

**Joel Cowan interviewed by Bob Short
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Joel Cowan**

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BOB SHORT: Hello. I'm Bob Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by Young Harris College and the Russell Library at the University of Georgia. Our guest today is Joel Cowan who has been a part of the major decisions that have been made by the State of Georgia and the City of Atlanta in recent times. Joel, we are delighted to have you with us today. Tell us a little bit about Joel Cowan. Who is Joel Cowan?

JOEL COWAN: Well, I'm a product of Georgia, and small town Georgia at that. Cartersville is about 40 miles northwest of Atlanta. I grew up there, which had the typical small town environment, which I always thought was a good laboratory, if you will. Back in those days you'd see many corporate CEO's all over the world who grew up in a small town. I always wondered why that was so. But my theory was that, as a citizen, you knew who the mayor was. Might be in your church or another church. And you knew the policemen. You didn't cut up much in there. You knew that would get back home pretty fast. And so it was a good growing up experience, but it was important to be in that radius of Atlanta. So you had a decent amount of that.

BOB SHORT: Your father was mayor.

JOEL COWAN: Yes, sir. He - - my father and - - I guess I inherited my liberal genes from him because he was - - went up there from Conyers to open a business with \$125.00. It was a tire business and then some parts and ultimately a dealership, but he was always concerned about the little man and woman and family.

And back then most of the towns in Georgia and in the south were mill towns, and they had a different objective. Often it was not to - - to educate or put as much emphasis on education because they thought that was a way of getting cheaper labor. And even in the early days of industrial development, anti-union and cheap labor that was - - that was what we were selling. So, my father was interested in the development and he was also interested in breaking the whole of the mill town and - - because his interests. The more money the people had the more they'd spend in the store and so on and that was some quid pro quo there; however; it works for everybody. The so-called win-win.

But he had a concern for people and that manifested itself in running for the City Council. I think he was elected there. The first time he ran for mayor he was defeated and then he ran again and was elected. And just a word on that, he got involved with the Georgia Municipal Association which was new then. You remember some of those people. Elmer George from Griffin was the Executive Director and that was the first time that small towns throughout Georgia had banded together and began to make their presence felt in the State House and otherwise.

BOB SHORT: So you went to high school in Cartersville with a classmate who turned out to be a very historic figure in the state of Georgia, and that was Governor Joe Frank Harris.

JOEL COWAN: That's right. We met each other - - he grew up in the little town of Atco, which was just a suburb of Cartersville, but it was the mill town, and - - but he came to school in the city school system and we met in the third grade - - and I can remember - - on the playground in fact. I don't know why that stuck with me, but we did meet there and then we were lifelong

friends after that. He was either in my house or I was in his. His mother more than anybody - - mother and father, they were sort of surrogates. There was always food on the table and that kind of thing. But when he started running for Governor I had to remind him I was President of the Senior Class and he was the Vice President. But he showed me later what real leadership was and I think maybe I trained him well.

BOB SHORT: Then you went to Georgia Tech.

JOEL COWAN: Well, it seemed like there was just no other place to go for me. I was interested in coming to Atlanta first and we had an uncle - - I say we because my brother two years my senior also went there, but my uncle was Horace Sturgis who was the Associate Registrar and it's kind of good to have somebody up there who could help you if you got in too much trouble. And so Uncle Sturgis carried us through, but I had no interest in engineering. It was in management. But more than anything it was Atlanta. It was the hub for me. So, I started in industrial management and finished there.

BOB SHORT: But before you graduated you founded Peachtree City.

JOEL COWAN: Yeah it was kind of - - the way that went about - - it happened in the ATO fraternity house right there on campus. I was sitting there having breakfast next to Pete Knox who was from Thompson, Georgia, and his father was a prefab home guy and a builder, but a very visionary kind of person. He studied things, trends all over the world, but he was very much was on the leading edge and a visionary and would have an idea and he was not particularly good at following up on the idea - - but just there.

So he and a group that he put together created a company called Fayette County Development Corporation and that was the time when you could have an instate stock issue. And Herman Talmadge did it first with Georgia International Life, which is very successful with the Talmadge name. So, there were several others that thought they might do the same thing and this was one of them. However, that was not successful and they put a salesman that would just walk around the streets of Valdosta and places like that. You'd sell one share for \$5.00 or something like that. So we ended up with a few people - - 120 people - - on the stockholder list, but no money.

And the way I got involved then that - - when he was having that stock offering he had an article, and I still have it, on the front page of the paper, the Atlanta paper, with his picture saying "New town proposed for Fayette County." So I was reading the morning paper sitting by Pete and I looked at that article, read it, and I said, "Pete, does your dad need a mayor for that town?"

Those were the exact words. And we laughed and talked and didn't say anymore.

And then about two weeks later he said, "My dad's coming to town and would like to have lunch with you. We went to the old Atlanta Athletic Club, which now is torn down, but on the fifth floor they had the big dining room with table cloths, which was really uptown so far as I was concerned, and I can remember that.

So we met and had a lunch, and afterwards he said, "Joel, Peter tells me you're a whiz." Those were his words. And of course humble, you know, that kind of thing, but he later pursued - - that was my junior year and he asked me over to Thompson to stay at his house and get better acquainted. And then - - I then worked for him in the summer kind of getting things organized, and then my last year at school I worked - - I had an apartment out of the Darlington Apartment. They couldn't pay me and they knew that and so they said, "we'll give you stock." And I said,

"Whatever." And because I liked the idea and it was - - but it was totally bankrupt. I mean it had nothing. So yes, it was started.

When I got out of school I didn't go on job interviews or anything like that and I asked could I work with him doing something else because Peachtree City couldn't afford anything. And so I worked in the same office with Tom Cousins in fact. He started there right down on just off - - on Decatur Street in Pryor. That building there was where the Knox Homes office was. And so I did projects where he would bid for military housing or something like that and I'd go put the things together. I did - - the first commercial thing I did was in - - on Stewart Avenue which was a big - - really the first discount department store, Zayres, on Stewart Avenue. The old building is still there. And so that was my introduction more or less.

BOB SHORT: Well, from such an austere beginning, how did you manage to pull out Peachtree City?

JOEL COWAN: Well, I kept working on the project, including having - - I figured that we should incorporate as a city. I thought we could do it. I'd become very well acquainted with the landowners down there because they were our creditors, and my job after school or whenever I could go down there was to sit at the pot bellied stove with the farmers because we owed them money. We either had an option or we'd made a down payment, and we - - and they knew we didn't have any money and it was a pipe dream, so I befriended those. I figured out how to make that work, and with their help and a man named Grady Huddleston who was the son of the major one who was in the legislature and thought we could put a bill through the legislature. So that was in - - still in '58 with the legislature coming up in January of '59. We didn't have money to prepare the bill or the charter, so Henry Neal, who you probably knew - -

BOB SHORT: Oh yes.

JOEL COWAN: Later was the Executive Secretary of the Board of Regents, but he was the Knox attorney in Thompson before he came - - he had moved here in practice and so he just copied the law books where there's a charter and prepared a bill and that's still - - I still have the book of the original charter because it uniquely allowed you to regulate flying jennies, as a case in point, just because you copied the old legislation there. And we presented it. Governor Vandiver was the - - was the Governor at the time and I had come to know him because of - - he was very active in the work the cities were doing. And so I'd come to know him slightly there and the Knox's knew him well. So we prepared the bill and got it introduced. Grady introduced it in the legislature and named me the mayor and I had to pick four of my creditors down there as the council. And people make a big thing of it now, first mayor and so on, but it really was - - for me it was a placeholder. It gave you the sort of power you might need to defend against the county, for example, wanting to zone you out or do something that you didn't want to do. It allowed you to take your own destiny in hand and that was the original purpose. We also thought we could do some municipal finance that way. It turned out we could not, but that was in the mind at that time. So we got started naming it the Peachtree City. We had a lot of names out. Asked a lot of people. I think the planner we had, Willard Bird, came up with the name, but I never liked it and I had the sole choice of selecting it - - and I did - - but it was where someone would instantly recognize where it was. A lot of reasons I didn't like it because you had to say officially it was

city of Peachtree City. That sounded clumsy to me. Legally that's what you'd say. But I must say the name worked out well because our first job was industrial development, getting people there way out in the country, but no matter where you were in the nation they pretty much knew you were talking about Atlanta and that name.

