

Jim Tysinger interviewed by Bob Short
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BOB SHORT: [In progress] ... Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by Young Harris College and the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia. Our guest today is former State Senator Jim Tysinger, who we're very happy to visit

with today.

Before we get into your service in the Georgia General Assembly, Senator, we'd like for you to tell us if you will, a little bit about yourself, your family, and how you got involved in politics.

JIM TYSINGER: Okay. Well, I'm a basically a native of North Carolina. I grew up in Greensboro, but during the Depression jobs were not easy and my father got one in Washington so we moved to Washington D.C. and I went to high school in Washington D.C. Couldn't go to college because then they didn't have student loans or anything and so I went to – I joined the National Guard. I was always interested in the Army. As a matter of fact, I wanted to go to West Point. So I joined the Guard because I could take the competitive exam for the Army and at the same time I was in the Army I liked that portion of it. And I busted my physical for West Point because I had to wear glasses and I didn't realize then you had to have 20/20 uncorrected vision. And we went in – I was in a unit that got mobilized early, in January of '41 and we went to Fort Bliss, Army career there. War was declared; we went to Birmingham and stayed up there. When they lowered the age limit to below 21 I applied for OCS and went to OCS and graduated in July – commissioned in July and went to my first unit I was assigned to was a Georgia National Guard unit from Calhoun, Georgia, and we sailed for the Pacific in September. I was overseas for over three years. I served in the South Pacific, Southwest Pacific, Guadalcanal, New Guinea, Leite, and Luzon, and came home after the war and went to Georgia Tech and ended up – the first three years I was in oil field with Shell Oil Company. My daughter got polio, we moved back here to take a Warm Springs because it was the best place to take her. So

I came back and forth to Westinghouse as an engineer with them and retired from them.

SHORT: How did you get involved in politics?

TYSINGER: I got involved in the Goldwater Campaign. I thought he was – I read about his background and enjoyed him and so I got involved then just as a worker in the Goldwater campaign and then from that got involved in the DeKalb – because the Goldwater campaign was – at the time there was no DeKalb Republican party to speak of. There was a group in South DeKalb, Frank and those group –

SHORT: Frank Miller?

TYSINGER: Frank Miller. And so, I got involved with the DeKalb Republican Party and you know as a precinct worker putting up signs and all that and finally I became a Precinct Chairman. But I was asked to run, during Bo Callaway's campaign, I was asked to run for the House. They were looking for members and I didn't have any money. And they promised to raise me a thousand dollars and I matched it with a thousand and ran against [Indiscernible] Malone, got defeated, because then it was a four man district covering all of – almost all of DeKalb and all of Rockdale County and it was difficult to get around, especially with the machine the four of them had all set up together. And then in the court decision they made it that you couldn't have a four man district at that time and the Senate was already a one man one vote district and I – during

that time I served on – as a councilman for the Old Village of North Atlanta. Matt Conway who was a Senator put a bill in for a Constitutional Amendment to do away with North Atlanta. I thought he was wrong, that what was behind it was developers who didn't like the zoning we were putting out. And so, we lost that election and North Atlanta was – they were abolished. And so, the next year, two years later, they asked me to run for the Senate. They wanted a candidate – they had some people lined up for the House. Bob Bell ran as one, Stan Collins and Harry Geisinger. And so, I ran for the Senate. Again, I didn't have any money to speak of. I got some donations, but looking at the money spent today, I think I ran for less than \$10,000 the first time. But because I had a lot of friends and we had kind of an organization built up, that's where I won the election. Conway, at that time, had become an Independent because he did not vote in the election for the governor, when the General Assembly voted for governor. He did not – he said his people in the district didn't vote for Governor Maddox and therefore he was going to vote the other side. The next time he ran as an Independent and I ran against him and there was a Democrat in the race. It was a three man race. He was eliminated and it was down to the Democrat and I and I beat him in a run off election. And – which surprised me how I got that far, but anyway, I went in and I was very fortunate that I was able to serve 30 years. I have some terrific people supporting me and it was 30 years, I hope that I've done something for Georgia. I got a lot out of it, too.

SHORT: You sure did. And I want to tell you, of all the public officials that I have known over my 50 odd years of being in and associated with Georgia government, I hold you in high esteem.

TYSINGER: Well you're grateful – I'm grateful for that and you're kind to say that.

SHORT: You've been a great public servant. But I – I would like to ask you this question.

Why did you decide to be a Republican in a state that had been Democratic for a hundred years?

