

Eunice Mixon interviewed by Bob Short

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Eunice Mixon

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia. We have a very special guest today,

Eunice Mixon, who is a longtime Georgia political activist and public servant. Most people in Georgia know you as Miss Eunice. Can I refer to you as Miss Eunice?

Well, Miss Eunice, I'd like to begin, if you don't mind, by asking you to tell us about yourself and growing up in Tifton, Tift County, Georgia.

EUNICE MIXON: I would like to. Unfortunately, we don't have time for me to tell you all about those wonderful people that helped make me be what I am, and the people that helped me do whatever the things that I got done, and the things that they did that I was able to help them with. I believe that I was a child of fortune, even though I was born on a small South Georgia farm where the economy had not changed much since Reconstruction. And I came from people - - my parents did not go to college, but they were, I know now, enlightened people. The people before them - - there have been doctors and lawyers as uncles - - uncles and aunts - - but my direct line was always farmers. But they were able to convey to me - - I don't remember them saying, but you just knew - - that you did what you could for the neighbors, and your neighbors ripple out a long way sometimes. Sometimes people a long way from that small farm in Tift County made a difference to what happened to your neighbors. I can remember, say, if someone was going to run for sheriff or county commission, those kind of candidates would come by and sit on the front porch and talk with Daddy.

Maybe I should tell you why I got to hear so much. We were such bad kids, my parents could stand only one at a time. And I had a big brother who was a - - there's twenty years - - well, there were three of us - - twenty years between my brothers, and I came in between. And my big

brother was a teenager by the time I can remember him. And then because I married two months past 17, but I finished high school at 16, and Momma and Daddy thoroughly approved of Albert, they just didn't approve of my age. My mother was, "Well, at least one of you is grown." And I used to tell them the best thing I ever did for them was to get them a good son that would stay in South Georgia with them.

But we had - - and so I can remember sitting at the table with my big brother, and then I can remember being the only one at the table. And then my little brother started school the year after I married. And I don't think I ever heard the term used, the word "babysitter," in South Georgia. If my parents had - - if there was some - - if there was something that they were afraid you'd catch - - oh, Lord, the summer I stayed home when polio was around - - you stayed with Grandma and Grandpa when they went to town. But - - and I would - - so I was always either with Momma or Daddy.

Now my mother - - my mother and father belonged and took me to the Brookfield Baptist Church. We lived nearby, and my mother would get out a parasol, and we would walk the short distance down to what you'd call the village of Brookfield. And my mother would go to missionary meetings, PTA meetings in the afternoons, and visit people. And - - but women, if there was anything interesting to talk about, they'd go to whispering. You didn't learn an awful whole lot. But with Daddy, whenever the truck cranked, you know, of course I'd be in it. And he'd say - - he called me Baby until I got married, and then he started calling me Miss Eunice. But he would say, "Baby, if you want to go with me, go powder your nose." And I'd go in and feel around on my mother's dresser until I found the powder box, and Daddy said I'd come out

looking like I'd been in the flour barrel sometimes, and off we'd go.

And we would go like to the general store in Brookfield - - a lot of interesting talk there. Men probably - - they probably didn't cuss as much then, though, anyway as they do now, so they - - I didn't hear cuss words. But, man, I heard all about Roosevelt; I heard about Talmadge; and I heard the reasons that it made a difference. But farmers are eternal optimists. And so, "This next crop is going to be better," and "This time we're going to elect somebody that'll be good for us." And I remember, oh, the tobacco market, the peanut mill, feed mill, wherever I went. And I believe having experiences with all kinds of people - - men as comfortably as women - - I think that stood me in good stead, because I got involved a little earlier, you know, when there was still a little bit of a culture of, really, "nice ladies don't get involved with that kind of thing."