I think had I not used that name, Portland would have used that for Peachtree Center and if you may recall there was a columnist and he was called the mayor of Peachtree City, just as a term because he reported on things downtown. But in any case, we staked it out and it became law and the rest is history.

BOB SHORT: How quickly did it really develop?

JOEL COWAN: Well it went very slow and you knew it would be. We were broke to start with. I had moved down there, built a house in 30 days, a Knox prefab home, because I had to be residence January 1st. The bill was signed into law in March of '59, but I had to be a resident. Probably didn't have to but at that time we thought we did, so I dragged my wife and off we went down there. And it was the country. It was not a - - it - - never was a four lane road planned for the county. The interstate dodged it completely. The road pattern was strictly farm to market and Atlanta was not considered the market. It was aimed at Fayetteville.

So it was very rural - - it was rural area. And so the first job was to properly finance it and that's where I started the ability to network and do those type things, and from that office at Five Points I did that. I networked around and eventually - - interestingly - - found a broker in Atlanta named Judson Ackerman and he had been introduced through someone else, and Jud knew a man with the William A. White Company in New York. William A. White Company - - there was another fellow that worked there named Howard Aurbach who was very junior down the line as things go. So I'm telling you how many people this went through.

And he - - and as I found out later - - his wife was very good friends with Blanche Riley, and Blanche was the wife of Jim Riley who worked for the Phipps family or Bessemer Securities. And Howard would always try to show him some property he could buy and because of the relationship he wanted to buy it. He - - he would give him the benefit of the doubt. So when this property came up they had already - - they were not interested in new property. They were closing down New York and they owned a lot in Florida - - in Palm Beach, Florida. So they were not interested in expanding, but somehow he agreed to come down. Mr. Riley agreed to come down because of that and he was hoping against hope that he'd find something that he liked.

And so when he started to come he said, "Well, I'll have to have an option. I don't come down and look at property and then if I like it they then say they're not going to sell it." And I didn't know what we had. They gave me - - they couldn't pay me anything so they gave me 60 acres of land to build that house on. It was the only piece of land that was free and clear by the way. We only paid \$30.00 an acre for the first tranches, so it wasn't a lot of money.

And so I called Mr. Knox and I said, "Look, they want an option. I'm just out of school. I don't know anything about that. He said "Joel, you have carte blanche to do whatever you think you should do." I said, "Well, I had an idea what that meant but I wasn't quite sure, so first thing I did was go to the dictionary to look up what carte blanche meant.

And so I then drafted - - I guess I probably have this option letter. Notably I put in there, I could sell my house too, because I thought they might buy it and I may be out and I didn't want to be sitting there. So in any case I did all that, signed it and sent it up there, and on the basis of that

they came down or he came down and looked at it, but looking at it was a story too, but it was - - we got it done on - - and closed on July 31st - - of 1959. Already had the city charter, but frankly they didn't look at it as a city.

The structure I put together gave me - - the land paid off. The old stockholder group was still there. They were sort of about 20% of the whole. Bessemer had put it up and they had \$435,000.00 in the bank. And the deal was, basically, I could spend that money on starting the development and I would either prove it would work or else it was just a tract of timberland 30 miles from Atlanta in their eyes. So it wasn't - - it never was a serious effort to develop. It was always an asset of play.

BOB SHORT: At that point did you have your - - your map of what you would expect Peachtree City to be?

JOEL COWAN: Yeah.

BOB SHORT: Did you have your roads and your cart paths and all of that?

JOEL COWAN: You know we had what turned out to be remarkably prescient. Remember you didn't have - - we couldn't even afford a survey, so none of the property was surveyed. Mr. Knox had only been there once and he wasn't sure where he was then. He was driven through, but you couldn't - - literally there was no reason for you to say, that's my property, that's not my property, or here's a property line. That's what I was trying to do was piece all that together. And I took a map of the - - and the way I got that map was I went to the archives and got the old Indian grant because it listed the land lot numbers, and then blew that up into a big map and then drew in the parcels. Now the way they described parcels back in the farm is, you know, you go to that oak tree with the horseshoe in it on the bank of a lying creek, that kind of description. But in any case, we pieced it together. When the Phipps's came in they said we don't want - - we won't accept the title in a checkerboard fashion. We want to have contiguity all the way through it. So I had come to know John Matthews, who was the General Manager of Forest Title Insurance Company of Virginia, but it was right there diagonally across the street, it's where Georgia State - - he has an office in there right now.

But so, to get this thing done he agreed - - I borrowed a jeep and got one of his young lawyers and we went down there and spent the weekend with me showing him on the ground where this property was without a surveyor or anybody and I satisfied them of the contiguity. So they insured that it was contiguous. Now that map became sort of significant because it was big and folded it wouldn't fit in a file drawer, you know, what they're normally accustomed to, so he always kept that in a special place at the title company there. So piecing that together. Now, when they did the first offering, this land planner named Willard Bird - - he's what's called a landscape architect back then, but he had done this rendering that showed this lake and housing around the lake and an industrial area were railroad. So the things, the major planning things, were just sort of obvious if you had an idea where the railroad was and the highways and the creeks. And it's called a bubble design in the sense it's just a blob of residential here and industrial there, but except for the lake it turned out to be remarkably close, simply because it - - it fit. But we simply didn't have any mapping or engineering studies until we got the money.

BOB SHORT: Did you envision at that time that Peachtree City would be what it is today?

JOEL COWAN: I'd have to say I did and the only caveat was when. If you'd asked me any time in there, "Will it be successful? I'd say, "It certainly will be successful, but don't give me a date because it was clear that for quite a while there was no reason for anybody to come there and that's why we chose the chicken and egg, industrial versus residential.

I built this lake and you could then and there was something called an RS Lake Shores that was marketed where they just built a lake and then they advertised heavily and sold where you'd put a cabin or something on. Now see that was a shortcut to get something, but I didn't want to take any shortcuts. What I would say, but not with advertising because I know advertising, but I felt if you advertised you would - - it would go stale because there were just years before you could do anything significant and people would say oh I heard about that; "Wonder what happened to it?"

So I kept it quiet. I moved around very aggressively with industrial development, but if someone showed up - - and they did - - I put them on a lakefront lot, you know, like the one I'm thinking about for \$1,200.00 that would now be worth close to a million dollars. But, you know, it was important to me to get any kind of resident down there if they were a permanent resident or a community builder, not somebody there for second home purposes or that kind of thing. So that was the start or the philosophy I guess that was - - was going on.

BOB SHORT: It worked.

JOEL COWAN: It worked and, you know, surprisingly, and it still surprises me because the first industry we basically bought. I had the word out with all the industrial development people, you know, we want industry and we'll do whatever it takes to get it. So the trust company came up with one of their customers, a company called Dixie Frozen Foods, and it was out east of Atlanta here and the Lassiter family from Macon owned it and he ran it, but they didn't have any money or anything. They needed a new plant and so the trust company brought them the million and said, you know, see what you can do. So I agreed to build them a plant which really, you know, put them in business out there just to get that first plant.

And the second one was a man named Norman Pascal who is still alive, still commutes down there. He's late 80s, but he was in East Point and they had a horrible problem with smoke - - it was a dust kind of thing because it was a cotton waste plant. And City of East Point said, "Look, man, you got to shut down." So he didn't have a choice. So I put him way over in the corner and made a deal for him and let him go on with that down wind, you know, for a number of years with the understanding that when there was anybody nearby he'd have to clean up. But so it was deals like that to get just something started. Residential was harder because you couldn't - - people wouldn't come until you had a grocery store and then a school or something like that. But every amenity you were able to get brought on a different level of people.