TYSINGER: Well, I'd always believed in the Republican philosophy. Some of that came really out of my father-in-law. When I came back, you know, after the war I didn't know anything or anybody – anything political or maybe what's going on. The strangest sensation I had coming back when the ship got close the United States, we started hearing the radio and I – what the hell is going on? (Laughter) People with all those ads and stuff. But anyway , I – so I got interested in that way. And the philosophy in part. I'll have to admit that when I was at Georgia Tech we lived at Lawson apartment and it was election there and I, at that time, I voted – wasn't anything to do. I voted Democrat. There was long paper ballots and so forth. But philosophically that's what I believed in and so that's why I became a Republican. And Barry Goldwater was the center of that.

SHORT: So in your first term in the Georgia Senate you were one of seven –

TYSINGER: Seven.

SHORT: Republicans.

TYSINGER: That's correct.

SHORT: You had a Democratic Governor and a Democratic Lieutenant Governor.

TYSINGER: Yeah.

SHORT: In those days, Senator, Georgia had probably the strongest governor system in the country.

TYSINGER: That is correct. Well, actually, when Governor Maddox took over, Speaker Smith realized that they had elected him and so Speaker Smith basically assumed a lot of the powers that previous governors had. As I understand it, the governor – the previous governors would almost appoint who was going to be a speaker and who was going to be in the chairman position. And so, Speaker Smith recognized this political thing and basically grabbed the power away from Governor Maddox. I think Governor Maddox was – I won't say he was naïve but I think Governor Maddox wanted to get along and so he did not resist it as a Carl Sanders might have done it. And so then the power – basically more power shifted to the General Assembly. It became less of a strong government than we previously had.

SHORT: What sort of –

TYSINGER: On a few occasions individuals did get calls to come down to the governor to explain the legislation to him.

SHORT: Were you ever called down?

TYSINGER: I was never called down.

SHORT: What sort of committee assignments did you get from a Democratic Senate?

TYSINGER: George Smith was -- who is the other George Smith – was very, very I think fair and my first assignment and which I stayed the whole three years I was in and I enjoyed it. It was higher education. I had public utility and I think I went on appropriations, too, that time. Later, I – under Governor Maddox when he was Lieutenant Governor – I became Chairman of Science and Technology and I – that's one area I stayed in, dropped public utility. That was one of my assignments. But George Smith was fair. And I want to say other thing. For the most part, the Democrats were very fair to me. I only recall one – one Democrat I would not put in that category but basically they were very fair to me. And I was – I cannot – you know, I think that I was treated very well.

SHORT: 1970.

TYSINGER: Yes, sir.

SHORT: 1970 of that election the Democrats were deciding whether or not they would nominate Carl Sanders or Jimmy Carter. As it turned out Carter won. But the Republicans had a pretty hotly contested race between Atlanta newsman Howell Suit and Jimmy Bentley, who had left the Democratic party and become a Republican.

TYSINGER: Yeah.

SHORT: How did the Republicans feel about that switch?

TYSINGER: Well, most of us knew Howell Suit because of his TV and thought he'd be the favorite. I don't recall if there was any animosity; they just favored Howell Suit. As you know, he was a World War II veteran, wounded, and handled himself very well and – so we went behind Howell Suit.

SHORT: And that same year Senator Frank Miller, who you mentioned earlier, was a candidate against Democrat Lester Maddox.

TYSINGER: Yeah.

SHORT: And Maddox won that one. How did you rate Maddox as a governor?

TYSINGER: You know he was very accessible. We could get into his office and talk to him and that didn't happen under other governors later on. But we could get in and talk to him and he was fair. Earl Patton and I went down there. Georgia Tech was trying to raise some money to match the Callaway Foundation for the student center at Tech, and I went down to talk to him – and he – I think, if I remember right, we got \$30,000 out of him to help us in that over there. He was fair and he was accessible. Always had a good humor about him.

SHORT: How was he as Lieutenant Governor?

TYSINGER: Same way. He was fair and as I told – I believe that two senators basically influenced him and some of the decisions he made and they were Gene Holly from Augusta and Smith from down in Perry, Georgia. Smith was a – would – he was a rough person to deal with. And I think that in that position he had – I think he was Rules Chairman. I believe he was. He was pretty rough on us. But Governor Maddox was, even as a Lieutenant Governor was very fair. Because of Armstrong, Smith was close to him. As our Republic leader, I got Chairmanship out of it. I was Chairman of Science and Technology and Paul Coverdell came under retirement.

