

**Hugh Gillis interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is another chapter in the series, Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia. Hugh

Gillis, of Soperton, Georgia, served 55 years and 7 months as a State Representative and as a Senator. That, I'm sure, is a record that will never be broken, and we're delighted today to have Senator Gillis as our guest on Reflections on Georgia Politics.

Senator, before we get on that long road down your career as a public servant, let's talk about the Gillises and the impact you and your family have had on the State of Georgia, beginning with your grandfather, who I understand helped create Treutlen County.

HUGH GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And your father, Mr. Jim Gillis, who was in the legislature at the same time as your grandfather.

GILLIS: Yes. Well, my grandfather was in the Senate representing Emanuel County, and an area over that in that territory, and my father had moved across Felden[ph] Creek over into Montgomery County and was farming over there and he campaigned all over this Montgomery County in a horse and buggy, and visited one home right after another, and I think he spent a good bit of time, uh, politicking and – and defeated, you probably remember Joe Underwood served -- he defeated his father --

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: -- for the House of Representatives, and then in 1917, that was probably 1916. In 1917, my grandfather introduced a bill in the Senate to create Treutlen County, and it was part of Emanuel, part of Montgomery, and, it passed the House and then came over to the Senate and it passed the Senate. So, that -- after the county was created, then, we had to build a courthouse and all of the necessary buildings and so forth for the county to operate. And there was already a little village here that -- built by -- the railroad came through and, uh, and a lot of the employees and different ones built homes and created the town of Soperton prior to that. So Soperton became the head -- in fact the only town in the -- in the county. There were some country stores scattered around in the county, but, no -- nothing other than one or two little filling stations or grocery stores.

SHORT: Well, your father, Mr. Jim, as he was known, served 24 years as head of the Highway Department. I guess that's how you got interested in politics.

GILLIS: Yeah. My father was always interested, and, of course, he got the family, and my grandfather, and every Sunday afternoon, we would meet up over at my grandfather's home and have Sunday lunch and spend the afternoon socializing and talking about business and politics and, among it all, we all stayed really interested in what was going on politically in the State of Georgia.

SHORT: They tell the story around the capital about the time when Governor Ernest Vandiver,

sent you and a group of senators over to see your father, Mr. Jim, in the Highway Department to tell him that they were about to cut his budget.

GILLIS: [Laughs] Well, that's true. Uh, Ernest had -- Governor Vandiver had to cut a lot of the Departments' budgets. Yeah, as you know, you have to live within the budget, and to do so you have to work on the various departments and so they did come over to see him and he had a habit of not -- of course, there was nothing he could do about it, so he had a habit of just sort of whistling when somebody tells him something like that, and that's about all he had as a reaction he had to it. He -- of course, he had to cut the budget to agree with the governor.

SHORT: You were elected to the House of Representatives in 1940.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Did you have any election that year? Did you have an opponent that year?

GILLIS: No. Luckily, Mr. Jim Fowler was our representative here in the county and he had decided not to run, and my father and my brother and several members of the family encouraged me to go out around the county and feels some pulses and see what they thought about me running, so I had just gotten out of the university in 1939, and I did -- I found a lot of support, so I announced and was elected to the House of Representatives and Gene Talmadge, Eugene

Talmadge, just was the Governor of Georgia at that time.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Back in those days there was only one party and that was the Democratic Party.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: But there were factions within the Democratic Party --

GILLIS: Exactly right.

SHORT: -- that opposed each other, and a lot of people, generally referred to them as the Talmadges and the Rivers'.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: Which one of those factions were you associated with?

GILLIS: Well, really I was, probably, with the Rivers faction because my daddy was a real close friend of Ed Rivers, and he had put my father on the Highway Board.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And, uh, we had created a lot of jobs and built a lot of roads in – in this area of Georgia. In fact, in the State of Georgia, they did. But I had a little help, but I tell – often told people, if you went over to the Capitol during those days, and you were not on the Talmadge side, you might as well stay at the Henry Grady Hotel.

SHORT: [Laughs]

GILLIS: But, Roy Harris was still in the house and luckily, I got a seat on the front row on the left of the speaker's stand. You know where I'm talking about.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: Front row.

SHORT: Right.

GILLIS: And I was sitting between Roy Harris and Fred Hand, and both of those were expert politicians and knew probably government better than anybody else in the – at the Capitol. And, uh, I had a lot of good help from them. And I imagine you remember one named – you

remember [indiscernible] Matthews,

SHORT: Very well.

GILLIS: From Athens.

SHORT: Yes, sir.

GILLIS: He was – he was in that group.

SHORT: Mr. University.

GILLIS: Yeah. I don't think there was over about 23 or 24 that were close Rivers people, so called, or at – we were not anti-Talmadges that much, but we didn't have to vote for everything that he proposed, so occasionally there might be 25 or 30 votes opposing whatever the governor wanted, which didn't amount to much, but.

SHORT: Who was speaker then?

GILLIS: I believe he had Randall Evans.



SHORT: Randall?

GILLIS: Over the --

SHORT: Thompson

GILLIS: Out near -- near --

SHORT: Augusta

GILLIS: Augusta.

SHORT: Right. But when you came to the --

GILLIS: Randall -- incidentally, Randall had never been in politics much and, especially never had been in the legislature, and he didn't know a whole lot about being a speaker, so it was right amusing -- you know, Roy Harris and Fred Hand were experts, and they enjoyed keeping him in trouble.

SHORT: [Laughs] Well, when you got there, Senator, back in those days, the governor ran about everything, including the General Assembly. How was it to serve under a powerful

governor like that?

GILLIS: Well, there again, you didn't have a whole lot of work to do. They didn't – they would not put us on as chairman of any committees or, we didn't have to stay over at the Capitol all day afternoon working. We could – back and to from the Henry Grady Hotel, and that was the headquarters for almost all the legislators, so it was – it was real – I'd say real interesting and – and no problem. I mean, we never got in any trouble.

SHORT: Speaking of the Henry Grady, they say that more laws were passed and more campaigns settled at the Henry Grady than there was at the Capitol.

GILLIS: Well, I think that might have been true.

SHORT: [Laughs]

GILLIS: Because at night we didn't have any – anything in particular to do but talk politics and visit around from one room to the other. And it was just a real pleasure, and – and interesting to see what was going on over there after – after dark.

SHORT: Yeah. So, I think it was 1942 that a young Attorney General by the name of Ellis Arnall was elected Governor and you were there.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: What do you remember about Governor Arnall?

GILLIS: Well, Governor Arnall was going to reform our state government, and did, change a lot of – a lot of government operations and, it was entirely a different group operating than what the Talmadge faction was, so, I think – another thing, World War II had started and there was hardly no funds – extra funds. In fact, all the – all the departments were cut real bad and, everything, was, quiet and, we tried to get by the best we could with – with what we had, and Ellis Arnall didn't have a lot – a lot to do with.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: But, uh, I think he made a good governor as far as – as far as that goes.