BOB SHORT: That was your first development, but there were others.

JOEL COWAN: Yeah. Because during that period we recognized that we couldn't do anything. You can only go at a certain pace. You can't go faster. And so we would just work that pace, and meanwhile I started doing other things and started Phipps Plaza, for example, and I put that land together. Not too much detail, but the others had tried to get Sax Fifth Avenue and Tiffany's and people like that here. The obvious property was where it is. That belonged to the

Alexander Estate and that was Cecil Alexander's uncle, Henry Alexander. He was then 90. And I knew Cecil, so we started working, so I started trying to trade with him and buy the property, and we just couldn't get anywhere. He had his big mansion back there - - 13 bathrooms in it - - that was behind, but of course now it's Phipps Plaza.

And but in talking with this man Riley that I worked for in New York he said, "What about a trade?" I said, "What about it?" And if you've been to New York up the East River Drive when you get above the United Nations you go under two big apartment buildings. Well they owned the land under those two big condominiums and so it was a 72-year ground lease. No escalation. Fixed. And they still own the one, the South, and so - - longer story short, we actually traded with no cash difference. We gave them that piece of land in the New York that had a steady stream of income for the front part of the Alexander Estate which - - that's where Phipps Plaza was.

BOB SHORT: Your reputation as a developer spread quickly. It wasn't long until you were receiving overtures from the state government to get involved in some of their planning programs. Do you recall that?

JOEL COWAN: Yeah. Before President Carter was that, he was a state Senator and he was mounting a campaign for Governor, which he subsequently lost. One of the residents there Flor Far who was sort of my partner and he was the local renaissance guy, the one I could talk to and he could work with the local folks, but because of the seed relationship they knew each other at the seed relation. So we were - - I was an early supporter of his first time for Governor, and then when he was elected four years after that first time, one of his big things - - he was picking up on environmental - - he was - - I really believe he may have been the first environmental Governor there.

And so he created two commissions. One was - - I forgot the name of it but Ms. Blum headed it and it was a normal commission that she headed and it was aimed at environmental matters - - pure environmental, but on the planning side he had something called the growth strategies - - not growth strategy, but it was the Planned Growth Commission and he asked me to chair that. And that was the first effort to sort of bring some rationale about it and obviously the first time I would have run anything like that.

But Joe Frank Harris was on there. He was a legislative representative on that commission. And we did a lot of work on it the proper way, but I learned how to do it better later on because in the final analysis I sat down and wrote the report. And if you look at a lot of stuff that's in it's exactly: (a) what Peachtree City was, but it's also a way of the subsequent ones, many of which are being done today. So when Governor Harris became Governor it was - - he thought it was time to do it again because you can only move the process so far and you got to rest and let people catch up and then you move again. I learned that the hard way.

So he created the Growth Strategies Commission and asked me to chair that. And we did a big and very sophisticated process. University of Georgia was - - basically staffed it and did a wonderful job of bringing people together all over the state and I lobbied it all through and actually got its - - got it through. I don't think the main thing - - there was not a single descending vote in the House, wasn't any opposition in the Senate, but it was reaching those compromises and people realized something needed to be done. Not too far mind you, but something needed to be done on that line. Well it turns out that on that one Roy Barnes was our floor leader and he was on that commission. Then he became Governor. So you see it's a

stepping stone in that.

BOB SHORT: Do you remember some of the recommendations of the Growth Strategies Commission?

JOEL COWAN: Well, yes and even going back to the Planned Growth Commission, you know, open space green - - I called it open space. It subsequently became green space. It was always a key and that was always a hallmark of Peachtree City and it just seemed to me that - - the sensible thing to do. It was many years later before that became normal, and it still isn't quite where I'd like to see it. I think there's some things in position now where it could be, but the green space was a big part of it.

The clustering - - transportation being what it is, everybody is spread out on one and two acre lots. You simply can't afford the streets, the infrastructure. It's not only originally building it because you can afford that because people will do it, but then the counties and cities have to maintain it. But the worst thing is transportation suffers. You don't have enough density anywhere to get any hope of a bus or a train or anything to it so you really are building yourself into a hole. The public doesn't - - even now they're just beginning to think about that kind of crises both in water and gas we're having now, but it takes those crises to begin to move people in a direction that we're pretty sure they will go eventually.

So we put those kind of things in, but the things that came out of it were transferable development rights, for example, which, to get the - - the three constituents - - sort of the homebuilders and the county and the environmentalists together. That's kind of a three-legged stool, but to sort of make something that all would support came out of that. And that time the original reservoir system came that we tried to do, which we wish we had now. We probably would have had more of them, but you may recall the first one Speaker Murphy wanted to have in the west and that was looking right at Alabama and Governor Hunt over there took exception. And - - but had we started somewhere else more in the state I think we would have had less opposition and could have gotten some relief from what faces us now.

BOB SHORT: Before we get too far away from it, I would like to go back to the year that Joe Frank Harris first ran for the state legislature. Were you in Cartersville then or were you at Georgia - -

JOEL COWAN: No. When I left - - I left to come to Georgia Tech I left, and I mean I visit obviously. My parents are there, so I visit frequently, but in terms of being part of any campaign or anything like that. When he - - it was kind of always known that he'd run for Governor. I mean that was not - - I think the Speaker had him in his stable of people being groomed, but which is both good and bad, but he conducted himself in a way that would make him an attractive candidate as those things go.

I had been in the Atlanta scene all that time and I had a fair reputation here. I had a particular one in the minority community and that area, and so when he was ready to run and when we sat down, that's what he wanted of me. He wanted the fundraising on the one hand, but also I had some deep relationships here and I could attest to, you know, true he comes from a small town, but his heart's right and he's going to do this and it worked out well, and he honored that.

BOB SHORT: But he gave you a difficult job of which you performed pro bono, I presume.

JOEL COWAN: Oh well.

BOB SHORT: Chief of Staff.

JOEL COWAN: Worse than pro bono. You had to put money in the pot.
[LAUGHTER]

BOB SHORT: Well, Joe Frank had a - - had a very successful run for Governor. As you said he had the backing of the Speaker of the House and his friends in the - - in the General Assembly, and he - - he ran against a real strong candidate, but he came out on top and - -

JOEL COWAN: It's interesting. You had two things there. You had two - - I hate to introduce anything today to it, but you see when a candidate sort of "This is my office. I'm entitled to this office." And in the public there's some pushback there when it's hinted that that may be the case. In that case you had Bo Ginn, a favorite son who had been a Congressman and you had Joe Frank. Both of them could take that attitude and then Norman Underwood had worked for Busbee, had been in there. So you really had three candidates that any one of the three could have made, you know, this is mine. I should be there.

BOB SHORT: Um-hum.

JOEL COWAN: And all of them knew better than to do that, but what you had was the fun people and the lobbyists and those kind of things were all of the mind that they sort of picked who they thought would win and I think there was heavy betting on both ends.

BOB SHORT: Yes.

JOEL COWAN: I think it was most of the ones - - the big ones - - we had a lot of fun when the election was over and then they'd have to scramble and get back on this side. I won't name names but I could, but they do that. You see it right now when we went from Democrat to Republican - -

BOB SHORT: Sure.

JOEL COWAN: Same people are still there. But it was - - it was an interesting race. He worked hard and it - - I don't know if it was the first, but it probably was close to the first where you had sort of a media play or dominance. The kind of thing that's their commonplace now, and our guy came from Memphis, well recommended. He'd done a lot of campaigns before, but I never forget what he told us. He said, "You've been driving all over this state making speeches and that kind of thing." He said, "If you'll just go around enough to raise the money and stay out of trouble, you're going to make a speech, you'll talk to 20 people in a civic club, that's not going to do anything." He said, "We'll do it here with the media." Which, in truth, we did both, but if you see that today in today's light, that's exactly what politics has become, I think. That's why it's so expensive.