My next good fortune was marrying a good man who - - he had fought World War II. He was 13 years older than I was, and when he came home, all he wanted to do was buy a little farm, and it never took anything to make him happy but his little farm and his wife and his boys. Of course, I always had something going. And when we had been married eight years, I told him that when - - now, let me tell you, I was a farm wife like they don't even make nowadays. When I started going to school, I told my husband they changed the whole mode of farming. When we first married - - now being a farmer's wife is a lot more trouble than being a farmer's daughter, a lot more work. And we had a small farm and a big mortgage, so he'd get on the tractor and I would take a crew to the field to hoe peanuts, sucker tobacco. And you have to take the lead row if anybody else is going to get much done. And when about the time I started to school, they started using herbicides for weeds, put maleic hydrazide on tobacco so you didn't have to sucker

it, I said, "You know what? They had to change the whole system. Y'all couldn't get along without me." They couldn't farm by hand like that anymore.

But anyway, when I told Albert that when the boys got older, I'd like to go to school, you didn't have people - - you had had a generation of young men who went to college on the GI bill, but by - - when I told my husband this, it was 1956, and that wave had kind of gone through. And it was just kind of a pipe dream. I had occupied those eight years with farm work, women's club work, Red Cross, church ladies' group, Sunday school, vacation Bible school, local home demonstration clubs, and I'd pretty well stayed off the street and out of trouble. And Johnny was born four years after we were married, and Jimmy was born three years later. And when he was a year old, I told Albert that when the boys got older, I wanted to go to school because I wanted to be a teacher. He said, "Why not go now?" Isn't that unusual?

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: For a South Georgia farmer to say, "Why don't you go now?" I think back over the years, I think that he just had a big, soft heart, and if I wanted something, he wanted me to have it, unless it cost more than he thought he could afford. And so, you know, just - - you can tell him, but you don't get it by cajoling, you don't get it by fussing. That's just the way it is. And I think, though, that in a way, he really siphoned off my energy some. And now this is - - now remember, politics has not entered my mind except to vote. I knew that it was important to vote. And when I was 40 years old, I had been teaching, and I had completed my masters and

completed my specialist, and that summer, I was looking for something new. And I thought that I would - - I thought playing golf would be fun. Well, it is until the sun gets up. Albert would go out with me, and he would - - you know, he was a natural athlete, and he would help me. But the trouble is, you can't play nine holes before - - I mean, no matter how early you start. That sun is up and it's hot, and if I'm going to stand out in the sun, I want to be doing some good, not just getting hot. And so that was the year that Busbee called me. They don't do it that way now.

SHORT: George Busbee.

MIXON: George Busbee. George Busbee called me at home after school. And we vaguely knew each other. I knew he headed appropriation because I had been part of a teacher's group that - - I'd met him a few times because he would meet with us when we'd talk about what teachers thought was important. And I know now that, okay, I was the best person he could get. You know why I was the best person? I was the only one. That makes you the best person. When he ran, remember Maddox assumed that Carter was just keeping the seat warm for him, you know, while he was lieutenant governor, and Maddox was going to come back and be governor again. Well, you've got some other well-qualified people thinking about the same thing. You've got Bert Lance, and, of course, his Carter friends in Tifton were close to him. David Gambrell, who was a senator, quite well qualified. And a Southwest Georgia hero, George T. Smith, we liked to say the only man that ever served in three branches of the government, who went to the same school that - - you know, the local school, Abraham Baldwin

Agricultural College. He's also a graduate of that, where I first went. And - - oh, and Bobby Rowan, and you just loved him to pieces, and he had such a great - - you remember what a great record he had in the senate. He changed some opinions of the backwards South Georgia, I think.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Very effective senator.

MIXON: Oh, he was tremendous. So I am not thinking about anything except - - oh, by the way, I taught science. I taught eighth grade general science, and then after I got other degrees, I taught high school biology and chemistry and physics. At one time, I taught human anatomy and physiology to nurse trainees at the college. Because, see, once you - - that's not as great as it sounds, to be certified to teach chemistry, physics, and biology through the college level, because as long as you've got three courses on the graduate level in a given topic, then you can teach that.