SHORT: Well he certainly had a national reputation.

GILLIS: Oh, yeah.

SHORT: And his prison reform and, and also he was a – I think the first governor in the country

to pass a bill that allowed 18 year olds to vote.

GILLIS: That's – that's exactly right, and he created the office of Lieutenant Governor. That's another thing he did. And I think he set up the merit system and set up several constitutional boards --

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: -- so he did a good job in kind of reorganizing the state government.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: In the past, it's been run directly out of the Governor's office or from the leaders in the House and the Senate that were friends of the Governor.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Then came 1946. That was the year of Georgia's three governors. I'm sure you remember that. You were – you were up there,

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: And, you know, we – we read a lot about that in the history books, but we seldom have

an opportunity to talk to somebody who was there.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: Now you were there. Tell us all about it.

GILLIS: Well, it was a – everything had been operating kind of smooth because of the shortage of the budget, and it was – the budget was still short, but the three governors created a lot of discussion and excitement--

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: -- As far as the legislature was concerned, and, I tell you, I never have seen anything before or since like that.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Gene Talmadge was elected governor for the fourth time and then died.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And then it left you with Governor Arnall, who would not give up the office after Talmadge was elected by the Legislature, and Melvin Thompson, who had been elected

Lieutenant Governor, but not sworn in, so that was – that – that – that election came to a vote, and you were in the Legislature, and you got to vote on it, didn't you?

GILLIS: Yes, I did.

SHORT: And – and how did you vote, if you don't mind telling us?

GILLIS: Well, the three governors were Herman Talmadge -- and Herman served 63 days.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And then court ruled that, uh, he was a – see, Arnall had created the Lieutenant Governor's Office, and the court ruled that the Lieutenant Governor was to be Governor.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: So, I was – like you say, I was in the House, and after the court ruled, I run down to the Governor's Office the next morning to see what the Governor was going to do, and every door was wide open and there was no Talmadge employee or appointee down there. It was – they just cleaned house and left it up to M. E. Thompson to take over.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: But the three governor race was tough and, of course, Herman, they – he was involved in it because they claimed he got some write-in votes,

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And was second, and should – should be governor instead of M.E., and that's what the Legislature went on.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And, of course, the Talmadges had more friends in the Legislature than M.E. had.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And they elected Herman, but, like I said, the courts didn't agree to that, and it was a – sort of a knock down, drag out battle. Ellis Arnall tried to stay on because he said he was going to stay on as governor until it was settled.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And when Herman was elected by the Legislature, they went down and saw to it that Arnall was put out of office, and they moved him out. He set him up an office out in the rotunda of the Capitol and two of the Talmadge close buddies picked him up, I think, and carried him out the front door.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: So that left it up to Herman for the 63 days.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Talmadge very gracefully accepted that court decision, and a lot of people think that helped pave the way for him to run two years later --

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: -- against Thompson, which he did, and he won.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And he was governor for six years. He had some very progressive ideas. He created the sales tax. He did a lot of things.



GILLIS: Well, the state needed money and he had to have some more taxes, so he put taxes on cigarettes and tobacco and gasoline and various other items that brought in enough money for him to have a progressive state government by – from the funds that the new taxes brought in.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. He was also very much involved in the Southern Manifesto, which was signed by all the governors opposing the Federal Court decisions on school integration.

GILLIS: Yeah. All during that time there was a big problem with integration and -- Marvin Griffin and Herman -- and Herman Talmadge and Lester Maddox -- a lot of our governors were not for integrating our schools. But Ellis Arnall agreed with – he was the former Attorney General, knew a lot about law and he agreed with the courts on it.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: So, Ellis Arnold, his group finally won out the decision and that's the reason Herman had to vacate.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. It was – it was during that period that -- that Senator Talmadge was first elected into that job that they go to Washington, and he defeated for the second time Melvin Thompson, as you recall, to – for that Senate seat. Thompson had a very tough time as governor,

didn't he?

GILLIS: He sure did, and of course the Legislature was not with him, and when you are the governor and the Legislature is not supporting you -- House and the Senate -- you got problems, and that was -- that was the main reason that M.E. could not make a success.

SHORT: Marvin Griffin was Lieutenant Governor during the six years of the Talmadge Administration, and he decided to run for governor against a group of individuals, which -- also included other friends of -- of Herman Talmadge.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And Griffin won, and served six years. You were there while Griffin was Lieutenant Governor, weren't you?

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And now he's governor. What sort of a governor was he?

GILLIS: Well, Griffin was a -- a great fellow to be around. He liked to tell jokes and have fun and a lot of afternoons he'd come over to the hotel and join in with us and we -- we always

enjoyed seeing him regardless of whether you were for him or not. And he – he knew how to handle those kind of things. He was – he didn't let you not voting for him stand between you and his friendship. In fact, after he left the governorship and his wife died, and he remarried again, he and his wife – new wife -- stopped by in this office right here to see me.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: He had a tough time. We had some people that he appointed to run the Highway Department and the Purchasing Department, and they had friends that wanted to make some money [laughs] and they did. And, for instance, I believe I told you earlier before we had this – came in this office -- that I was a John Deere Dealer for about 24 or 5 years. Somebody brought me a copy of a purchase order on about 8 or 10 John Deere tractors and the price of them. And I looked at it, and it was 10% above retail, so I had a little committee appointed in the Senate and – and I happened to be chairman of it – to go down to the Purchasing Department to check on it down there and see just who bid on these tractors. And, I don't know whether you remember a little short senator, George Jackson, from up there in Gray.

SHORT: Yeah.

GILLIS: He was one of them, and there were two others, I believe. But anyway, we go down there and I handed this purchase order to the secretary, and I said, "We want to see the bids. I'm

the chairman of this committee from the Senate, and we want to see these bids on these particular items." And she disappeared and never came back. But in about ten minutes, out comes the Purchasing Director, and he proceeded to lay the law down to us and really used a lot of bad words and he was going to have us all locked up, this, that, and the other. But he was looking at little George Jackson all the time he was doing that, and little George reached into his pocket and pulled out a switchblade, and opened it up and he told him, he said, "You – yeah, you better not have – but I'm going to cut you down to my size."

SHORT: [Laughs]

GILLIS: And he knocked the door down running back into his Purchasing Department and slammed the door. Well, there wasn't anything else we could do but leave, so we left. And I went back up to the Senate and in about ten minutes, Governor Griffin called and wanted me to come down to his office. So I went down there. He said, "Hugh, what in the world is going on?" I said, "Nothing Governor, except I took this purchasing order down there with my committee and asked them to let us see the bidders, and they would not show us the bids, and they would not even talk to us. And in fact, they talked – the Purchasing Director talked rough to us, so we left. And that's about – that's all there was to it." He said, "Well, we'll buy some red ones then." And I said, "Well that's up to you what color you buy."