SHORT: Recite for us if you will the constant feud between Governor Carter when he was governor and Lieutenant Governor Maddox when he was Lieutenant governor.

TYSINGER: Well there was animosity to it and the five of us at that time were Republicans. Because we'd lost some seats, the five of us were really the swing vote. And we'd go with Governor Maddox or Governor Carter as we wanted to. And I'd tell people I had more sandwiches and Cokes with Governor Carter downstairs in his office and Governor Maddox was also through – not him directly but through others were also a vote. And so, we were the swing votes. But again, I said we were treated always fairly with the Democrats. I had many Democrats as friends. Paul Brown down at Athens was one of the best friends I had in the Senate, for example. And Bobby Rowan and these others. Frank was there. And so, I think Governor Maddox as Lieutenant Governor did a commendable job.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about some senators with whom you served. Hugh Gillis.

TYSINGER: Hugh Gillis. Hugh Gillis, low key, but an individual who went into the – as I understand it, went into the House at the age of 25 and went through many of those periods of time, particularly when they elected – the General Assembly elected Governor Maddox, but other instances. He had a deep interest and always was Chairman of Natural Resources and helped the natural resources of the state. He always – that was one of his big things.

SHORT: Bobby Rowan.

TYSINGER: Bobby Rowan probably was the best stump speaker I've ever heard. And he could sway an issue like no one else. As I told you earlier, I recall one instance there was a deal dealing with mobile homes going down the highways and Bobby Rowan in opposition to it went into the well and made a speech as if – from the perspective of his young son traveling with him in a car and said what's up, daddy, where's that going? How long we going to be there? And there was mobile home in front of him. He did such a good job he won – he beat – he won, he beat the measure. And Hugh Carter, who had mobile homes in his district, got so daggone mad. I mean he was spitting mad about that one issue.

SHORT: How about Paul Coverdell?

TYSINGER: Paul was – came in, he beat one of the – I won't say the leading Democrat but a big Democrat here in the city. He was a friend of the bankers and –

SHORT: Jack Hardy.

TYSINGER: Jack Hardy. And I know Paul, I remember one time went up to Mills Lane and asked Mills Lane for money and Mills Lane's comment, well, you SOB, you're running against

my best friend. Paul said he backed out of the room. But Paul was a tireless worker and he said – Governor Maddox made him Chairman of the Retirement Committee and he took some steps to try to improve the retirement system and the accountability in that. He was always very interested in the things that were going on. And I think he was a real dedicated individual.

SHORT: He was elected and re-elected to the United States Senate.

TYSINGER: Yes.

SHORT: I wonder what –

TYSINGER: Well, first, you know he ran for Congress and was defeated.

SHORT: Defeated, yes, uh-huh.

TYSINGER: But then he kept at it and ran for the United States Senate and was elected. And I ran into him on several occasions. You know, he had served in the Peace Corp., too. And I ran into him on several occasions while he was doing that but also as a senator and Paul never took care of himself. He would – he's energetic. He basically lived on coffee and peanut butter crackers I think. And I chastised him about that the last time we were in Tulsa that he better start taking care of himself. But he was all – he was energetic. He was all into it, very

dedicated.

SHORT: He took on a big task in facing and incumbent United States Senator who had the support of the Speaker of the House, Tom Murphy, and others. What was the Republican thinking at the time? Did you think he could win?

TYSINGER: Well, I didn't really honestly, and I think that the turning coat was the exposure of the money in the overcoat pocket. And at that time Herman had come up with a few other things that had – he'd lost, I think, many of the people in the state. That's my opinion. And I think Paul built on that. I think that was one of the factors that Paul won.

SHORT: Bob Bell.

TYSINGER: Bob Bell and I are good friends and have been. We went to the same church together. As a matter of fact, Bob went in the House and I went in the Senate and later when there was an opening, after reapportionment in '70 and they redrew lines and DeKalb County got more senators in here, Bob Bell ran for the 5th District and won and as you know, later, after several years, he ran for governor against Joe Frank and then dropped out of politics in general. But we're still good friends.

SHORT: Okay. Now, let's talk for a minute about the Lieutenant Governors with whom you

served. We mentioned Maddox.

TYSINGER: And George Smith.

SHORT: And George smith. Then there was Zell Miller.

