks case.

SHORT: Yes.

UNDERWOOD: Yes. The way judges are selected in Georgia is that when there’s a vacancy,

the governor makes the appointment, and the judge runs in the next election. And some people brought a case – Tyrone Brooks brought a case, and the United States Justice Department joined in the case, contending that that system was unconstitutional because it did not give African-American voters a fair shot at electing African-American judges. And there were years went by that the appointment of judges was enjoined. And when Governor Miller was elected there was a backup. There were a lot of vacancies. And he called me and said, “Would you take this on, and let’s try to come to grips with this.” And he said, “I would like to see the courts fairly represented.” And we set out on a strategy of identifying very qualified African-American lawyers who could become judges, and ultimately the case went away. It was a very important piece of our history. And I think when Zell Miller’s legacy is fully evaluated, one of the important things he did was to bring diversity to the bench.

I mean, we’re a state with probably 25 or 28 percent of our population is African American and we had virtually no judges. And if you’re a young man who’s being sentenced for crack cocaine possession in Dekalb County, and you look at the bench and you see all white judges, no matter how good they are – and they were very good judges – but it’s hard for you to have confidence in that system. And we were fortunate – Governor Miller was fortunate in that, at this point in our history, there were a lot of both women and African-American men who had gone to law school, and they had years of seasoning. And early governors didn’t really have that option, because the pool of qualified lawyers to be judge that were minorities and women was a much smaller pool. And we have the most diverse judiciary in the country and one of the best, and Governor Miller gets a lot of credit for that. And I was very honored and pleased to have a part in that, to work

with him in bringing that about. And I'm very proud of his work that I helped him doing in bringing diversity to the bench.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about party politics. In recent years the Republican Party has completely taken over control of Georgia state government. What happened?

UNDERWOOD: Well, I think Lyndon Johnson had it right. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and said – the Voting Rights Act. President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act and said, “I have just given the South to the Republicans.” And I think that's exactly what happened. Suddenly there were – not suddenly, but in a relatively brief span of time, we went from having no African-American public officials to having a lot of African-American public officials. And people are very wise about politics. In the Nixon administration and then in the Reagan administration, people in the Justice Department figured out that you could do God's work by having a strategy to make African-American votes count in redistricting. And the practical effect of that would be that you wind up with white districts and you're certain to get white candidates. So we stopped having the kind of compromise that had always characterized our politics in the South. Because before this period of time, if you were in the Legislature or the Congress, you served a district that had a lot of African Americans, a lot of conservative probably farm people up until the real growth in urbanization. So you had to be like Phil Landrum and John Davis and the people that we had in Congress, a moderate compromising sort of candidate. But the Republican Party, to their great credit, figured out if you have white districts and black

districts, then you can be very ideological. And they do the arithmetic, and there are a lot more voters in our state who are conservative in orientation. And they did the analysis and the hard work, and they have ended up in solid control at the congressional level and at the state level. And it's a product of all of those policies. But the fundamental policy that headed us in that direction was the Voting Rights Act, which produced sort of a division that the Republican Party has been able to use very effectively. And I think you have to give their political operatives credit for recognizing that, and the Democratic Party probably was slow in recognizing that until it was pretty much done. And in some states – North Carolina is a good example where the state went pretty much Republican, and then you get the follow up. You get Democrats who had let that happen get very energetic and active, and then they sort of reversed that trend, and North Carolina now has a Democratic governor. And we'll end up with a competitive two-party system, but right now the Republicans are very much in control.

SHORT: Some disenchanted Democrats think the state party relies too heavily on African-American votes and labor support. Do you think that is a factor in losing?

UNDERWOOD: I think it is. I think the state party has not been able to keep at the forefront what we used to call the moderate Democrats, the George Busbee types, maybe Zell Miller types. But the Voting Rights Act is what has brought that about. We've got a very large African-American delegation, and they have become more familiar with the legislative process. They assert themselves more. They make more speeches. And it's just a natural process that the

Democratic Party gets more identified with people who are in the party who are taking high-profile positions and speaking. And I don't think anybody's sat down and said, "We're going to be the party of African Americans and Labor," but it just evolved that way. And what we did not do is we didn't have a strategy to say, "Well, what about all of the small business people that are not country club Republicans?" And what the Republican Party did was figure out that they were not going to achieve this dominance with a traditional country club profile and they used the social issues, the so-called wedge issues, the abortion rights and all of those issues that appeal to the conservative instincts in the South. And they've kind of emerged as the dominant force because of that, because they've learned to use those wedge issues and those social issues. Whereas, historically, at the grassroots – meaning the country club grass roots – they were dependent on economic issues, and the Democrats always beat them on those issues. But when they got to the social issues, they couldn't.