But anyway, I had a number of interesting strings to my bow and was really enjoying them, and our boys were growing up a little bit. But the telephone rings one afternoon and George Busbee tells me that he would like me to chair Tift County. Now I'll ask you something. You will agree with me that if that were today, you would have a staff person contacting somebody that had deep pockets, or someone that had - - if you contacted a woman, a woman's okay because they'll work. But he would locate a woman who either had money in her own right or who had a husband with a bunch of employees. That would be more likely. A little country girl like me would not be involved now. Now I'm on the scene, so they just use me for whatever, but I

wouldn't have had that kind of beginning.

So he calls me at home after school and asked if I would chair Tift County. And my very honest response, I remember - - it's a very dramatic moment for me - - but I said, "Are we that bad off?" Now you think about it. Now he's getting low in the jug if he's got to call an unknown teacher to chair the county. And I - - of course, all of these things I didn't know. I have normal intelligence, but there are things you just don't know. And I told him - - then, you know, he said things you ought to say. And I said, "Well, let me see if I can get somebody else to do it. I'll help you find somebody." But he kept saying very nice things, and I was never one to turn down a challenge, so my last word to him was, "I still think I ought to get somebody else, but if I can't, I'll do it, but I'll have to clear it with Albert." I said, "You know, he hates me to get on committees because I get so involved, but I know that he doesn't want Talmadge reelected." And now, I mean, Albert didn't wake up every morning thinking what an evil man Tal - - Maddox - - excuse me, I misspeak sometimes. My excuse is that my brain is only a computer and it's a very old model. But Albert, like me, felt the man was in over his head. He doesn't represent. He doesn't know Tift County. He doesn't know our culture. And so I knew Albert would be very happy to support George Busbee. The only question was - - I don't think he was as much unkind to me about kind of holding me down sometimes as he was protecting me. I know just about the only thing - - now of course, something he couldn't afford. Never mind that. We'll just drop that one, because bear in mind, he carried on his business like his grandfather, who was a Confederate soldier, would have done. If you had the money, you bought it. We'd been married - - Lord a mercy - - six, seven, eight years. I didn't - - if I wanted to go

somewhere, I had to use a pickup truck. He didn't buy me a car, because he couldn't afford to buy it, and he wasn't about to pay down on one. Of course, now me, I'd charge anything that'll let me.

But when - - this was really a turning point. I didn't realize it when I accepted that responsibility, but it really was, and my life would have been a great deal different if I had said, "Well, I've got, you know, more than I can do." But I liked George, and I couldn't - - and also, I thought at the time that I was going to get somebody else. So I did the logical thing. I drove to town and went in to see the chairman of the county commission and said, "Charles, I know good and well that you are not going to vote for Maddox with George Busbee available, and I know you're going to be a Busbee supporter, and it would just go great if you would chair his committee. I mean, we can carry the county." Wasn't I naïve? He said - - but he gave me the courtesy, thank goodness. You know how women have so often been patted on the head. But he gave me respect and he said - - I don't get patted on the head as much now. They respect an old head a little better. But Charles says, "Eunice, I can't do that. If I guess wrong, I take the county down with me." But I knew - - but I wanted him bad, and I said, "Well, I tell you what, Charles. If you do what you can in your way, I'll be the front man, and if anything good comes of it, the county can do it - - county can have it. What can they do for me? Give me a job? I've got more than I can do." And I just - - I just considered we'd cut a deal, and he carried out his part of the deal. I don't know - - I don't know what he said to whom, but from time to - - I probably didn't spend \$200, but that came from him or his friends. There was a time or two I wanted to do an ad. He carried out his part of the bargain, and I did too. Every once in a while - - boy, he could

think of more things. Let's see, what office was it that he loved so well? Oh, Department of Community -- is it --

SHORT: Community Affairs.

MIXON: Community Affairs, yes, where they give grants.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: And there was -- and he could think of more things. He got a lot of them, too, because he was smart enough to know the things that were worth the state paying attention to. And he would write his grant, and I would tell people that this was coming and that I personally knew, and other people knew, how valuable it was. I enjoyed that time very much. Albert was very cheerful about it. He would go along with me. You know, normally, he wouldn't leave the farm except to go to church or town, but during those years, he would be pretty cheerful about putting on a tuxedo and going where I wanted to go. And, of course, that's what being married is, taking turns doing what the other one wants to do. I'm glad that I got involved.