BOB SHORT: Joe Frank had a commission to study education while you were Chief of Staff and I think that was the father of QBE.

JOEL COWAN: Um-hum.

BOB SHORT: Now do you remember that?

JOEL COWAN: I remember it but I wasn't - - I was over plowing these other turfs and when he did that, and I think that was the second term and I was getting pretty worn out by that time or people were getting tired of me. But what was interesting to me in that role after the election, and of course, his friends throughout the state, including yourself, sort of became my friends. So I was kind of one of the boys, but for somebody like me in business, you see a side of the state functions, you know, everything has a system, that's the way it works.

For example, our first budget, you know, he promised us no tax growth. We really thought that was going to be difficult to - - and he told me. He said, "You're a financial guy and you've got to bone up on it." So when OBB, Off Brand and Budget, would make their presentations - - all of the department heads would make their presentations and a lot of that was done on weekends and nights and that kind of thing, he had me sitting there through most of those because I'm trying to figure what business - - what can you hear as a business person that might help the situation over here. Now the good news is that we didn't have to do any of that, but it did give you good insight.

So other cases where there were problems, for example, the state fair down at Macon, and that was sort of coming on strong and so this is typical of several things. Like the Martin Luther King, Jr. Commission where he named me Vice Chairman, but with a role, you know, to come in and be sure it doesn't go crazy with the - - with expenditures. And like the one in Macon - -

BOB SHORT: You want to stop? You want to take a break? Okay. That's good. We'll just pick up right there when you're ready.

JOEL COWAN: I don't know where - - I must have knocked it off.

BOB SHORT: You're doing good, Joel.

JOEL COWAN: Is that going the way you wanted it?

BOB SHORT: Oh absolutely.

JOEL COWAN: Now some of this you can get too longwinded.

BOB SHORT: No, no. You don't get too longwinded. Anything - -

JOEL COWAN: But sometimes those little anecdotes, I find - -

BOB SHORT: Oh gosh, yeah.

JOEL COWAN: People feel like they're kind of there.

BOB SHORT: Absolutely. You're doing great. This is exactly what we wanted to do. Where were we? You were talking about the fair in Macon.

JOEL COWAN: Yeah. So when that came about, never any question where it would be. It was going to be at Perry and there was a problem that - - you could argue that it probably should have been in Macon because they had a big fair there, but the politics were such it was going to be in Perry. But he said, "Don't worry about that but try to hold it - - the expense down to something reasonable." And so that was my first time to get involved with the state architect and that procedure and how that worked, but I thought he did a good job.

I did make one effort to try to keep the arena from being air conditioned because it would be used so seldom, but down there they wanted something they could have concerts and all that kind of thing, because once you air condition something it's, you know, you're going to pay about a half million dollars a year to keep the thing running whether you got anybody in it or not. Same thing came up. I was on the Board of Regents when the Olympics were trying to do the same thing with the - - I think they called it Natatorium where the swimming venue was. Same kind of issues. But I was in touch with so many things and had a little - - a little power or perceived to have it and people would - - I never went in with a big stick. You know I never said - - you just tried to reason with people and we'd move it. But there's some things if they asked me to go do it and I couldn't save a half million or a million dollars for the state, I didn't feel like I had done anything.

There was a right-of-way case around the fair there. They told me the situation, what it was going to cost, and I said that - - it doesn't make any sense. You go to that landowner and offer what you're doing he's going to make a profit. He ought to give you the right-of-way. So they put me on a plane, I went down there, and we did. But I always felt like any time you were on the scene, if you used your imagination, you could always save that kind of money.

BOB SHORT: Did you - - did you participate in the planning for the Georgia Dome?

JOEL COWAN: No. A little, but not - - certainly not anything to do with the architecture, but I knew Dan and worked with him on - - I had done - - back when all of that was decided, you know, working - - I was involved with Central Atlanta Progress so one of the things you had the Civic Center over here, the Atlanta Stadium down there, and then what is now the Omni and the Dome and that sort of thing. And we had some choices. We could have put two of those together. The Civic Center was already here, but if you thought of what could be done transportation-wise, tourist-wise, if you add all of that together, just parking could be together and then you'd have enough mass to get rapid transit to it or a people-mover of some kind. So I was interested in that, but, you know, you can't do but so much. So we then end up with three corners of the stool and only the Dome and World Congress Center get served by transit.

BOB SHORT: Tell us about Central Atlanta Progress.

JOEL COWAN: Well, Central Atlanta Progress, the way Atlanta was - - the Atlanta Chamber needed to have a broader mission than it needed to be more regional. Now it wasn't, but Central Atlanta Progress was created solely by the Downtown Group, Dick Rich, for example, and the banks - - four or five Atlanta banks at that point created it. They got this wonderful guy, Dan

Sweat, who was a newspaper man, by the way, to - - but he came from Waycross and but he - - he probably is - - hasn't had an equal in his ability to get things done without getting out and doing it, but just getting the right people.

And the business community supported him. I mean he could call a meeting and get all the right folks in the room, but he just had a way of doing it where everybody knew where the power was, but he worked and it was a good lesson for me, coming along. That's what I told the Chair of Servant Leadership here, you know, you shouldn't be out front. You need to be behind the scenes, and I think it's still a good lesson for folks today.

But Dan ran Simple Atlanta Progress and most of the things that go on downtown and more got done there. That allowed the Atlanta Chamber to evolve into a regional chamber. Now I was involved in that too, because I always said, "You know, you've got to make these people truly a part, so why don't you take the North Fulton Chamber, the Gwinnett Chamber and let them come in as chambers so they got their own power base." They didn't initially do that. They wanted to create a kind of a branch because it was a control issue, but I said, "You know, if you're going to get in it."

And then later we did that with the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta. We set up a Cobb and a Fayette and a Clayton and that kind of thing, because to be a regional thing the then core power group needed to share the power and give good tips of the hat to the suburbs you might say. And so it was all a part of doing that, but there was a group.

One of the things that grew out of it is just over here the - - what's called Park Central Communities, but there's a big urban renewal area that went right alongside Piedmont and surrounded the Civic Center. So it was from North Avenue down to the freeway where the downtown connector cuts that off. And - - but that was all urban renewal land, so it was a federal establishment and a lot of things were going on there. And so with some of us, Dan more than anyone, we were concerned that - - two things. One, that that could be done wrong and it would become just another low income housing area, and what we thought that Atlanta needed was housing downtown on the one hand, but middle and upper income housing on the other, and that that would be the best place to do it.

So when we looked at the rules and everything surrounding urban renewal, the way that was done, you had to be a private company. You couldn't be government. So you had to be a private company to be a bidder to the land. So we got cousins, Frank Carter, take me a minute to name, but the leading developers in - - in my company. There were six of us I think or seven of us. John Portman. And so we all met and they elected me Chairman or said you got to do it. So that's what I did and the banks agreed to a line of credit, you know, to this entity that had nothing in it. We all put up - - we agreed that it was a not for profit. Had to be a for profit company but that our shares - - we would not make a profit. We'd donate them back. So we ended up owning 30% and the civic establishment owned 70%, but we had agreed to give ours over. And the banks gave us a line of credit so that we could bid for the property. And there was a lot of competition for it, but we got it.

And the first thing we did, we reversed and put Georgia Power on this end. It was - - the commercial land was up there on North Avenue. We switched it and got Georgia Power to build there which was our anchor on that end, and had the Civic Center and its big parking lot in the middle so the obvious place to do residential was on that North Avenue/Piedmont end. And to his credit, Dan Sweat bought the first condominiums that were built in there. Charlie Ackerman came in and built them. Then later built that awful shopping center you got down there. But it was first in town but a normal looking shopping center there. It's now been redeveloped.

But so that's how that whole area got - - got done, but it was the civic leadership, working together not for individual profit. We just felt like if we could create a better climate, that the result would be favorable.