SHORT: Most states require party registration. We don't. Should we?

UNDERWOOD: Probably [audio gap]. I think in the South there's just kind of an independence, or a lot of the voters would have the orientation that "I'm going to vote Republican this year, but I don't know about next year. And I want the discretion and freedom to go vote in that other primary if I want to." And I think that's kind of an independent streak that goes with us. So I think our history will probably not make it very good politics ever to advocate that.

SHORT: You had a wonderful career in law and in politics. As you look back over that career, what is your biggest accomplishment?

UNDERWOOD: Well, I think the thing that I'm going to be proudest of for probably the longest period of time that I think will have the biggest impact is working with Governor Miller on the judicial appointments and kind of heading the judicial system in a different direction. Because that has real implications for the state. And most states would like to have a judiciary that's as diverse as ours. So that was a very significant development that Governor Miller gets all the credit for, but I'm very proud to have had a role in that.

And then the work with George Busbee, and George Busbee was just such a pleasant and appealing person to work with. And then my longest association had been with Carl Sanders, a person who started the state in the direction. And he has been my mentor as a law partner and undoubtedly the single biggest figure in my life outside of family. So I'm very proud to have made that association with him. I've had his respect during all of the years as we have worked on political issues and legal issues and developed some new law and some things that will last longer than me and our law firm. And that's a source of real satisfaction to have had those relationships.

SHORT: Your biggest disappointment?

UNDERWOOD: Well, at the time, the biggest disappointment was not being able to succeed on what I thought was a successful plan in 1980. Because I think I did have the right idea, and I was not able to implement it. And it turned out that it was a year of change. And I thought somebody new was going to get elected, and I was hoping it was me. And when you're at that age, that's disappointing for a while. But you get over those sorts of things. And all of those experiences I've been able to use. And one of the things that I got out of that is, after the 1982 campaign, I had a lot of time on my hands because I'd been out making speeches. So I developed some habits of reading with a lot more seriousness and in depth. So I would read 20<sup>th</sup> century history, and I'd read about the political developments. And having done that, it became very familiar to me, and to read about the New Deal and what Roosevelt was going through, and to recognize the politics that he had to implement. Having worked in the Capitol, I could relate to putting those coalitions together. And I would read about the campaign of 1960 and the role of money in the West Virginia primary, for example. Well, having been a candidate and understanding that you have that walking-around money, that was all very familiar to me. So the backdrop of having participated in politics has made the last 25 years of reading 20<sup>th</sup> century American history very exciting and enjoyable for me, that I would have totally missed out in it had I not participated in politics.

Another experience that you only have in politics in our state and in our city, in particular, is you would not go to African-American churches if you were not participating in politics, unfortunately. I mean, it's often said that Sunday morning at 11 o'clock is the most segregated time in America, and I think that's true. But when I think back on my participation in politics,

and to have the experience of going to African-American churches and seeing what the role of the church is in the community, and to get to know the prominent ministers, that's an interesting experience to relate to politics. But had I not been a candidate, I never would have had those experiences.

And the other thing about being a candidate, it does force you to get to know yourself. And the reality is that retail politics, the things that you need to be really good at – just to enjoy small talk, to actually enjoy just going to cocktail parties – that's not something that I particularly enjoy, just the campaigning part. And so you finally – when you go through a campaign, it forces you to be brutally honest about yourself. And that's one of the benefits I got from campaigning, was to get to know what I like and what I don't like in a way that's more honest than most people ever have to confront.

SHORT: I can assure you that this has been totally unintentional, but we have not talked about the Underwood family. Are there any politicians growing up in the Underwood family?

UNDERWOOD: My children. I've got two boys, who are now in their late 30s, and a daughter. And they have been exposed to politics, and they have a reasonable interest in it. But they also see from all my involvement in my campaigns and from knowing Governor Sanders and knowing Governor Busbee – they have a clear understanding of the tradeoffs and the cost. And we work very hard at showing them the values of family life. And I think their intuitive judgment is that it's not a good tradeoff for them. They have not – both spent some years in

Washington, and my son worked for some period of time in Senator Nunn's office, so he's had a good experience in politics. But they work in corporate America rather than politics.

SHORT: Final Question. How would you like to be remembered?

UNDERWOOD: I think I'd like to be remembered as somebody who approached the idea of public service with some seriousness and worked hard at it and developed some skills at it and made some small contribution to the state that left it better than we found it.

SHORT: Well, Norman Underwood, on behalf of Young Harris College and the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia, I thank you very much.

UNDERWOOD: Thank you.

[END]

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