SHORT: Yeah. John Deere being green.

GILLIS: Yes. Yeah. But anyway, they – they had a bad time with the Purchasing Department and the Highway Department. They had a lot of roads left that didn't come up.

SHORT: Well he ran on a platform of paving rural roads.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: But he did not retain Mr. Jim.

GILLIS: No.

SHORT: He put somebody else in, Roger Lawson.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: I believe, and I don't know that Mr. Lawson knew a whole lot about building highways. But anyway, during that period, Ernest Vandiver was Lieutenant Governor.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And Ernest Vandiver and Griffin managed to get into a big fight over the rural roads bill.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And it sort of split up the Legislature there for a while. You were there. Do you remember that?

GILLIS: I was there and I remember the fight, but Ernest Vandiver was trying to build rural roads in Georgia. That's what he wanted to do. And, of course, transportation or Highway – Highway Department he called it then, they had certain roads they wanted to bid – build. And they wanted to let them to contract like they had been doing, and which, according to the courts, were not – some of them were not very legal.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: So that – that brought them a lot of problems.

SHORT: Then Vandiver runs for Governor and succeeds Griffin. And Griffin had managed to find an opponent for Vandiver. A fellow named Bill Bodenheimer. Do you remember him?

GILLIS: Yeah, I remember that.

SHORT: From Ty Ty, Georgia.

GILLIS: Yeah, I remember it.

SHORT: Vandiver won that race, you know, in a landslide, and he got to be Governor. But he faced, Senator, some of the biggest problems that any Governor has had in Georgia for a long, long time. He had a situation at the University of Georgia.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Integrating the University. That was a – that was a tough decision for him and the General Assembly to make. And you were there. Do you remember those days?

GILLIS: Yeah, I do. I think I had stated before, there were three governors, there was Vandiver, and there was Maddox, and there was Griffin. There were some of them that really didn't believe in the – integrating the schools because they were just reared that way.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And, of course, you can't fight the courts. When the Supreme Court rules -- or the high courts -- there's nothing you can do about that. So Vandiver had -- I think you remember when he ran for office, he said -- talking about integration, he said, "No, not one."

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: That was a famous statement he made. He would -- not one would integrate, but he had to apologize for that statement and back off of it, and abide by the law, which -- that was all you could do.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And finally there were several entered the University of Georgia, and --

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: -- Have been many, many more since that time.

SHORT: Then the Supreme Court says that our county unit system was unconstitutional.

GILLIS: Right.



SHORT: That created some problems.

GILLIS: Right. Well there – that was during the Vandiver administration, too.

SHORT: Right.

GILLIS: And, of course, there again, the high court ruled that you had to hold elections by population --

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: -- instead of by county unit systems.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: In the past, and I'm sure you remember, Fulton -- Fulton had a certain amount three year – I believe three representatives.

SHORT: Right. Six units.

GILLIS: And a little county like mine had one.

SHORT: And two units.

GILLIS: And one like Laurens up here had two, and that – they had them rationed out, I'll use that word, according to the population.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: The larger counties had more representation but not near what they would have if it had been on population basis.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: So the court ruled that you had to go by population basis. And since that time, it's been a – a different story in electing Governors.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And State officials.

SHORT: Right after that then the court ruled that we had to reapportion our congressional and legislative districts in the State.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: And that was another problem that Governor Vandiver had that he, I think, handed off to Carl Sanders, who had already been nominated Governor.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: -- And Governor Sanders took over that reapportion. But that reapportionment affected you and your district, didn't it?

GILLIS: Yeah, it sure did. I had normally been representing about four counties, and when they reapportioned like that, I had six. And at one time later on, they – you know, the law says you had to reapportion every ten years.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And later on, when we reapportioned again, of course, the committees of the House and the committees of the Senate did it, and here you had to be within one or two percent of the

population of the counties. So, in order to do that, you had to split counties. And at one time I think I had maybe seven counties and portions of four. It made a world of difference in how you – how you operated.

SHORT: How did you pass local bills back then?

GILLIS: Well, there was no problem in that. If I had a local bill and introduced it, or any other senator or representative, I think the majority of the House and Senate would join in with him. In other words, if – if I wanted to represent Emanuel County in my district, and I introduced a local bill for Emanuel County, all I had to do was tell the rest of my cohorts that this was one of my district – a county in one of my districts, and the majority of the people would support it.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the Senate of 1963.

GILLIS: Let me add one more thing about Ernest Vandiver. I think he's the one that built the archives building for Georgia. A 17-story building I believe, and we had records – state records scattered all over and around the capitol. Some in the capitol and some in various departments and if you wanted to check on a certain item, sometimes you had a problem finding the records on it, but after the archive building was built, then all of them accumulated and assembled in that one building. So you could go back to the archive building and look up any historical item you wanted to check on.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: But that was a great thing for Ernest Vandiver to do.

SHORT: The Senate of '63. You were there. A great group of people. You were there. President Carter was there. J.B. Fuqua was there. Zell Miller was there. Quite a gathering of State senators. Do you remember much about those days?

GILLIS: Is that when Sanders was Governor?

SHORT: Mm-hmm. His first --

GILLIS: Yeah, I sure do. Carl Sanders and Betty, his wife, and my wife and family, we were all close friends and we took a lot of trips together, and J.B. Fuqua was real close to Carl Sanders and we were close to them. So we had a -- they used to visit with me. I had a -- built a home down at Jekyll Island after we bought -- M.E. Thompson bought Jekyll Island, which everybody said since then was the best buy the State of Georgia ever made.

SHORT: Yeah.

GILLIS: But anyhow, I built the first house down there. Other than what the Yankees already had down there – the northern people, and Carl and J.B. and their wives would visit with me a lot down there. And we took several trips around the country together.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: Carl did a great job as – as Governor.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And, in fact, some people say he was the first Governor of the New South.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And I guess he had enough funds in the budget to do a lot of things the other Governors couldn't do.

SHORT: His Lieutenant Governor was, Peter Zack Geer, who history, unfortunately, has sort of passed by. You knew Peter Zack very well. Tell us a little bit about him.

GILLIS: Peter Zack was a great Lieutenant Governor, and one of the best presiding officers that

I ever served under. In fact, I believe, and I've heard a lot of other people say he was the best presiding officer to ever hit that capital. He knew the rulebook from top to bottom, and he didn't have to look up a rule. And he presided over several joint sessions of the Legislature, and did an outstanding job. In fact, he was presiding when we had the three-governor row.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And we – I had a lot of respect for him, and I was hoping he might get elected Governor, but for some reason or other, he couldn't get his campaign going right, and was defeated.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: But he was a good friend of mine.