BOB SHORT: What did the development that Cousins did over at East Lake - - what affect would that have on the city if projects like that were pursued?

JOEL COWAN: Well, I mean it was a great project and it's like the one I just described magnified some. You've got to have some civic minded somebody with money, who can be the bell cow, you know, can put it in, and - - and do things that way. A city - - I hate to have it in record here, but it's - - and I've said it. I've made speeches in Macon, but if you look at the difference in Macon and Columbus, as an example of what I'm going to say, Macon is the center of the state. Got freeways everywhere. It's too - - has a river through it. I mean any logic would tell you that would be the place of great growth and it should be. It's got everything there. Yet Columbus, you know, which is in the edge of the state, but look at what's happened in Columbus compared there.

Then if you take Atlanta - - I'm drawing three parallels here - - you can do it with Chattanooga as well. If you don't have, like, a Woodruff in Atlanta, some private source who can stimulate, leverage and do something, or the Turners early on, Bradley Turner, in Columbus, you know, would spawn the Jimmy Blanchards of the world and that kind of thing, that's the kind of leadership that makes - -

I remember we tried to get some studies - - I think the University of Georgia has done it and we've done it at Tech, asking what is the proper role of some wealth applied to the civic equation where community building is encouraged? So if it's a smaller town, then it can be a smaller amount of money and will have the same impact. But that - - the stabilizing impact of civic money is critical. So, when you come to Peachtree City, after I got the Phipps in it we had money. So we had land and we had money. Now what do you do with that?

So I've used those as models and I've tried to stay behind, not out front, on everything because, you know, I'd get a call my streetlight's out or this kind of thing. I was out there spawning rotary clubs and churches and making the city independent truly, even though we had to subsidize everything, we did it behind the scenes. And so, the way we used the money in the case of Peachtree City was a model of what Woodruff did in Atlanta and the Turners did in Columbus, but Macon is a different story. That leadership in my mind had the wealth, it just didn't rise to the top. And that's - - that's just a theory of community building.

Now can you - - can we replace that with civic institutions? You bet. The example you gave of Cousins taking one area, critical area; the one I gave of Park Central, one area. You've got to have that done because we all can't do everything, so you just do your part, and if it's organized that will have a positive effect.

BOB SHORT: One of the heartening things to me over the past, oh maybe, two decades has been the concept of regional planning and development, which I personally think came as a result of the demise of the County Unit System where the smaller counties weren't able to do things as small counties but could approach their problems reasonably, and you've done that.

JOEL COWAN: Um-hum.

BOB SHORT: You were Chairman of GRTA and I'd like to get you to tell us about Greta and the plans and what happened with that organization.

JOEL COWAN: Well let's back up to what you said - - reasonable planning, because it's important. Now when the federal government was giving the grants to cities and counties and states, it was a big thing during a period of history, the early '60s, middle '60s, that kind of thing. It was where the money came from. They required a planning organization. Atlanta started it. The predecessor of what's the Atlanta Regional Commission. It was called the Metropolitan Planning Commission. And I served on some commissions, one of them was the airport subcommittee for that big master planning effort. But they carved the state up into - - I think it was 14 districts and to get this planning coming together, and the bait was federal - - a federal grant that had to be approved by that group. So that's what gave them the power. Now I felt that power ran amuck. It was political if you had Albany as sort of the larger town and it's a city in its district, but yet the center of the - - of that planning district was one of the little towns above it. So, you know, you sort of get off. Then it gets to be a power game and over on the coast of Georgia you had the line wrong. So when we did the Growth Strategies Commission one of the recommendations was to change all of that and the name Regional Development Center, RDC, that's one that I gave basically, you had to have that word development in it. And regional was important, but you said look here's the mission because there wasn't any more federal money coming, but they had achieved such a critical mass that you couldn't get them away from the trough, so to speak.

And I could cite some specific examples where we tried to change the districts. In fact, Joe Warton who was the first and master of all these facilitators that that became a science later on, but we had one over at Athens once where we had all of those people coming in and we set up the goal of reducing the number from whatever it was - - 14 down to I was trying to get it down to 10 or 11.

And I can remember the opening thing - - here's what we're doing. Somebody from the back of the room said we might as well go home and made a few speeches why this was a terrible idea. But before two days had ended we had pretty good consensus. He did a remarkable thing. He made three table size puzzles with each county having a cutout and then we had three teams and each team was to match these things up. And they came out except for one up here at Dalton - - one area in there they were the same. The three working independently. Kind of interesting what human nature will do. But he was a master at getting people in like that.

So that concept of regional planning needed to be shifted to something that made sense toward developing the state. And of course now it's graduated to a new level because of the water planning. Many of the - - they tried to make those districts the same, but those districts didn't follow the basin. So if you're dealing with water, it is a valley and a basin and a watershed, and if you violate that you - - already you've got an issue between you. So you had to do that together.

And so then you come back to GRTA. Remember I said Roy was on the Growth Strategies Commission, so he had seen all of that work. During the campaign he asked me and Maynard Jackson to come over to the Capitol. He made a press conference sort of thing. Had us standing behind him, saying if I get elected I'm going to do whatever. Of course, I realized I was there to stand. Maynard didn't. Maynard had something to say. A lot to say. You know, you couldn't get him to say look here's the candidate. You're not the candidate.

BOB SHORT: [Laughs]

JOEL COWAN: But Maynard and I worked together for many, many years. But so when he got elected, "What do you want to do?" He said, "I want to - - I don't want any more commissions." So we sat down and formed GRTA. He intended it to have enormous power and after it was passed people thought it had a power, but in reality it didn't have that power because it was not elected officials to start with. I was the Chair. It had people appointing them - Speaker, Lieutenant Governor, and that kind of thing, so it had some balance and it had lay people, but the - - and Shirley Franklin to be Vice Chair. He called us both over there together to start it. And - - but in reality the lawyers scotched that idea that it just didn't have that discretionary power. In other words, if it had a transportation nexus. So you might control a driveway, for example, but if you said, "I don't like the color you got on the building, you ought to put it green instead of blue or something like that." You know, it didn't have any kind of discretion. So it wasn't as powerful as thought. It was pure transportation.

But we made a lot of headway. We had enough divisiveness on it that these people who don't want any rapid transit, don't want any of that kind of stuff, they have - - they think you can pave your way out - - were there and very present. So you couldn't just arbitrarily do things. Now one of the more interesting ideas I thought that I had that I am only disappointed I never could get a Governor to really pick up on it. I wrote a private memorandum to Governor Barnes and then under Freedom of Information they picked it up somewhere. What that was was at that time France had the TGB trains 180 miles an hour. I mean that was just - - you can go over there right now and do that, so it was not brand new technology. And so I said if you had a train that ran from the Atlanta airport to Macon, then you could go on below Macon because that gave you Warner Robbins. That's the way you would go anyway, and you'd go down toward Thomaston. It has to be a new area because you got any straight shots. You don't want to spend all your money on right-of-ways and rebuilding bridges and things. But if you look at that part of the world, it just holds it together. "But what that would have allowed," I said, just getting from Atlanta to Macon that and cutting that time down to like 30 minutes, you in effect take sort of an economic engine that Atlanta is and you peel a little of that off and skip land in between and start a new one down in Macon. Ultimately you'd try to do the same thing at Columbus and Augusta. So you would be taking a little of the growth here, which we were having trouble accommodating our growth and I don't think anybody would have objected to that, but I would have thought, you know, if you were a Governor that came from down there you would say, "Oh great." See I - - they said well what would it cost? I said look what would be the value of every acre of land in that area if you had this? That pays the cost. See that is ultimate economics. It's not what the ridership.