TYSINGER: Zell was most of time I was in the Senate Zell was Lieutenant Governor. Again, I was treated fairly. Zell, the latter part – I think he would have done it earlier had it not been for some people, like I said, like Holly and others. But Zell made me Chairman of the Georgia World Congress Center Overview Committee and I served in that for several years. But he was always accessible and you'd go talk to him and if he had a piece of legislation you were particularly interested in and it wasn't something he was vehemently opposed – was in opposition to, he'd help you. So I have real fond memories of him.

SHORT: You served, I believe, for one of – probably your final term with Lieutenant Governor Mark Taylor.

TYSINGER: Yeah. No, I was not.

SHORT: You were not there?

TYSINGER: Mark was – Mark was the floor leader for Governor Maddox – I mean, I'm sorry. Governor Miller.

SHORT: Speaking of Governor Miller, upon the untimely death of Senator Paul Coverdell, Governor Roy Barnes appointed him to the United States Senate. As a Democrat replacing a Republican, what was the reaction among Republicans to that?

TYSINGER: I think they thought Zell would probably be the best person that he could put up there. Zell had never been at odds I think with goals that the Republicans wanted to achieve, and so, there was no negative image of him. And they felt that that was probably the best person they could put up there. And you know, when Zell got to Washington apparently he was exposed to some politics he couldn't – didn't like and he told them. He's written a couple books about that. And I was fortunate that I went to the National Republican Convention when he made the speech at the National Republican Convention. And he got a – he was – got a standing ovation. It was outstanding.

SHORT: Do you think there was any basic difference in the political philosophies of Coverdell and Miller?

TYSINGER: That's an interesting point. And no, I don't. I think Paul might have been in certain areas, you know, he was one of those opposed to Hillary's healthcare. That was one of

the big issues he was in. He was in that. But philosophically, you know, I think there was a lot of similarity between the two in their outlook. I think Zell always had a very high opinion of Paul. And if I recall, Zell's comment when he took the position had something to do with – and I don't remember the exact words, but it came across to me, "I'm going to carry out Paul's philosophy." That's what came back to me. That's the way I interpreted it.

SHORT: Among your chairmanships during your service in the Senate you were also Chair of the Metropolitan Atlanta area Rapid Transit Overview --

TYSINGER: That's correct.

SHORT: -- Committee.

TYSINGER: And then later became the MARTA Ethics Committee.

SHORT: Tell us, if you will, Senator, about how the legislation that created MARTA was passed.

TYSINGER: Well, MARTA was created by legislature. As you recall, it was a vote of the people of DeKalb and Fulton County voted for it for the one cent sales tax. And that was the issue that put MARTA into business. MARTA, however, I think politically was organized

incorrectly. One of the things – we had the head of MARTA at that time was a hard headed individual you couldn't even talk to. And we – I remember we in the Senate tried to get them to accept the railroad cars built down in Winder, Georgia -- they were building for Washington, D.C. – and they wouldn't do it; they wanted their own car, their own design and went to France to buy them. And that upset some people, but they – Elliot Levitas who was in the House then, got upset to a degree he was – actually at that time he was Chairman of MARTA. But he got upset with him because of the money they were spending and how they were spending it. So, Elliot got two bills passed. One of them was that – I think it was – I remember now what the count – the percentage was, but a good percent of that money had to be – couldn't be used for fairs – subsidizing fairs; it had to be use for construction. And they also passed legislation that the fair box had to bear more of the cost of the ride. And had it not been in that, MARTA would have gone broke a long time ago. And Elliot Levitas was one, I think, farsighted enough to see that the money was not being spent well. That director finally left and went to Houston and MARTA then came – we were fortunate. We had Dan Patillo was one of the Chairman and he was very aggressive in pushing it. We in DeKalb County got upset because legislation was passed to build Atlanta to the airport without coming into DeKalb County. And Dan went along with that but he did build a first line into Brookhaven and then on up. And then later David Chestnutt got in and did a good job too. So we were fortunate in DeKalb County. We had two good Chairmen in that MARTA.

SHORT: Originally Cobb County opted out.

TYSINGER: Cobb County opted out and I don't recall –it might have been racial. I don't recall the reason. But DeKalb did and Fulton did. Now one of the things that we tried for several years is to get the sales tax from the Atlanta Airport included, which is probably now it'd be two or three million dollars. And Clayton County, since the airport's in Clayton County it would not allow that to take place because of some political questions between the Chairman down there and then Maynard Jackson.

SHORT: Let's talk now, if you will, for a minute or two about the rise of the Republican party in Georgia.