SHORT: You have served under thirteen Governors.

GILLIS: Fourteen now.

SHORT: Fourteen.

GILLIS: I told you the other day thirteen, but I wasn't thinking about it -- our present Governor.

SHORT: Yeah.

GILLIS: I hadn't counted. I counted the ones on the book. Yeah. But it didn't list the present Governor.

SHORT: Yeah. Yeah. Let's talk for a minute about some of them.

GILLIS: All right, sir.

SHORT: Of course, Gene Talmadge was Governor when you went --

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: --To the Legislature in 1941. He was succeeded by Ellis Arnall. We've talked a little bit about him.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Arnall was actually succeeded by Melvin Thompson.



GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: We talked about that.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Then after Thompson, there was Talmadge.

GILLIS: Was who?

SHORT: Talmadge. In 1948 Talmadge defeated Melvin Thompson for Governor.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And then was elected to a full four year term, so he was there six years.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: And we've talked about Talmadge. Then there was Griffin, we mentioned him. Then there was Vandiver, we mentioned him. Then Sanders. And then it comes up to 1946, when we

had another Governor misunderstanding when Lester Maddox got the Democratic nomination.

Bo Calloway was the Republican candidate. We had an election. Nobody won. It went to court.

It came back to the Legislature, and the Legislature elected the Governor -- Lester Maddox. Do you remember that debate?

GILLIS: I sure do. Lester Maddox is the only Governor we've had that never had much education. I don't think he ever went past 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, or somewhere along that, but he worked all his life. In fact, he had to, I think, to help support his family, and as far as I know, Lester Maddox was honest and if he ever mistreated -- I don't want to say mistreated -- if he ever tried to take something that wasn't his -- after he got in the State government, he never tried to move anything that would benefit himself. He ran the State of Georgia for the people of the State of Georgia. In fact, he created People's Day in the Capitol, and every Friday afternoon, and -- they would -- when the legislature wasn't in session probably all day Friday. But anyway, he would listen to the public. Anybody could come and talk to him, and he had his department handy where they could -- he'd turn them over to them if they had a problem that the department head could solve, and he did everything he could to try to represent the people of Georgia. And another thing he did was appoint people to office that he thought would do the best job regardless of whether they supported him or not. He was one of the few Governors that did that, so I enjoyed serving with Lester.

I was president pro-tem while he was Governor. And I'll tell you something else, he was always on time. And when the time came for the gavel to fall, he was there, except one morning, and we

kept waiting around then and waiting and finally he never did come, and I said, Well, I being pro-tem, I'll go up there and get the preliminaries over with." Roll call, committee reports and various things you have to do before you go into passing legislation, and I did. And finally he came in and he eased in back of me and sat down, and I thought he'd been sick. And finally I got a chance to turn around from the podium and talk to him. I said, "Governor, you been sick?" He said, "No. The house passed a bill for a two cent sales tax in Atlanta, and I stayed up all night, nearly, figuring on that, and that's – that was twice more than they need, and I went by the Mayor's office and talked to him about it, and he agreed with me, that it was twice more than they needed. So, when the bill comes over here at the House, I mean Senate, we're going to amend it to 1%." So we did, and sent it back to the House, and they agreed with us. But he saved, right then, the people of Georgia in Atlanta -- well a lot of people in Georgia shop there -- millions of dollars, and not one word I've ever seen in the newspaper about it to give him credit for it. But I know personally he's the one that did it.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. A lot of people were apprehensive about Maddox when he was elected, but he turned out – he fooled them.

GILLIS: He sure did.

SHORT: He fooled them. He made a good Governor.

GILLIS: I never saw a man in my life love his wife any more than he did. He would write me a letter and the first or second paragraph he'd say something about his dear wife, Virginia, and how much he loved her. And he's one of the few that left office, as far as I know, broke.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: He had a lot of family trouble with his children and one thing and another, and he had some health problems. And I also don't believe he ever took in any extra money that people offered him much. So when he left office, I think he was broke. In fact, the other Governors, Carl Sanders and different Governors got together and George Busbee and Barnes and they all raised a bunch of money to give to him to help pay him out of debt.

SHORT: 1966, during that period when we had no Governor-elect, the state legislature decided it was going to become independent. And, led by speaker George L. Smith, they – they did that. But as I have observed the General Assembly over the years, I found – I found the Senate to always be independent.

GILLIS: [Laughs]. Well, most of the time they were, I'd have to admit.

SHORT: Yeah. Now, you served on a number of committees in the Senate: Natural Resources, Appropriations, and all of the key big committees, which one was your favorite?

GILLIS: Well, I was chairman of the Natural Resources and Environmental Quality for 24 years. And, of course, that included Forestry, which we are really interested in personally in our area, and as far as that goes statewide, it's one of the biggest industries we have in the State of Georgia. And the environment, and you see something in the paper everyday about the environment nearly, and something – you have to have rules and regulations to control. And a lot of those things came up before my committee and we had study committees to look into it and people would recommend what we ought to do and we came up with legislation that tried to solve a lot of those problems. And I enjoyed that. If you asked me which committee I enjoyed the most, that was it. Now, as far as getting something done is concerned, I was chairman of the Appropriations Committee for many years, and we -- we did a lot of work in that. Appropriating funds for -- as far as that goes, for education, and our colleges and all of our – all of our institutions, and departments. It was a job; I'll tell you that now. The chairman of Appropriations Committee is no easy job.

SHORT: Well, being a legislator is almost a full time position, isn't it?

GILLIS: Well it is, especially when you represent an area like I have. I was rather amused, there's one Senator up there never had a town in his district. He's out there in the urban area of Atlanta and nothing but residences, and I couldn't hardly believe that, because down here you've got to go to Dublin, you've got to go to the Chamber of Commerce, you've got to go to all these

various clubs and this, that, and the other. Same thing over there in Emanuel. Same thing in Toombs. They keep you busy all the time.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Full time.

GILLIS: Yes, sir. And if you don't go, then they'll say, "Well, he don't think much about us." That's a good way to lose elections.

SHORT: Well, you never had much serious opposition. The only time I can recall is in 1972, I believe it was, when you had an opponent.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: A strong opponent that was – that you defeated, but it was, you know, a fairly close election, wasn't it?

GILLIS: That was when Carter had him – Cecil Passmore running.

SHORT: Cecil Passmore.

GILLIS: And there was a black fellow in that race too, from – from Dublin. See, there were two

from Lawrence County running, and myself.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And I had the most votes.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: Of the three, but I didn't majority, so we had a run off, and the black candidate went with me, and we defeated Mr. Carter's candidate.