So we had a study - - well the press picked that up because it was an obvious place to put the second Atlanta airport. I made the mistake of mentioning that in a memo so when the press got it, Delta got it, City of Atlanta got it, everybody said terrible idea because they were only worried about that airport and not the big picture. But that could have meant more to South Georgia and could today, because if you were locating an industry you could come much further south than Macon and drive an hour to get to Macon and then you're at the airport in 30 minutes. People would do that. And so that would - - that, you know, is an interesting idea.

So we studied the train but it still had this bias in it. For example, they would make the full right-of-way cost, the construction cost, everything try to be supported out of the fair. But if you look at the highways you don't pay a toll rode to get from here to Macon, and it's subsidized all

the way. And not only subsidized, it's free. And your - - and if you measure the cost of adding another lane each way and you played that off against the cost of that train, they're not that far apart.

But there's still this bias against the train, and that's what the leadership's got to just come to - - come to terms with is - - both in the national establishment and otherwise, and if you don't have the crisis like we have now, the gas prices, people are just not going to change. That's just human nature. But we shouldn't miss a crisis.

BOB SHORT: Traffic particularly in the Atlanta - - metropolitan Atlanta area, is there a solution?

JOEL COWAN: Well, you've got to go - - and we're doing it right, not that we planned it that way, but with the cost of gas it makes people do things they always said they wouldn't. You know, you find them - - just a number of people now that are carpooling. Okay. Well I'll wait. I'll go in with you, you know. I'd like to be there. It makes 15 minutes difference, but now they'll do it.

The car purchases will begin to be rationalized some. The buses were already filled up. We did the GRTA bus. I insisted we put the name on it because of Gwinnett. I always sort of had a running battle with Wayne Hill up there, but he saw Gwinnett as the center of the universe and all roads, including the outer loop, everything going in Athens, you know, sort of poured to that center. When traffic got bad enough it would support MARTA and that kind of thing, but he started his own bus system.

And GRTA, I wanted to start them in, of course, Clayton and went around saying, "Look we'll do this if you'll do that." The county will do something to help it out, and those deals are working beautifully today and you can get the critical mass but those, you know, you work on one bus, you can work on another. You don't need every county to have their own bus system. So it's I think that bus, if they can ever get the HOV lanes completed, and if you think about them they built them but to get off you've got to then go across four lanes. So you can be coming as a Cobb County bus driver. You're going to start getting over into the normal lanes because you can't get off at the HOV. So whoever designed that thing didn't have HOV exits and entrances. You've got them right here in just on the downtown connector, and they're not really complete but you've got them to a certain extent. So we do things. We just don't have that philosophy that's guiding our engineers and that's what needs to be corrected.

I tried to push because we studied all kinds of ways of getting an east/west corridor north of Atlanta. You had the outer loop, but every time you look at it - - you can look at it with any theory you want to look at it - - but the political impossibility of doing it becomes paramount. I favored - - looked at it a lot, by the way. Not a little, but a lot.

When you - - on the northern 285 by - - you were going to put so-called hot lanes or HOV lanes there, I went up to New York and they're doing this - - I can't believe they've done it, where you could add eight more feet of right-of-way in the middle. Not on the edge where it's expensive, where you're tearing down buildings, but in the middle and put these foundations in. So when you're ready later on without interrupting traffic you can come put a column on top of that and you can put whatever you want. Bus lanes up there, truck lanes, trains, a combination train/bus, but you don't disrupt the traffic again. You don't have to buy any right-of-way again. And so I was trying to get that done, but you can only push so many things. Of course it would have cost millions of dollars, but not anything like it's going to cost to get that corridor a little more

rationalized.

BOB SHORT: You spoke of the downtown connector. Was it an engineering error to force traffic from two heavily traveled interstates into a connector through the city of Atlanta?

JOEL COWAN: Probably was no choice. I mean you either have a beltway - - remember the philosophy then, downtown was king. This came - - if you talked to some of the old heads, you go to Alvin First, for example, and talk to him, and you should, but back then when Hartsfield was the Mayor and there was the rerouting of a street or a road plan of any description in downtown Atlanta, you could see Rich's signing off on it. I mean if it didn't fit Rich's it didn't fit. So we did a lot of things and then Rich's closed the store. That's a lot of years. I mean it made sense there. So the bias, the power of the Atlanta banks, Rich's and so on, the power that was just enormous and everybody felt you had to have a downtown center. It was just safer frankly. So you - - you couldn't have, I wouldn't have, nobody would have looked outside that box.

The 485 effort which, you know, that was the first time a road that should have been and would have been - - environmentally that was when it happened here and it happened in other states. But it happened here to say, "Stop we've had enough," and that meant you had to do something different relative to downtown. It had to go up the Peachtree corridor and other places. I don't think your - - I don't think you could have visualized it.

If you remember those freeways, the way they were, I mean, narrow lanes. I mean they were four lanes, but concrete lanes with a cyclone fence down the middle. You remember how many people that killed that run into it and that upper bar would come through the windshield? So you couldn't project that well.

The greatest problem, and it's a constitutional problem, is not being able to buy the right-of-way in advance, and for that knowing which right-of-way to buy would be an issue because you can have interchanges but you could have had one that North Druid Hills but who would have dreamed, until Executive Park was built, what was going to happen there. So you could go try to do that at every one of them, but we don't allow our government to condemn property more than they're actually going to use. So that's one of the things that keeps us hemmed in and makes it expensive.

BOB SHORT: So is that proposed highway around Atlanta called a northern arc a plausible thing?

JOEL COWAN: Yeah. It was - - the trouble is you look at it as a loop and it really wasn't a loop. What it should have been is connecting two points. You had an I-75 to I-85 need. And you've got one from I-85 coming down to I-20. You could sort of see those. They could be interesting. Now if you're planning such a road you'd say as you grow it would be foolish to have the roads not meet. So you may be 50 years from now building the one in the southwest, that loop, or on the west, but if you built them you'd like them to join.

So you see what I'm saying? You don't set out to build a loop. You set out to build certain things and then good planning just says it ought to be continuous. And it got down to that with the northern arc. In fact, the only area Governor Barnes and I had, the only problem we had, philosophical problem, was that. And we discussed it a good bit, but it was a thing that he could see. He wanted to get the right-of-way but I also will not forget his - - he and I were talking

about that and he looked at me with, I thought - - he had a twinkle in his eye but it came close. He said, "But if it doesn't work you may have your dream belt." Of course they would have acquired the property.

BOB SHORT: Yeah. Governor Purdue didn't sign off on that.

JOEL COWAN: Well he took a view quite opposite what you would think a Republican coming in would do and probably had no idea it would resonate so well, and it's one of the contributing factors. As I say I was not for it. However, when he asked me to do some work on it. I said, "Well, the way I think we could support it - - as you know I'm a great believer in green belts and that kind of thing, but our problem is when we just sprawl without a line, a build out, a target." So I said if you drew that line then it was a road, but suppose you know what 400 was so-called a development highway, so you say we're going to put that there and we expect people to develop. But if you built something and you said let's do the opposite of development and whatever you do for development to make land valuable there, do the reverse, now what would that be? You would have the road. You'd have this enormous view shed, green space, pastures, horses growing out there, that kind of thing. At an interchange point you wouldn't have any development right on the interchange. You would have to go up the road a mile up in the community and start all over there. So you would have a greenbelt.

So you would have - - from downtown you'd have intense development, less so, less so, less so, green fields. On the other side you'd start green fields, medium, high as you go further north. So you've got a logical break, and I think it's just good human planning so people can see some green, you know, and I'm not talking about 20 foot buffers. I'm talking about where you can walk around in it and be in the woods. I mean children ought to grow up knowing what woods are like, not what pavement's like.

That's the way it's worked so beautifully in Peachtree City and we could have it for free, but that's what my idea was on the - - that would be unconventional. I don't think it's ever been done anywhere in the world. Perhaps the Blue Ridge Parkway. Of course they owned all the land. You couldn't develop it. But this could have been done.

BOB SHORT: Do you favor privately constructed toll roads?