TYSINGER: Well it was a slow process, but I think philosophically, as you pointed out earlier, many of the Democrats in this state were very conservative minded and they didn't like some of the things taking place in Washington. I think that was the impetus – they didn't want to be identified with it. And so, that slowly built. We were fortunate we had Paul was Chairman of the Republican party I believe during that period of time and really worked to get the message across and we slowly picked up seats. When I left I think there were – we probably had 15 or 16 Republicans when I got out. And then the impetus went over and we became – the Senate became Republican.

SHORT: Did you think you would ever elect a Republican governor?

TYSINGER: Well, we almost elected Bo Callaway. (Laughter) But you know, it was a question. I think the people of Georgia, as I said, were conservative and they didn't like some of the things that Washington was doing and basically some of the things that Jimmy Carter did up there as president, and so I think that turned them against it. And I think that's why we picked up so many Republicans in the Senate.

SHORT: Carter left office in Washington in a mess.

TYSINGER: Yeah, what was it? Interest rates – I mean the gasoline was as high as it is, or getting up there and matter of fact, it was a shortage if you recall. You couldn't even get gasoline. And also, inflation was very, very high.

SHORT: Interest rates were high.

TYSINGER: Interest rates were high, and so, that, I think was one of the factors that put Ronald Reagan in. Because Ronald Reagan, he had both Democrat and Republican votes when he went in.

SHORT: Reagan Democrats they called him.

TYSINGER: Beg your pardon?

SHORT: They called them Reagan Democrats, those that –

TYSINGER: Blue Dog Democrats.

SHORT: Blue Dogs. Yes, sir.

TYSINGER: As a matter fact, the Wall Street Journal yesterday had an article about the Blue Dog Democrats still in existence. I think there were 37, 38 of them and they were – wouldn't – were pushing the Speaker up there who wouldn't help on a bill because it was not tax – no money to offset the spending she wanted. And they were insisting new balance – if you're going to spend some money you make certain you got some money to spend and don't just go in debt for it.

SHORT: Some states have registration by party. What do you think of that?

TYSINGER: I like Georgia's system. And that is you vote whatever you want to at the time. Otherwise we would have a difficult time building a Republican party.

SHORT: But doesn't that allow cross voting?

TYSINGER: It allows crossing voting and probably some of that has taken place. But I think that's -- I know at times they made an issue of that. I always -- I didn't participate in that. But there is, and that's one of the weaknesses of that system. But I still believe you have the right to be an independent or vote Republican or vote Democrat or vote Libertarian.

SHORT: When we were talking earlier about some of your colleagues in the Senate I failed to ask you about probably the most colorful one who ever served, a fellow named Culver Kidd.

TYSINGER: Culver Kidd sat in front of me and I'll say one thing about the positive thing about Culver, and that is Culver probably passed more legislation for departments of state government, because they asked him to do it, than any other senator. Culver would go out and have a liquid lunch and come back in and he would -- in one instance he got to the well and spoke of a bill that was the next bill up, not the bill he was supposed to be. He got mixed up on his bills. And he had a -- he was a colorful individual. On one occasion, I said he sat in front of me, and I went in the Senate and there was a young woman sitting in that seat with a page button on and I said what the heck's going on? She was a night club owner or singer out here on Roswell Road and he'd brought her in for his page that day. (Laughter) I don't think --

SHORT: Were you there --

TYSINGER: That's Culver.

SHORT: Were you there the day he wore his Crown Royal britches?

TYSINGER: Yes.

SHORT: Do you remember that?

TYSINGER: Yes. Culver was always a source if you wanted some liquid refreshments, you'd go to Culver's office.

SHORT: Well, you had the pleasure of serving with six governors.

TYSINGER: Yes.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about them. Of course we mentioned Lester Maddox. He was governor during your early years. You served with Jimmy Carter. You went through the Carter reorganization legislation. And incidentally, that's been many, many years ago. Do you think that reorganization worked?

TYSINGER: No. Well, it worked in part. The biggest mistake was made – and I voted against

it – was the Department of Health, he broke it up. We had Department of Health and Department of Mental Health or something like that. And he broke that up. Now we have a department over there that you can't manage. It's too big and they're constantly in the paper about children abused within the system, but it's too big. And that was one of the mistakes. I voted against that. Some of the others we needed, but that was one big mistake.

SHORT: How about George Busby?

TYSINGER: George was a good governor. One of the things he started was a – and pushed, was a concept of – and while it's located on Tech campus, there were other people involved in it. And that is where you could have a incubator for businesses. And I thought that was a good idea. Where you had this place where a business could come in with – under basically low rent and with help from the University system start his business and then branch out on his own. I think that was one of the big steps that he made. But there were others. He was a good governor too.