SHORT: Why was Mr. Carter interested in having an opponent for you?

GILLIS: Well, I don't know. I told you earlier a story, which I won't quote any more about it, but that was one of the reasons, I guess-- because we didn't support him. My father didn't support him, and, of course, I never went against my father in politics. So Carter knew I didn't vote for him and he didn't – he didn't have to do me a lot of favors, but I was not going to sit up there and see him abolish the Forestry Department, one of the best departments we had in Georgia and – and harm our Natural Resources Department. I didn't want to do that. So, that was the main disagreement we had.

SHORT: Otherwise you got along fine?

GILLIS: Oh yeah. Yeah, if I were to see him right now, he'd come up and hug me. Glad to see me and so forth, you know. I got nothing against him personally. His wife is a good lady.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about reorganization under Governor Carter. His reorganization plan met with some pretty strong opposition in the Senate headed by the Lieutenant Governor, Lester Maddox, and they had quite a battle back and forth over that – over the reorganization plan. What really were they fighting about?

GILLIS: Well, Bob, you asked me something now, and I can't give you an exact answer on it. But the main thing in my opinion was that it was cutting out a lot of the Senator's districts, taking away a lot of their leading candidates and given them to somebody else. It was not a map that we agreed with at all.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: So that – and, of course, Lester – Governor Maddox, went along with the leadership in the Senate on it.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Well we talked about the Governors you've served with. Let's talk for a



minute about some of the Lieutenant Governors. We mentioned Peter Zack, Garland Byrd was one.

GILLIS: Garland did a good job. He was a good presiding officer and as far as I know, we had no problems in the Senate as long as Garland was our presiding officer. I enjoyed working with him.

SHORT: And he once decided to run for Governor, but withdrew--

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: --The year that Carl Sanders was elected.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Now let's talk about a fellow who was Lieutenant Governor of Georgia for sixteen years. That's a long time.

GILLIS: [Laughs]

SHORT: Of course, that's Zell Miller.

GILLIS: Ol' Zell Miller.

SHORT: Zell Miller

GILLIS: Yes, sir.

SHORT: You and Zell were friends.

GILLIS: Yes, sir.

SHORT: Tell me about him.

GILLIS: Well, Zell was -- as you know, was an educator. He was born and reared at Young Harris and his father taught school at Young Harris College. And after Zell got out of college, he went into the Marines, and he came back out of the Marines and I never will forget him. He ran for the Senate and got elected and when he came over to the Senate, he had a little -- he still had a little Marine crew cut, just like he had in the Marines. And he retired out of the Marines as a sergeant, and you know he had to be tough --

SHORT: [Laughs]

GILLIS: -- Back then to be a sergeant, especially in the Marines, because they were – they were some kind of organization. And Zell really, I thought, after he served in the Senate, he learned all about State Government and so forth and he knew what he wanted to do, and he was a strong promoter of education and --

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: He, every move he made, it was, in my opinion, for the betterment of the state government of Georgia. He made an outstanding Lieutenant Governor and Governor.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. That was a period of time when there was a lot of battle between Speaker Murphy and Miller over issues. Do you remember any of those?

GILLIS: Well, to begin with, they cooperated and worked together. But for some reason or other, later on during the years they got – had problems with one – some legislation, and, of course, Murphy didn't take no for an – maybe for an answer. He had a yes or a no, and he'd tell you right quick what he thought about you. So I imagine he told Zell what he thought about him and then wound up their friendship. But, Zell didn't back up. He held his ground, too.

SHORT: Yeah.

GILLIS: And after awhile there they would compromise and come together and solve the problem.

SHORT: Well, tell me if this is not true. Legislative politics is different from other politics in that your success in legislating law is coalition building – putting people together. One day your – your opponent on a piece of legislation might be your biggest ally the next day. Isn't that true? Don't you find that true?

GILLIS: That's true. And that was – that was – if you want to know my – my main asset in the Senate was getting a coalition of friends. And most of the time I could go around on one side and see two or three at once – my close friends, and they would spread the word and go on the other side, the same way, and they would spread the word, and we had a – we stayed together. And for instance, I never will forget – you remember Hodge Timmons?

SHORT: Hodge Timmons, oh yes.

GILLIS: Was in the Senate and our formal Lieutenant Governor from Albany --

SHORT: Mark Taylor

GILLIS: -- Mark Taylor came up there into the Senate and he was sitting by Hodge on the opposite side of the Senate from me, and he turned to Hodge and he said, "Hodge, how do you know how to vote on all these bills? They all of them different, or something, different things, different times, different this." He said, "Senator, ain't no problem at all." He said, "You see that bald headed man sitting right over there on the other side?"

SHORT: [Laughs]

GILLIS: He said, "Yeah, he said, when he holds up his hand, you hold up your hand." [Laughs]

SHORT: [Laughs]. Well, that's good advice. Now, let's talk for a minute about some more Governors. Joe Frank Harris was in the Legislature for many years as chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Were you -- were you chairman of the Senate Committee at the same time?

GILLIS: That's right.

SHORT: You all got along pretty well together?

GILLIS: Real good.

SHORT: What do you think of Joe Frank as a Governor?

GILLIS: Joe Frank was – and his wife – were the most religious people that ever came to the Legislature, in my opinion. For instance, before he was sworn in as Governor, he had a service over at the Methodist Church an hour prior to his being sworn in.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And he never, in my opinion -- I never heard him use a bad word in my life, and he always considered doing the right thing. He was a topnotch governor.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And as far as I know, he hadn't had a problem, but he was – he and his wife were good people.

SHORT: His opponent in the Democratic primary was a gentleman from near here, Bo Ginn, who is a former congressman.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: And he was a very strong opponent. And Joe Frank managed to win that and most people think it was because he went on the air in a statewide radio broadcast promising no new taxes. Now that was years ago, but I think that's a pretty good campaign slogan, don't you?

GILLIS: No doubt about it. No doubt about it. In fact that's about the best way I know of to get beat is to campaign around and tell them you are going to raise the taxes.

SHORT: Yeah. And then there was Roy Barnes, who I guess served with you in the Senate.

GILLIS: Oh, yeah.

SHORT: And he was elected Governor. How was he?

GILLIS: Roy was a good Senator, and did a good job representing his district and I thought did a good job as Governor, but he didn't serve but one term, and that was it. He was a friend of mine and I got along with him real good.

SHORT: Also, another one of your fellow Senators is Sonny Purdue, who was elected Governor -- who defeated Barnes.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Purdue was President Pro-Tem of the Senate.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: As a Democrat.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: And then he switched parties.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: What did you think of that?