I'll tell you something else I thought about too. When I was thinking about getting involved, was this: I didn't think it as being -- think of it as being all that different from when I would gather up things to help my kids understand -- well, teenagers, mostly, that I taught -- but to show them or help them understand whatever it was that I wanted them to learn. Bear in mind,

when you start talking about the Krebs cycle of photosynthesis, there's not much sex appeal in that, and so you try to think of things that you know that they'll need sometime. And did you know the political climate - - not just my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren now - - the political climate affects their lives so much. All of those kids that I had all those years. I'd have this room full of them for a year, and they would do things that they really didn't particularly want to do, didn't think it was worth all that much, but they'd go along with me. And you work with them and you care what happens to them. They don't walk out of your room and you not care. And you don't want those kids to walk out of your room into a poisonous political atmosphere. You don't want them to walk out into poor economic conditions. And leadership - - leadership - - I don't suppose that leadership can make good things happen all the time, but they can be in a position to scuttle things sometimes. Of course, sometimes they can make good things happen. Albert used to tease me and say, "Honey, you'd stick with a former student if he stole a horse." I said, "Well, most of them don't go around stealing horses."

SHORT: So election day came in 1974. There was a runoff between Maddox, who many people thought would win, and George Busbee, who had been a great legislator, 18 years in the house, chairman of appropriations, probably knew as much about state government as anybody. And they get into a runoff. What happened then?

MIXON: That was so exciting. Remember, there was so little that I knew. I was just instinctive about - - look, if you spend your life trying to get teenagers to pay attention to you, you develop

some idea of what people might be interested in. I would - - I would fix meals for people - - no, no, that was before then. We're talking about - - we're talking about when you get to the nitty-gritty. Okay, Charles told me. I know I stayed up just about all night the night of the election because Charles had said that a certain level that we could beat - - if we could get in the runoff at a certain level, that we would be able to beat Talmadge. And so I kept - - to keep from waking Albert up, I would - - we didn't have cell phones then, and I'd go to a phone in the kitchen that had a long extension cord. And the bedroom was in the other end of the house, but he had told me about two o'clock it was time for me to get some sleep. So I would go down to the kitchen and pull the phone out the back door and call again to get the latest news that I could get. And so then we're into a runoff, and we had planned - - we planned a breakfast for him. You would've loved our sign. We had a sign at the Holiday Inn - - that's where you did things that were important - - and the sign said, "By George, this ain't Maddox country!" We thought that was clever. I'm sure it'd been used 100 years. By the way, didn't George have his, "Elect a work horse, not a show horse."

SHORT: Work horse, not a show horse.

MIXON: Didn't that work in with Maddox so well?

SHORT: It did.

MIXON: Now I did like the one with - - Sam had a good one. "Put Sam Nunn in Washington."

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: And this summer, we elected a wonderful senator. I had to vote in a Republican primary to get him, but this wonderful Judge Crosby, who was a retired Superior Court judge. We needed a senator bad.

SHORT: State senator.

MIXON: State senator. Yes, yes. And, of course, I couldn't contribute much except convince him that I'd - - try to convince him that I'd never known him to turn down a need before, and he'd just be an absolute shoo-in. I even - - I traded on my reputation a little bit, which isn't really ethical, but I thought that it was for a good cause. I said, "Now Judge Crosby, you've always said that I was good at picking a winner." And I said, "That being true, jump in!" Well, you say Albert invented the five-second delay for answering a question. Well, Judge Crosby invented the five-day delay for making a decision. But he ran. My gosh, he carried his home county like 72 percent, wiped everybody else out too. And some smart person - - somebody smarter than me - - came up with "You can count on Crosby." Just simply, "You can count on Crosby."

But we're talking about Busbee today, and the thing that I - - that I think that I'll mention this to

you. I used to didn't tell this when people asked me questions because I didn't like to reflect on people that had been friends. And it's really not all that bad, it's just part of the culture. It's part of the culture; it still lingers a little bit. Women have got long hair and short brains.