SHORT: Did you support the lottery?

TYSINGER: I did. Let me tell you this. I supported the concept of let's let the people vote on it. That was the concept I went on. And the legislation that was passed was the right legislation. And the fact that it was restricted, if I recall the details, to four areas, one was for Hope

scholarship, one was for, I believe it was the kindergarten program; one was for scientific technical approach. As you recall, Governor Miller put dish antennas at each school and put computers in each school. And then the third – fourth thing was reserve so that if the funds were to decline there'd be enough money to keep the Hope Scholarship going. I think that's one of the big things that came out of that. And I think it was properly – I hope it does – no one amends that. I think that's the – those are the [Indiscernible] should go in. And I visited – one of the things I tried each year, not each year, but I tried to visit every school in the district I served. And I know I went into one up here at Nancy Creek and I was asking about what they were doing with the government money they got from the governor and they – I went in there and they had a room full of computers that hadn't even been put to use. And I went over to the Superintendent of schools and I complained about it and the principal was basically relieved. But it was a good program. And I went to schools in Gwinnett County and they had – they were using this program to bring science programs that they couldn't probably afford that kind of instruction. I remember one was from Arizona, was excellent. So they're doing – I think they basically under Governor Miller that was a right step in the right direction.

SHORT: Of course that was his main campaign issue was the lottery. So you would give him high marks overall as a governor?

TYSINGER: I would. I think it turned out well as opposed to the way Florida did it. I mean Florida put it in a General Treasury. This was, I think, well structured and it's been a good use.

The Hope Scholarship has been one of the best things we've done in this state.

SHORT: What do you think about earmarks in state government?

TYSINGER: We don't have earmarks as such as they do in the federal government. You can't put an earmark on an appropriation item. It has to basically stay by itself. For example, I've gotten some money for parks but it was done, specifically spelled out that's where it was going. I think it was – while it was, I think, complete in the disclosure, it's not hidden as it does in the federal government. There's too much of that still going on in Georgia giving, you know, the money out. And usually, if you recall, what happens is you – appropriation – the governor would make an estimate on the low side and more money would come in so when you come in for the amended budget, which was supposed to be just for -- basically the amended budget was to be for the school attendants to bring that up. That's what we required. If you have more students then you need more money and you don't know how many students you're going to have until they register in September. But that was brought out and that issue was – and I voted against the budget several times because there are areas in that thing and the money was – while it went through a department, it was full disclosure, I just think it was wrong.

SHORT: How do you rate Georgia's appropriations process? Seems that it always ends up the last two or three days.

TYSINGER: That I think is a weakness. You spend all the time in appropriation meetings and the House passes a bill and sends it to the Senate. One of the things that disturbed me early on, Speaker Smith would send the appropriation bill over to the Senate and did not give them enough time to really consider it and what was in it. If I recall, one of the conference committees report, we got it at 11:30 I think on the last night and we turned it down. And the House members in there were lined up along the side because they didn't want to come in the special session. And we were – got commitments that there'd be certain corrections made to the appropriation committee. And so we reconsidered and passed it. But then that's why the Senate passed their rule that you had to have the appropriation over during a certain time. But I still think, I mean, a lot of work needs to be done in that area. When you go in a conference committee report basically the appropriation of Georgia is decided by six people, that's the conference committee report, and I think that it should be – they should not have that much power that six people are going to make that decision. Because it comes back to you and they could change it completely the way you've passed it. You don't have enough time to really look into it.

SHORT: Getting back to the governors we were talking about, you also served with Roy Barnes.

TYSINGER: Right.

SHORT: What kind of governor was he?

TYSINGER: Well, Roy was not governor when I was governor.

SHORT: Oh, he wasn't?

TYSINGER: When I was in the Senate. Roy was in the Senate with me and was an outstanding senator. And he was an excellent individual to go in the well and explain something. He did it always with a sense of humor that he had. If I recall, he ran for governor unsuccessfully or ran for some seat unsuccessfully and got out of the Senate and later came back into the house. And then after I left he ran for governor and won. Roy and I are good friends.

SHORT: And you didn't serve with Sonny Perdue but tell us what you think of him as a governor?