GILLIS: I didn't criticize him any, because at that particular time I was – I would vote with the Republicans occasionally. Their floor leader would come around and ask me to vote with them. If it was a good bill, I'd vote with them, I mean, but we had a lot of Democrats that just voted right down the line against everything that Republicans proposed. Well, sometimes they had good bills.



SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And for instance, one time Sonny had a bill that was a good bill and the Democrats wanted me to propose the bill because it was a good bill, and it was Sonny's bill.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: So, I couldn't turn them down, but what I did, I went around and told Sonny. I said, "Sonny, I'm going to have to present your bill, but you can follow me and you come up there and give me hell and you can give the ones that set up the agenda for the day all the trouble you want to." But I said, "It wasn't any of my business. I'm going to present the bill and it's going to pass."

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: Because it's a good bill. And you can follow me and what I don't talk about the bill, you can finish telling and then, like I say, you can give us trouble about it if you want to.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: But so Sonny did. He followed me and he told them what all was in the bill and then he lit in on the leadership, and when he got through, Mark Taylor said, "Cry me a river."

SHORT: Oh, that famous statement?

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: Came back to haunt him.

GILLIS: Yeah.

SHORT: We've talked about Governors. We talked about Lieutenant Governors, and now with your permission, I'd like to talk about some other famous Georgia characters who served in the legislature, like Culver Kidd.

GILLIS: Culver was a character, I'm telling you. I enjoyed serving with him, but you never knew what he was going to do. He would – might tell you something one time and do the other, but he wasn't – he wasn't doing it just for the fun of it. He was doing it for just – just didn't, you couldn't place him a lot of times. But he really enjoyed his service in the Legislature. And he did a good job, I'll have to say, for Baldwin County and Milledgeville and the state facilities, and he was always supporting them.

SHORT: Now, Senator, I'd like to ask you about Leroy Johnson.

GILLIS: Leroy. Well, he was a good friend of mine. He sure was. And we worked together. I might tell you this story. I might not need to repeat it, but anyway, he -- the press found out about Leroy and me were good friends, and they wanted a picture of Leroy and me shaking hands. Leroy had some special bill. I don't know what it was, but I told him I'd help him with it. So that morning I came in to sit down at my desk and there was this photographer right in front of me on the floor with his camera trained right on me -- on my desk. So, Nathan Dean was sitting by me and I said, "Nathan, go back there and tell Leroy, if he wants to see me, I'll meet him in the bathroom, so -- and not come down here." So he sat there the whole session and, of course, Leroy never came. [Laughs]

SHORT: [Laughs]

GILLIS: And after the session, this photographer came over to me. He said, "Senator, I want to get a picture of you shaking hands with Senator Johnson. Would you come back in the back and shake hands with him?" And I said, "No." Is said, "You been sitting there all the morning trying to get that picture. You ain't going to get it now, either." See, they wanted to put a big story in the paper about that, and I don't know what they were going to say about it. You never know and all.

SHORT: Yeah.

GILLIS: I just told Leroy I'd help him with his bill, whatever it was. I went over to the – to the baseball game what afternoon, and had a ticket on this back of the third base line, and I was going down the hole on the second floor of the – wherever its booths are -- going to my seat, and ran into Leroy. That was after he got out of the Senate. You know, he was manager of that stadium and, "Hey, Senator, where you going?" I said, "I'm going to my seat down here back of the third base." He said, "No you're not. You're going to sit in my box right down here in the third door on the left. And any time you come over here in a ball game, don't you get a seat, you come to my box. You can sit there anytime you want to." Of course, I didn't go back to any ball games much, I don't think. But anyway, I sat there and enjoyed the ball game, but he was a fellow, if you did him a favor, he'd do you a favor. I mean, he's just that kind of fellow.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And I think the people in his district liked him, as far as I know.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Yeah, he was reelected. He ran for mayor of Atlanta though and was defeated.

GILLIS: Well, that's a different deal. The whole city of Atlanta.

SHORT: That's true. That's true. Tell me about Bobby Rowan.

GILLIS: Bobby was a good, close friend of mine. We always worked together. He and Frank Harris and -- he was, of course -- served in the Senate, you know, several years, and then was a lobbyist, and I guess still is.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: As far as I know.

SHORT: Well, he also was elected to the Public Service Commission.

GILLIS: Right. Public Service Commissioner. If I wanted -- happened to want something or I wanted to find out something through that organization, all I had to do was call Bobby.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: So, he was like Leroy. He'd return a favor.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Are there any other Senators you served with that you would like to talk about?

GILLIS: Well, I had a lot of good friends in the – in the Senate, and they were good people. Nathan Dean, for instance, sat right by me and Ronnie Bowen, and they were all good people and did a good job representing their district. Al Holloway was a good – we already mentioned him -- was a good friend, a good Senator. I could name a lot of them, but I always got along real good in the Senate with – had no problems in particular.

SHORT: Mm.

GILLIS: I don't think I ever lost a bill. Never lost one.

SHORT: That's another record that will never be broken. Well, come to think of it, we hadn't mentioned that you served 55 years and 7 months. How did it come out for the 7 months there.

GILLIS: Well, that's easy to explain, we talked about reapportionment before and the last time we reapportioned was 205 – 204 and I was in the Senate and Senator Williams down here, a Republican from Lyons, Georgia, was sort of – he drew up the map for the Republicans, and there again, he was a good friend of mine. And he came over and asked me how I wanted my district drawn, and I told him, and we made some changes and some – some he couldn't make.

But anyhow, he drew up a map that was real good as far as I was concerned, and it passed the Senate by a big majority. And we sent it over to the House and they never would even take it up.

SHORT: Mm.

GILLIS: Never would, and they never would send us a map to vote on, so there was nothing could be done except turn it over to the courts.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And they said if we didn't do it by a certain day, then they were going to do it. And that day came and they took it over. And taking it over, they did not want any advice from any of us. They were going to do the reapportion. And it wasn't any use for me to go tell them how that I wanted my district or how to do it, so I never got -- never had any communication with them whatsoever and I don't know if some of them -- some people might, but I don't know who it was. But they drew completely new districts -- district lines. Put me in the district with Senator Hill.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: A good friend of mine from down at Reedsville. And he was chairman of the

Appropriations Committee and always helped me with appropriations and while I was – we were in there together. In fact, I served with his daddy. I don't know whether you ever knew him or not.

SHORT: Wilton.