And so there was a gentleman who had been kind, but I think that he felt that - - he was a very prominent businessman, and he was pretty sure Maddox was going to get reelected. But if I were going to be - - you know, if I was stirring up such a dust, and I did stir up a little dust, I thought that - - I thought you were supposed to have a campaign headquarters. So I asked - - I'm going back to it because beforehand affects what happened later, this other story that I think I'll tell you. I think the ladies would appreciate it.

But I wanted a headquarters. You're supposed to have a political headquarters, I thought. I'd never seen one, but I thought you ought to have one. And so I asked Charles if he would ask Mr. Tommy Tift, who was a - - oh, gosh, I mix up my generations - - Captain Tift, who was the founder of Tifton, a Connecticut Yankee who married a local belle, Miss Bessie Willingham, and always said Tifton had that hybrid vigor with a Connecticut Yankee and the local girl. But he did not live in Tifton, but he had a lot of holdings in Tifton, and he was known to be a shrewd businessman. And I said, "Charles, I don't know that man and you do." I said, "When he comes to Tifton, you tell him that that corner where Brook's Drug Store used to be." I said, "That'd be a great corner for campaign headquarters." He said, "Okay."

So, you know, it's a couple of weeks and he finally gets to Mr. Tift. I said, "What'd he say?"

"I'm not going to tell you what he said, but he's not a Busbee man." Well, you can imagine how much that suited me. That building is sitting there empty, and it's the perfect place. So I found

out the lawyer's name that handled his real estate, and I went to that lawyer and I said, "You know, I know some of the Tift people. I know Miss Wheaty, his niece, is such a nice lady, and she and her husband Homer Rankin that owned the paper are good citizens. And I've always heard that he was a shrewd - - I cannot imagine a shrewd businessman letting a place stay empty." I said, "Would you ask him what he'd rent it for?" And I don't know where I'm going to get the money. I probably won't get it out of Albert, but I want the place. So I went another week or so, and he called me and said, "Come get the key." And I said, "What will it be?" He says, "Well, he told me I could do what I wanted to with it, and you just take it." I said, "Great." And I said, "You're going to get the biggest in-kind contribution credit that anybody ever got for an office building."

And so, let's see, the Atlanta headquarters helped me get the lights turned on, and probably had contact with - - see, I didn't know how to make these contacts, but if I got a headquarters, Atlanta helped me. They got a drink machine in there with free drinks. And the little Gazette boys would come by every afternoon with their newspapers and come in and get them a free drink, and I'd give them stuff to take out with them. And I had then - - now, see, I'm old; don't accuse me of being - - nobody should ever think that I was so naïve I was dumb enough to get in politics. I was old enough to know better. I was already a grandma. I was 40 years old. And I had this cute little granddaughter who was less than a year old. And if I had her for any time, I would take her down to the headquarters with me, and, see, we've got this plate glass window. Now I would not put her in the display, but, I mean, she's in the building, but, you know, right through the window. And I'd put her little playpen there, and she was so cute, and my brother

accused me of exploiting cute little girls for political purposes. But she had a good time, and I did too, and that all turned out real well.

Well, this - - then when we get in the runoff - - I know I need to tell you all the help that I had. The Tomlinsons, it's a young couple there, and they were talented and they helped me do some things, but I really didn't have much of a crew. I really didn't. It was just a few people that I - - because everybody assumed Maddox was going to get elected, and I don't think they were as active as they are now. I think that I'm wandering on, but old people wander on, so I'll just keep wandering on. But you're making me remember some good times when Albert was with me, and my family. Of course, now my boys were grown by then. There are two sons, and the youngest one had gone off to Atlanta to live with his uncle to go to school. And so it was Albert and me and not as big a tobacco crop as we had been dealing with, so - - but politics is a lot more interesting than playing golf, I can tell you right now, and a lot more useful. In fact, if I were an important businessman and had to play golf, you know what I'd do? I'd hire somebody to do it for me. I just simply would not fool with it.