TYSINGER: Well, you know, Sonny and I are friends and when he first came to the Senate I perceived in my own mind that he was going to be a coming leader. As a Democrat he worked his way up. Like I said, he got me on – if you recall, he had a special committee on gas deregulation and he got me on that committee with him and other committees. And so, I was impressed with him. And then he became president pro tem of the Senate and then I left. The one thing I think personally that – why he became disenchanted and became a Republican was Charles Walker and the power he had picked up under Pierre Howard and some of the things he was doing. And it was others, but Charles Walker namely he didn't put up with that stuff so

that's why he changed.

SHORT: Well you certainly had a very interesting career. As you look back over it, what is your fondest memory?

TYSINGER: Oh, God, it's hard to separate those. [Indiscernible] I just think that looking back I hope one thing, as I said earlier, that I might have made some contributions to the state. One of the last pieces of legislations I handled – two of them. One of the last pieces of legislation I handled was the electronics transfer signatures, which has been a bonus for Georgia and the legal profession and legal documents. And the last thing is that when they closed Brook Run working with Pierre Howard as Lieutenant Governor we set that up. That's 100 acres in DeKalb – over 100 acres, and the legislation provided for 70% green space, so they can't do anything out there. They're restricted. And DeKalb bought it, I think for \$2 million and it's been a tremendous asset to our county.

SHORT: Before I forget it I want to ask you about your Tysinger Breakfast that you used to have in DeKalb County.

TYSINGER: Well, when Bob Bell and I were in the General Assembly I thought of the idea that we should get together basically on a weekly basis. Bob Guhl was in there and was DeKalb Commissioner and later became Chairman, Harry Geisinger, and we had Joe Willingham who

was on the school board. We used to get together and talk about issues so that we'd all become familiar with what others were doing and maybe work together and coordinate our efforts together. We started off just having breakfast over here at the Holiday Inn and other people started coming in and joining us. And it got kind of out of hand. They gave us room on the side after breakfast and then we transferred – we been kicked out of every hotel in DeKalb County I think because the guys basically want to drink a cup coffee rather than eat breakfast. And so, the last thing that happened is that the Republican party wanted to have – wanted a better place. And we had been raising money as a breakfast fund – you contributed I think \$3 or something like that. We were raising money for it and had some money we set aside.

And so, and we had a yearly breakfast that I started as a president's dinner. And the reason I started that, the Atlanta newspapers came out with an article that said the Republican party is dead in Georgia. That was the headline. It made me angry. So I said we'll have a Lincoln Day Dinner because that used to be the old Republican dinner. We had it up here at the Marriott and we had Phil Crane come down from -- to be our speaker and we had standing room only. So we took the money and we had it set up just to pay some expenses but we were approached by the Chairman of the Republican party for support. And while we were not aligned -- it's non-aligned Republican -- it's so we can get judges and others to come to it, and Democrats to come to it. We promised that we would pay a portion of the monthly rent for the place if we were allowed to use it on Saturday morning. So we used the Republican headquarters building on Saturday morning for which we paid roughly five, six hundred dollars a month for that opportunity. And we raised the money for it within our group. And since it's not – it's not –

while we're in a Republican headquarters and many of us are Republicans, it's structured so that we hear all of the judges. Not many people – they can't go to a partners in politic – political place, so we get the judges in, we get other people in who are in school board races and all. We get people in from – we've had – I've had Sam Nunn come talk to us. We had other Democrats. And it 's just – I feel what we need to do is educate the people what's going on they don't see in the newspapers, and you hear this direct from people. And it's been successful.

SHORT: You've been a real hard worker for the party. Tell us, if you will, about some of the early hard workers in the Republican party.

TYSINGER: Well, there's a friend of mine that was probably the leader when I went in. It's this fellow named Al Warrington. Al was with Arthur Andersen, was a partner of Arthur Andersen, later moved out of the state to Miami and then ended up in Texas where he went and retired basically from Arthur Andersen. But went into business, made a fortune out there. But Al was one of our early leaders, Al Warrington. And of course Bob Bell was one of them and built a thing [ph]. Joe Willingham who was on the school [ph] that helped. Bob Guhl did a lot to that area. These are some people who [Indiscernible]. Harry Geisinger and Stan Collins didn't – were not – they'd come to some but not many. But those are essentially the ones that were in there.

SHORT: What do you see politically down the road? Do you think the Democrats can regain

power in the state?