GILLIS: He later became head of the school driver's association. School Bus Drivers. And we were good friends. He sat by me. So I had no intention of running against Jack Hill, and happened to run into the Governor down here in Vidalia at a meeting, and he said, "Hugh, I want to talk to you." And I said, "All right. Come on and ride back." He was going to Dublin to another meeting. "Come on and ride with us in the van and I'll talk to you on the way up there." So, I got on the van with him and Senator Hill and Senator from down there at Lyons, and two or three representatives were already in the van. And he started up the conversation before we got back to Soperton and wanted to know how we'd like to serve on the Ports Authority. I said, "Well, Governor. I've got no intention of running for the Senate anymore. I served my time and I'm in a new district and I certainly don't want to run against Senator Hill." He said, "Well how about me appointing you on the Ports Authority?" I said, "Well, that would be great. I think it's a great organization and doing an outstanding job and I think I would enjoy that." He said, "Well this – that's how the seven months comes in, see?"

SHORT: Mm-hmm.



GILLIS: He said, "Well, I'll go back and appoint you now." I said, "No. I want to go to the last national convention, which is going to be the last of June, and out in Salt Lake City."

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: "And soon as I come back from Salt Lake City, I'll come down to your office and you can swear me in." And he said, "Well, that'll be fine." So that's the way it came in.

SHORT: That's the seven months.

GILLIS: See, the legislation was over. Wasn't anything else I could do for my constituents particularly except make calls, and I still do that.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: They call me quite often right now and want me to – in fact, I had a fellow stop me out at Meiers today.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: Wanting me to call the university over at Augusta and one at Mercer to try to get one of his friends in the med school, so you don't ever get over it. You have to – they'll call you right on.

SHORT: Well, we've talked about politics for a long time. Now, let's talk about Hugh Gillis.

GILLIS: [Laughs]

SHORT: You were born right here in Soperton.

GILLIS: That's a bad subject. [Laughs]

SHORT: That's a great subject.

SHORT: You were born right here in Soperton?

GILLIS: Out here in the country, oh, four miles from Soperton.

SHORT: Grew up here. What was it like then?

GILLIS: Well, it was an entirely -- like I said, different situation. I told you, we had no paved

roads. I'd seen cars bogged down in on the street in Soperton. And I came up -- we were on the farm and I came up, what you call -- might call the hard way of farming. I plowed a lot of mules. I used to come to town when I -- before I could even plow and bring -- I'd pull up peanuts on Friday, pick them all Friday afternoon and have them boiled Saturday morning and bring them to town on a bale of cotton. Ride on top of a bale of cotton on the wagon and come up to town here and sell them on the street, and if I -- nickel a bag, and if I made me \$2.00 or a \$1.50, I was rich. And then -- was farming right on, and on Saturdays, my uncle, Jim Peterson, owned a grocery store and dry goods store combined. Dry goods on one side and grocery on the other. And I worked in the grocery store on Saturdays and started in the morning, early Saturday morning, and back then, everybody came to town on Saturday. Had nothing else to do. So the streets would be crowded with people walking up and down the streets and they'd come to town on their wagons and shop, and by 10:00 we'd close Saturday night. Then we had to sweep the sidewalks, and clean out the store. I'd get home about 11:00 on Saturday night. When I went off to college, I had money in the bank that I had made the so-called hard way working on the farm and in the grocery stores and I'd also load up my pony and little wagon I had with watermelons or cantaloupes, or whatever we had out there and bring them to town, peddle them out, 15 cents, quarter a piece, whatever. I came up working and trying to make some -- enough funds to go to college on.

**SHORT:** So you went over to the University of Georgia.

GILLIS: Well, I went to GMC first.

SHORT: GMC?

GILLIS: Yeah. I graduated from Truetlen High School, here. Eleventh grade, and then I went on to twelfth grade back then. Went on to GMC for one year.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

GILLIS: And Georgia three years.

SHORT: And majored in agriculture?

GILLIS: Majored in agriculture and came back home and went to farming. Then went to politicking.

SHORT: Politics. Did you join your family's business back then, or do – did you start on your own?

GILLIS: I joined the family business. I was working for daddy the whole time.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Yeah. Well, tell us a little bit about your – your company, Gillis Ag and Timber.

GILLIS: Well, it's originally from my business here, I could say when I was farming with mules, and then I brought the first tractors into the county to farm with. Some people said you couldn't plow with them, but we did, and we showed people we could. And I set up a John Deere agency here and then I had a Pontiac agency for about ten years, and that was Gillis Brothers. That was my brother and me, but he had nothing to do with it. I ran it all. In fact, he didn't ever come over here hardly. And then that Gillis Brothers, Union Camp started in – really in the pulpwood business in Savannah.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And I had a dealer here in Soperton, Jimmy Lawton. And Jimmy passed away and his wife took it over, and she – she did not – didn't want – didn't operate it and the Union Camp crowd wanted me to take it over, which I did, and that's where Gillis Ag and Timber came in. We had agriculture, with tractors and so forth, and what we did was have pulpwood operators bringing in pulpwood up here into a pulpwood yard on the railroad.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And we would ship it by the car – car load -- open car, you know.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: To Savannah. And that was Gillis Ag and Timber.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And that's the way that started.

SHORT: And you've been operating it all these years?

GILLIS: I did until I – when I went to the Legislature and my son, Hugh, got out of university he had always farmed with us and worked with us, and anything I was doing he was doing and so forth. He knew everything that I did so I turned it over to him. And then he has a son named Ben, and Ben is in there now, I think. He and Ben operate Gillis Ag and Timber.

SHORT: Mm.

GILLIS: They work with International Paper. You know, I think I told you before. Union Camp sold out to International.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And they didn't – they didn't want to do all the office work and they – you have to supervise these loggers, because there's certain rules and regulations and --

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: --If you don't abide them, they'll take you – take your license away from you. So we have to – we have to supervise and see that everything is done according to the rules.

SHORT: Do you saw your own timber or do you buy it?

GILLIS: Both. Both. We have about 8 timber cruisers and they go out and cruise timber and different companies will bid on it and if we're the low bidder – the high bidder, then we move – we move one of our loggers on it.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: We have one of our own personal logging operations called Soaps and Naval Store. That's what the name of our turpentine company was that we had. The Chinese put us out of

business as far as making rosin and turpentine.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: There's no more of that going on. Langley's, you know was the largest in the country. We were probably second, but there's not going on at the present time. So, we still have a logging operation of our own, and we call it Soaps and Naval Stores and some of our farming operation is still operating under that name.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. So you have a son, Hugh, Jr. You have another son and a daughter.

GILLIS: Yes, sir. I have a son that was recently sworn in as a Superior Court Judge. He was a state court judge this county and Governor Purdue swore him in about, oh, four or five months ago as a Superior Court Judge.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And my daughter married down in Adel, Georgia. Married E. J. Harris. E.J. Harris. He's with the Vo-Tech schools.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.