Well, I had been wanting to go over to Savannah. I had never visited the Lutheran church there, a brick church that was built before the Revolution, still standing where my German ancestor was a member and his children, including my long-ago grandpa was christened. And Albert's people were across the river in South Carolina, and he had never been to the Mixon home places. So we had agreed early in the summer that we would go over there immediately after the election. And so we were going to be gone for about three days, and I was going to have a meeting. I had announced a meeting for, you know, like five days. Well, when the gentleman

businessman who I had - - was one of the people that I had asked to be the chairman, said that he, you know, just wasn't in a position to help me, but he would help me later on. Well, when Albert and I left town for three days, he called a meeting and - - of Busbee people. And, you know, Busbee people come out of the woodwork when he gets in the runoff with Maddox.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. Right.

MIXON: They're just all - - by the way, that's the way I established - - I don't think I deserve any particular credit. I knew George Busbee and I liked him, and I wasn't any big political guru. There was just somebody that was worthy of being governor, and I wanted to help him. But other people are afraid to be involved. They're afraid they'll lose. But shoot, you're not going to lose unless you risk winning. I mean, excuse me; again, I'm misspeaking. I think you know, though, before I straighten out my point that unless you are willing to step out and risk losing, you are never a winner. You sit on the fence and you don't lose, but you don't win either.

SHORT: That's what Marvin Griffin called a "tweensy."

MIXON: The what?

SHORT: Tweensy.

MIXON: Oh, I like that word! That's - - Bob, I knew that I'd learn some stuff from you.

SHORT: Oh, my goodness.

MIXON: I like that one. I like that one. Anybody that personally associated with Marvin Griffin and Talmadge and then the - - you associated with the whole range of Georgia politicians, you really did, because Carl Sanders, the epitome of the New South, viewed across the nation as progressive.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: And then our more colorful characters. I bet your computer's pretty well overloaded.

SHORT: Well, I came along at a very interesting time.

MIXON: Yeah. Well, now, I think those times, though, were better than now. It's interesting now, but you know one of the old curses was, "May you live in interesting times."

SHORT: Right. Right.

MIXON: And these times are just a little bit too interesting for me.

SHORT: That's true, yes.

MIXON: But remembering the fun times, good old Albert backing me up in whatever fool thing I wanted to do. And Charles, and there's another county commissioner. Charles Kent was the chairman of the county commission, and he moved on. He headed the state organization at one time. By the way, his wife Louise was a distant kin to me. You know, only southerners know things like that. You have to go back. I think that the Confederate soldier had a sister that was an ancestor of mine. But we claimed kin. I like Louise. So - - and he had a - - just about his best friend, I suppose, on the county commission was Ray Taylor. And all during the summer, the only real political meetings that were held, if I got concerned about something, I would call Charles and Charles would call Ray, and we would meet in the back of Charles' furniture store in the mornings, because in the afternoon, Charles stayed at the courthouse. And so we'd have our quick little conferences there. And when Albert and I - - jumping again, the needle; somebody bumped the old record.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: Does anybody remember the 33 rpm's?

SHORT: Oh, yes.

MIXON: And if you bumped the record, it would jump.

SHORT: Right.

MIXON: Well, when you're talking to me, I bump the record every once in a while. It drops another slot.

So Albert and I go off to South Carolina, and this man, who would not speak up, made his move, so to speak.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: So he calls everybody, and he - - they have a Busbee meeting. And this man nominates another prominent man to be - - "Miss Eunice did a great job during the campaign, but now that we're in the runoff, we men need to step forward to make sure it works out right." And so Charles and Ray both gave me great detail of how they defended my position and did not let somebody else take over at this point. They stood up and argued very forcefully that I had worked my head off all the summer and that it should not be taken from me. I probably did not - - it didn't cross my mind, probably, until a couple years ago that Charles and Ray were protecting their investment too. But that's fair.

SHORT: Sure.