TYSINGER: That's a good question. I think that they will gain some but it's going to be a cycle or some time I think before they really gain the power. If you recall, the Democrat election on the old county unit system was predicated on the sheriffs of various counties and they had this system. The sheriff was a big keynote – key person in each county. That's gone. And the other thing that the Democratic party went into was a series of very liberal people, probably a lot of African Americans in there and – but I think it's a liberal concept more than anything else that they've got to change their concept and come back there. Because many of the Democrats had – when I was in the Senate had the same philosophy I did. They really did. I had many friends. Paul Coverdell, I mean, and Paul Brown, Bobby Rowan, Frank Eldridge, just to name some of them.

SHORT: So you felt comfortable in the Senate even though you were in a –

TYSINGER: I was always accepted as a senator.

SHORT: -- minority? Pardon?

TYSINGER: I was always accepted as a senator.

SHORT: Yes, sir. Okay, now, as you look back over your career, what has been your biggest disappointment?

TYSINGER: Well, that's a good question, too. You know I don't know whether I had any real disappointments. I think I was frustrated sometimes when I could get bills through the House but not through the Senate – through the Senate but not through the House. And Speaker Smith had a system over there that the bill would come over and they'd put in a committee and they'd put it in a sub-committee and you had to work your way through a very maze to get through it. And if the Speaker didn't want it it didn't get passed. So that was my biggest frustration. I get – and many of the other senators the same way. They would pass bills that were good bills and if Speaker didn't want it that was it.

SHORT: If you were asked to give a young, aspiring politician some advice what would you tell him?

TYSINGER: I'd tell him two things. One of them is you've got to build up an organization, a bunch of friends. You cannot do it by yourself. And the second thing is, as today, you've got to build up enough financial support from friends to win the office. I think it's obscene the amount of money you have to spend for a House seat and a Senate seat today. I ran for three or four thousand dollars. The most I ever spent was sixty and I had opposition. Stan Collins – I mean I ran against – he ran against me was John Linder and John had more money than I did but I had

the organization and the people got out and worked. That was – that's how I beat John that time.

SHORT: Since you have retired you have still been active. In fact, you're on the Board of Natural Resources.

TYSINGER: That is correct. Governor put me – asked – assigned me the Board of Natural Resources.

SHORT: And you're now faced with a lot of problems. Water.

TYSINGER: (Laughter) Well, for two years there's been a study made and it was approved in the last legislation, a water plan for Georgia. If you recall, under Governor Maddox, he was trying to build six reservoirs in the state which if we had built them we'd been ahead of the game. And you know we were sued by Florida and Alabama to stop that. There was one other one, too. Under Governor Maddox, when was governor, there was money set aside for a dam on the Flint River. Money was there, the plans were there, and Governor Carter came in, took a canoe ride down there and stopped it. If that'd been in there that would have also been a big source of water for Georgia. What the department is encouraging now is that for each county and each municipality if it's large enough, to set aside a reservoir of their own water. And that's happening over the state. We're having smaller ones. But we've suffered a drought period. As

a matter of fact, for three years we've had a serious drought condition and water restrictions. I think the Core of Engineers now – I read this morning in a paper they now are saying that the muscle show down in Florida can survive on enough water going through. We don't have to pour all the damn water down there. So, I think we're on the basis if we get some rain in north Georgia and fill the reservoirs back up I think we'll be all right. We'd still have to watch ourselves and how we use water.

SHORT: During your career did you every think of seeking a higher office?

TYSINGER: At one time and it was in frustration more than really looking at it. I felt I had my family to take care of and I didn't have time and the money to go for a higher office. But – my mind – you have to forgive me, my mind's blanking [ph]. Pat Swindall. Pat Swindall was caught up in his last election –

SHORT: He was a Congressman.

TYSINGER: He was a Congressman. He was caught up in some questionable activity. And he sat right there and we had [Indiscernible] in here one night and he lied like the – right to us and at that time I was considering running against him because I didn't like what he was doing. But he sat there and as I said, lied like the dickens but they finally found him guilty; he lost the election to a nobody really.

SHORT: Ben Jones.

TYSINGER: Yeah, Ben Jones. But Jim wasn't owned anything except his television program .

SHORT: The Dukes of Hazard.

TYSINGER: Yeah, but Pat just was not honest and that's the one time I was seriously thinking about running against him.

SHORT: Well you've certainly had a great, great career.

TYSINGER: Well, as I said, again, I hope I've done anything for Georgia, helped in any way, that's my gratification.

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

TYSINGER: Well I'm glad we're trying to preserve some of history if I'm part of it. (Laughter)

[END OF RECORDING]

**University of Georgia
Jim Tysinger**

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