GILLIS: In fact, he's a supervisor. He's been operating one at – for a while now at Valdosta, and not they got him sort of moving from one – about three different ones, sort of supervising and operating. And Jean Marie, my daughter, is teaching kindergarten.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And she's been teaching now almost 20 years.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. I want you to think about this, Senator. If you had your career to do over again, would you do anything differently?

GILLIS: I don't believe so. I don't know what else I'd like to do. Like I say, I was born and reared here and if I'd have picked another vocation, I'd have probably had to leave this country, go to Atlanta or some other state. I've always been happy living right here and socializing with people in our territory.

SHORT: So you never thought about running for a State office?

GILLIS: No, sir. There's a lot of people that asked me about running for Congress and I told them I wouldn't run – wouldn't run – I wouldn't go to Washington if they gave me the Capitol

up there.

SHORT: Okay.

GILLIS: I just never had a desire to do that.

SHORT: Well, you are certainly an icon in Georgia politics and --

GILLIS: Well, I've enjoyed it and I give my family credit for it. I couldn't have done it, you know, without my daddy. He was always a good advisor, and knew a lot of people in the area, district, and, of course my -- when we had a campaign, my wife, Jean, she always organized a group of ladies and they -- they went from town to town giving out cards and my daughter, Jean Marie, belonged to a group called the Gillis Girls and they were about ten or twelve years old and they came -- they'd go into a town like Mt. Vernon down here.

SHORT: Mm-hmm

GILLIS: And had on little Gillis Girl hats and little jackets and a handful of cards and they go in every store and give out my cards and ask them all -- everybody they give a card to, ask them to vote for me. So I'd have to give me family a lot of credit for my success.

SHORT: What was your proudest moment?

GILLIS: Proudest moment? I guess that the termination of some of these elections. I don't know. I wouldn't pick a certain one, but going back that way, let's see – the birth of some of my children, would certainly, certainly be among the tops.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And my marriage to – I had a great marriage to Jean. We lived together about 40 years. Had a lot of good times together and now, I – after she passed away I married Montez Champion, and she was working in Atlanta at the Radisson Hotel up there and we met and became friends and we been married 7 years now and we get – had a lot of good experiences together.

SHORT: Has anything ever disappointed you?

GILLIS: Well, that's a good question, Bob. I guess I would have to say that when the election we were talking about when Jimmy Carter was Governor and I had a run off, that was – it was disappointing to have to have – to be involved in a run off.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: All the rest of them I won on the first ballot.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. One last question.

HUGH GILLIS: Yes, sir.

SHORT: What advice would you give a young political hopeful, who wants to become a public official?

GILLIS: Well, and the main thing he has to do is meet the people, and when I say meet the people, you can't – you can't tell a fellow, no I'm not going to do this. Or I guess it can't be done. You always got to tell them you'll help them if you can.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: And do it if you can. That's another thing. A lot of times, in fact, I had a fellow out at my house yesterday checking on a problem out there and I never – I hadn't seen him in 15 or 20 years and he said, "You got me a job one time." I don't remember it, but I guess that I might have, but you can't – you can't turn people down, and you got to get out and work at it. You can't just announce for office and stay at – stay put. You've got to get involved.

SHORT: Well, I said final question, but I have one more.

GILLIS: Yes, sir?

SHORT: How would you like to be remembered?

GILLIS: Hmm. As a good – good public servant. Good public servant. And as an honest public servant. I don't know of any other way to describe it. I certainly wouldn't want to be remembered any other way as a bad – as a dishonest or a bad person.

SHORT: Well, you've certainly been a good public servant, and we thank you for sharing some of your experiences with us here today.

GILLIS: Well, I've enjoyed it and I appreciate you all coming down and, if you need any other information that I can supply or give, I'll be glad to do it. Like I told you – told you earlier, though, and I don't mind repeating it, I'm 89, be 90 in about September the sixth. Your memory is not as good now as it used to be.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: So, I've tried to answer your questions and some times maybe in a round about way,

but it was because I couldn't remember something, but --

SHORT: Well, you did great, and we appreciate it.

GILLIS: Well, we try. Let's put it that way. That's another thing. You can't -- can't do, I can't say no. You have to try as hard as you can.

SHORT: Would you talk a little bit about political parties?

GILLIS: Well, I think I stated before that while I was in the Senate, I voted with the Republicans occasionally because if they had a good bill, I saw no reason why not to vote for it. No reason to sit there and just vote no, when you know it's -- you're not going to accomplish anything. It's going to pass anyhow, so I'm -- I don't understand enough about this present national election to give you an honest opinion on it. I don't know -- I never heard of Obama until he announced, you know, a while back.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: I don't -- I'm not a -- born and reared a Democrat, and I guess I'll Democrat, but if -- if I think a Republican is a better candidate, I'm going to vote for a Republican.

SHORT: Senator, some disenchanted Democrats in Georgia think the state party is controlled too much by minorities and labor unions at the expense of the rural old-line Democrats. Do you think that's true?

GILLIS: Well, they have a lot of influence. There's no doubt about that. But I know whether they control it. There's more people outside of those two groups than there is in it, so they couldn't control it all, but they are involved politically in a lot of races, but I'm – there again, I don't think they control them.

SHORT: Do you see a bright path for Democrats in the future, or do you think our state still is going to be Republican?

GILLIS: I don't necessarily see it. I think if a good Democrat got out and campaigned enough and met enough people, he'd get reelected – get elected. Same way with a Republican. If he got – gets out here and out does the other fellow, he's going to get elected. People are not as much party concerned now as they used to be.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: Way back yonder it was – and you and me have talked about it earlier – it was a flat Democrat deal in Georgia. If you were a Republican, you were on the outside looking in. But

it's not that way anymore, so --

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Some states require registration by party.

GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: Do you -- do you support that?

GILLIS: No. Not necessarily. And if I did -- if a Democrat -- there again I don't think that means you would have to vote flat straight Republican ticket. No I wouldn't support it if I had to just vote a ticket without concern for the other side.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

GILLIS: I like to look -- look at the candidate. There're a lot of candidates in both organizations that are good people.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Well it seems the trend is that way. That independents who are not devoted particularly to either party seem to be the -- seem to elect the candidates. They look at -- they look at the Republican; they look at the Democrat in the general election and they vote independently.



GILLIS: Right.

SHORT: But do you think that there's a place for a third party in Georgia?

GILLIS: I don't think so. If they did, they'd have a lot of work to do to ever succeed.

SHORT: Yeah.

GILLIS: I think that the trend in Georgia right now is for people to vote for the candidate regardless of what he is, even though he might be an independent.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Okay. Good. Okay, Senator, I thank you very much.

GILLIS: Well, I appreciate you all coming down, and I didn't -- don't know whether I --

SHORT: You did good.

GILLIS: -- Gave you the right information or not.

SHORT: You did good.

[END OF RECORDING]

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