JOEL COWAN: If they are in the model that is in China. We've been peripherally involved in some there, the concept of DOT build on and transfer, so it really was a public. Of course in 30 years the public [Indiscernible]. So you could have it. It ultimately was a public thing. And you have some limits so it couldn't be rapacious. You have some normal limits because if that private owner got too bad, public can come over here and build a free right-of-way.

So there's a balancing act, but when you've got the sharpie people in Wall Street that, you know, they started getting into space even 10 - 15 years ago and not necessarily here, and they say well here's this money, let's find a way of using it, and I think you could do that. I think it makes sense. They used to laugh at doing something with Atlanta airport. But look, it's still a public thing and that's just one way of doing the revenue versus another. There is a way of building a free enterprise, competitive, capitalistic model and still serve the public purpose, but it takes some brain power and you've got to think of those contingencies.

BOB SHORT: One of the things I remember about my grandfather was he once asked me how

to spell water, and I said capital W-A-T-E-R. And he said, "Wrong. You spell it W-A-R." And so, well, he added this - -

JOEL COWAN: Listening.

BOB SHORT: "But you don't have to worry because we live up here in the north Georgia Mountains where there will always be plenty of water." Now you serve as the Chairman or have served or maybe still serve - -

JOEL COWAN: No I don't.

BOB SHORT: As Chairman of the - - of the North Georgia Water Management.

JOEL COWAN: Hard name. Yeah.

BOB SHORT: Yeah.

JOEL COWAN: That's probably North Georgia - -

BOB SHORT: What - - what are we doing?

JOEL COWAN: Well what happened - - let me back up a little. When we got GRTA going and again we were stymied the way I indicated because you didn't have discretionary authority. My goal, going way back to Carter's day, was the impact on land use and planning. All this other stuff was just a way to get there. So you have to keep that in mind.

The Atlanta Chamber led an effort to solve water problem here and we already had it back in the Harris administration - - Alabama and Florida, and Alabama did it for the wrong reasons. You know, they thought if they could stop development here in Atlanta it would spill over into Alabama. And I led the state - - people didn't know it much but we had a little private, it was almost secret, mission. We'd meet at Callaway Gardens and we'd meet at Montgomery. Leonard Ledbetter, the usual suspects and myself, and Tommy Lewis, and that's the way the early negotiations were - - were coming in. They went through Roy's effort.

Well let's see I'm taking that back to Harris. I may mean Barnes because I know when we were going out of office I told, I think, Joe Tanner. I said, "You know what you need to do is say those people had it wrong, meaning me and us, and step on our grave and get the thing settled any way you can." And that's what they were - - no that was when Zell Miller came in. What I said was correct. I forgot about Zell in there because when Joe Frank - - from Joe Frank to Zell that was where that switch occurred. I said, "Just step up there and say those people had it wrong." Let's us get in and settle it, which is a good tactic by the way. But it was so entrenched it let you know people are not going to give a quarter, you know, not going to give up something. Now you got all of that working when you have the water. So he called me over there and said, "Look would you be the founding chairman of the water?" I said, "Absolutely." Because water - - before GRTA was all built on air quality and the fact the Feds were going to shut down contribution to roads if we didn't do something about air quality, so everything we did was under the gun of air quality. But when you look out the window you'd say there was nothing wrong with the air and they put on a sign saying it's a bad air day. The public - - there's nothing you

can get in there and say we have a problem here. But water is an absolute. You know exactly how many gallons you've got. And so I said that may be the way to do what at least I want to do.

And so we started that and commissioned this 16 county report. This time we used all elected officials whether there were five or six lay people appointed Governor, Lt. Governor and Speaker, but the others were the County Commission or Mayor of the largest city in the 16 county rotation point. So we didn't fall in that trap again. This is all elected officials and they could outvote the lay people totally.

So we put into study - - and the studies were all aimed at quantity. How much can the 16 county area have? And - - but at some level you knew two things - - there's a limit; that just tells you nature has a limit. You can build a reservoir, you can do a lot of things, but at a point you reach a limit. But you have another limit which is Florida and Alabama, because there's a point when they say, "Well it's not in our interest. We want - - when it crosses the state line we want X millions of gallons coming through." So that's another limit and I call that a contractual limit, the other one is a natural limit.

Then because Atlanta is at the head of five basins and the main ones that count of course is the Chattahoochee, then you have not quite where you are but Habersham County and Dawson I think are in the - - there are just two counties above Hall County that have - - that are in that watershed. But the Etowah, Allatoona is there and what we're doing today - - we've been doing - - is moving 100 million gallons a day out of the Etowah into the Chattahoochee. That's done through Cobb County system by and large. Of course they get it there and treat it, but it goes in the sewer systems on the Chattahoochee side.

So the negotiations which Bob Curr headed were going on simultaneously with this effort with Florida and Alabama, so we were comparing notes. And they agreed to a 200 million, the 100 we had plus another 100. Alabama agreed to let us have 200 million from that source but no more. And then we had the number that was agreed to at the Florida line and so that becomes your planning criteria.

Now what I think people don't realize is that's an absolute. There's nobody out there when you run out of that that's going to give you more water. So what do you do when your mother cooked a pie and they said, "You cut it and your brother's going to choose the first piece?" Well you were going to make it - - you're going to be pretty careful where you cut the pie, right? So the same thing applies and I couldn't get - - of course my ideas are usually different from what other people's are. No surprise there. I couldn't - - even I was Chairman of the thing I couldn't get all these engineers to study the allocation of the water, which I regarded as the key thing. In other words, you got a limit. Now my question, how much of it do I get, because that's what it will boil down to.

You've got 16 counties and of course you've got the inner ones that are growing fast and you've got seven of them out that grow slow. Well that's just distance from the center. No surprise there. I worked up a formula - - I won't go into it now, but a rational reason why a county should have a certain allocation of water to not only supply it now, but to supply it to build out. So if you were only 30% built like in Bartow County or 20% in Walton County, you have all this other area and it may be 10 or 20 years before you're ready to need it, but you'll need it.

Now imagine, if you will, coming out there at that time, right about now I'm ready to develop my land, everything's grown out here, and somebody tells you I'm sorry there's no more water? Your land is a pasture now and it's going to be a pasture. Say wait a minute. What happened to it? I didn't vote for anybody that did anything different you see.

And I talked to Roy about that. That's a taking. So then, 20 years from now, you'd come back if that happened to you and sue the state because they didn't administer the allocation and that's just common sense because nobody's going to get nothing. That same grandfather of yours, could you imagine him going out and buying a piece of land that didn't have water? Nobody in this region would think of buying it if it didn't have some kind of little stream and the first thing they wanted to do was put a dam and build a farm pond. If you wanted water on your property - - when we got to developing it that water gets there from a pike and it comes from someplace else. It doesn't change the value of that property. Water was used for some things then; now we know what it's used for and it's directly related to value of the property.

So I got this formula worked up. I'm going to go through the formula because it's quite logical and it - - what it does I have so much experience in these previous efforts with home rule powers. That means a county would say, "We don't want the state coming in and telling us what to do with our land." So what I did is I said, "Let's take what they have done already and simply apply that to the rest of the county. So if you don't like what we're giving you, blame yourself. If you like what you've done, then that's what you've got."

Now again that wasn't the plan, that's just quantity. So this is the quantity you're using now. This is how much land you've got left. Apply that to this. That's your allocation. Well with the little changes, we had our meeting in 16 - - all 16 counties, including Gwinnett, said yes. It was passed unanimously - - the allocation and that allocation stands today. And we did something else with wastewater, but I won't get off on that.

So I do have and I use this because I've got a beef now - - no power no nothing, but it's not being administered. What I said would happen in Walton County is going to happen just as sure as we're sitting here and it's wrong. And that's because the EPD and the counties aren't administering it properly. Again if you've got that limit, you know it's a limit, you are obliged to make it fairly allocated to everybody, not somebody. So we have a first come, first serve. So if you race out to Walton County and develop you may get it all and somebody else gets nothing. First come, first serve.

So - - but water becomes, then, the first thing. See at Peachtree City I always had a planning goal. Started out at 60,000 people. One time we had a plan that took it to 88,000. Then it came back and then it came back to like a 46,000 build out, which is it now. But at that point the land was the same. What you could put on it is the only number. Now that's the only variable. But where you put it was your choice. It didn't matter. You could put everybody in one Empire State Building and then have the rest as farmland, or you could do halfway between.

That is the situation that we find today when a county knows it's got that limit. I've got 27,000 units and that translates into 83,000 people, 3.1 to the house, so if I know I've got 27,000 units I can put in the county, now I turn to the planners and say, "Where is it best to put those - - those units? Where it will have green space and clustered here and spread out there? Where is it best?" That changes the planning dimension when you have that limit on it.

We have that limit now and if it were properly administered I predict this 16 county area would be a garden spot because you wouldn't have that race to sprawl. It would make people have to look a little further out, because if you don't have the allocation, even though your land is not next, it's here, you got the allocation so we've got to develop it out there. See? So that's - - that could be quite a planning too.

BOB SHORT: You're an interesting man.

JOEL COWAN: I don't know about that, but, you know, you get so many ideas and I don't say they're all good by the way. Somebody else can decide that and do them but I, you know, somebody will say, "Well you've been successful at this, but some of the things that I really felt passionate about, that I couldn't get done, I don't feel too good about that.

BOB SHORT: As you look back now, what do you think was your biggest accomplishment?

JOEL COWAN: I don't know. That's a tough question because it puts - - I think this area of the planning and if you - - that manifests itself. The question was always asked, well, look in Peachtree City. You owned all the land, so you can do what you want to - green space, all that kind of thing, but you can't do it in the public. That was my challenge. How can you make the rest of the region like Peachtree City? In the central area for that is green space, you know, where you can walk out your back door, in our case get in the golf cart, you can walk, jog, whatever, and be in the woods and that's important. Our children have much more freedom. They're not just pinned up in their backyard with a fence around it. They go - - they can go miles and there are systems to protect them and everything like that. So trying to translate what would be good for one developer into what would be good practice for everybody, and I - - so that's - - did I accomplish it? No. Is it on the way? Probably it is. Of course at some level somebody will figure out this water issue and that will make people start thinking about it.

BOB SHORT: Your biggest disappointment.

JOEL COWAN: Disappointment. Well I guess the disappointment was that it didn't - - I wasn't able to get it to that point where the multiple independent home rule - - cities and counties didn't see that and make that their cause. Now the blame for that is leadership because, you know, the way local politics - - and this is a local matter - - is the public simply won't support leaders who will think ahead. That's true at the state level. It's true at national level, but it's way true in the city and county level where these kind of decisions are made.

My criticism of any leader, politician leader, if when you have a crisis, we've had them - 9/11, Katrina, droughts - - when you have the crisis, that's the time the leader needs to move the ball because the public will support him, and for leaders to not do it, to pander to it, "Oh well, I see we've got a crisis, let's cut the price of gas." I mean, that's exactly the opposite direction of what we ought to do. And so it's when you can do something, you know, you need to be doing it.

BOB SHORT: Do you have time for a couple of other questions?

JOEL COWAN: Sure.

BOB SHORT: You mentioned your work with the Foundation at Georgia Tech. Would you tell us about that?

JOEL COWAN: Well, the - - of course the Georgia Tech Foundation, if that's what you mean, is not - - I'm in a group that does that, and it's been a very successful, well-lead group. I've never been the leader so I can say that objectively. The staff has just been first class. That's the most sophisticated, supportive organization I think anybody could find. I'm an Americus trustee

now so they let you go to the meetings you want to go to and you don't have to go. If you can't vote that's okay.

But it's good and I think these foundations at UGA, at Georgia State, they're absolutely critical to so many previously public institutions, not only colleges and university. I mean, you see things that were total government, they now hire a development officer and say, "Go raise some of your own money." And that's raised the quality because, look, you get the government, the bureaucrats making all these decisions because they've got the money. We all know those may not be the best decisions. But if you get a little bit, 20%, 30%, in Georgia Tech's case it's near 40% of the money, you know, that comes from this source, it's mixed but you get a lot better influence. They don't have the power. They give that up. But the influence is still very much there and I think it's quite positive.

BOB SHORT: You're somewhat of a mentor for students. Aren't you involved in some program that - - at Georgia Tech?

JOEL COWAN: I teach, and I teach in the Masters level MBA program, but because they don't pay me they let me teach what I want to teach, and I try to take those students, because by definition they're older, but their thing is they don't learn. You know, we insist we're teaching Georgia history here, but look what's going to impact them the rest of their life is what's happening in the world in general and the emerging world specifically, and that's where I devote, frankly all my time now, is in the emerging world - Central Asia, China, India and places like that, and where there's conflict - - natural conflict between the Muslim and - - and nonreligion or between Muslim and Judeo-Christian, Hindu, Buddhism.

But my whole thing is peace and like I told you in the past you've got to have a goal, something you write high on the wall there so everything you're doing is moving you toward that. And mine is peace like the global Eisenhower kind of - - MacArthur kind of peace, but now it's down in the little clusters. It's down with very small groups and you've got to do something about the economics, you've got to do something about corruption, and you've got to do something about free vote or - - I'm disappointed in the word democracy, because I could argue and I've had to in those quarters.

I mean I go to - - people don't even know where Tajikistan is but when you're in there and you try to put some traditionally American values and ideas and democracy, we call ours the House and the Senate, you know, that doesn't relate. Nobody's going to let you come in and tell them that. And the people for most in the Stalinist world, the CIS, the Russian and the Soviet Union part before it was broken up, you know, he spent 74 years stamping out religion. So it's not religion. You're starting from scratch. There's cultures, so you're culturally Muslim, but you may very well not believe in God. And - - but the ones that are, they're far more religious and dedicated and orthodox than we are in our beliefs - - Christian or Jewish. And so to come over there and tell them they're wrong, that's missing the point. You know, if they're hungry they've got to be fed and by the way you don't need to handout. We've got to help build a system. Microfinance, education.

I've got a program I'm doing myself in - - outside in rural Tajikistan and what you find, those cultures discriminate against the girls. So at 12, 13, 14-year-old girl might be taken out of school because the family wants to put money on the boy, and she would be trained for learning things around the house and how to be a wife, and that's what they're missing because if you train the girls, they become mothers, they educate their children. You have a generational pass down

where if you educate the boy, the better he is the further away he gets basically. So we've got a computer program where we bring them in, which they would never have access to at all. Then we've got - - we actually are teaching critical thinking. Now here you've grown up in the Soviet system where you never question the teacher. We're teaching the teachers to encourage critical thinking. In other words, think, act, do. So I didn't mean to get off on that, but that's - - that's what my interest is now.

BOB SHORT: That was my second question.

JOEL COWAN: [Laughs]

BOB SHORT: One final question. How would you like to be remembered?

JOEL COWAN: I've had - - you know, I've - - I've always tried to work behind the scenes. I've never liked being the Chairman of something. I like being Vice Chairman. And I always - - I can do everything I ever do without holding a position really. And it's a good discipline frankly because it makes you - - not to sell you that my idea is right. I've got the power, you have to listen to it, what is that?

So, that's a good discipline, but, you know, it would all come to the fellow man first, you know, and foremost, but not religious-based. Not those kind of things. Those values that we grew up with Cartersville and you grew up with North Georgia, those values are community and caring, not government caring, but you caring. For that, those are the values that are just as applicable anywhere in the world. And so we have to come back to values and be known for them and we'll hopefully return to that. We've lost it right now, but I think it's recoverable.

BOB SHORT: Joel Cowan, on behalf of Young Harris College and the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia, I want to thank you for being with us today.

JOEL COWAN: Thank you for having me.

BOB SHORT: Good luck.

[END]

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