MIXON: For goodness sake. And it was kind of them to make sure. See, they could have taken over. They could have said, "Well, you know, we've been with him all the time." But did you know that you would not have a motion made like that now. See, somebody makes them - - somebody in 1974 will say, "Well, that sweet, dear little lady did a good job, and now she needs somebody to really make sure it gets done." Things have changed. Things have changed. But I wasn't particularly offended, you know. Now, if I'd lost, I guess I would've been, but why get offended if nobody hurts you.

SHORT: Right.

MIXON: So - - but he went down fighting. When we had the breakfast, they gave me this beautiful crystal and gold candy dish as a gift for all I had done. And I understood that meant I was supposed to retire; I just didn't. I just kept doing what I was supposed to do. And it was - - it was lots of fun. You can't - - it can't be as much fun anymore.

Let me tell you about the - - nowadays, advertising - - Lord, if you don't mortgage the farm before you go up there, don't bother to take out any ads. But I think the only ads that I did was on the radio. I wanted to advertise our - - a barbecue we had for him. And, oh, that's where I got some real respect - - I mean, like you give to men. We wanted to raise some money. And this sounds so small compared with the way we throw money around now, but you have to get

into the context of the overall cost of things in '74.

But I went to - - Albert and I went to Atlanta one weekend during the runoff when we were planning a - - were planning a fundraising barbecue during the runoff period. And my brother told - - in fact, we almost made a special trip. My brother - - big brother - - my big brother came to Atlanta to seek his fortune in the '50s, and he, at one point, went to work with Carey Paul, who had a series of Ford dealerships. And they were, my brother and Carey Paul, were very close. They were both in the DeKalb County sheriff's posse, which I'm sure that they were good citizens, but what they really did was ride horses, you know, in the parade. But, you know, they did good things too. And my brother called me and said that Carey Paul wanted to see me the next time I came to Atlanta. And he had been - - he and Mildred had taken a meal with Albert and me a few times. They would come down for various reasons and we would see them. But anyway, he wanted to see me next time I came to Atlanta. And I thought, okay, we're talking - - he guessed wrong; I know he did. And also - - oh, did you know that George Busbee gave his chairman a steak dinner during the runoff period? That's right. And so we were coming up for that. Man, you don't waste good advertising money on steak anymore, do you? But it paid off for George, didn't it?

SHORT: It did.

MIXON: We came to - - we all came in dressed up. And, oh, and in those days, men not only, you know, had to at least be dressed up at night, not always have a tuxedo, but we ladies put on a

long dress and a fox stole. We dressed up when the sun went down. And so I went - - we went by to see Carey, and - - oh, and I did my homework, though, before I went up. Now see, being from a long line of farmers, I'm pragmatic to a fault. And I'm naïve about some things, but I know that if somebody did not want to go with the winner, if he wants to be part of the action, he wants to - - so I called, the night - - the afternoon before I went up, I called headquarters. And Harris, who was the - - had served in the legislature, the grandson of Joel Chandler Harris. I forgot Harris's first name. He had been taking my calls. But he went out to open that new bank in DeKalb County.

SHORT: Robin.

MIXON: Yeah, right. Right. Thank you. I knew - - two old computers work well, don't they? But he - - this is - - see, in the run - - see, he takes my calls until the runoff. And he goes out, he's opening a new bank in DeKalb County. And Al Burris, you remember, was president pro tem of the --

SHORT: Speaker pro tem of the house.

MIXON: Speaker pro tem. I'm sorry. I've been door-keeping for the senate the last few years and my language has deteriorated. No, the senate is still the upper chamber, to my notion. But anyway, when I called headquarters, Al Burris answered the phone. And I said, I need to

talk to you, because my brother has a friend that I know guessed wrong. He wants to see me. I think he wants to buy in, and I want his money. But I know I can't speak for George Busbee. What can I tell him?" Al Burris gave me as good of political advice, I think, as anybody could be given. Certainly, it was good for me, has helped me understand why some administrators have a good administration and some don't. And he gave me a way to ask for money that I didn't mind. So when I'm talking with Carey, he tells me that there's something there as a - - with car dealerships, there was a board that mattered to him, and he was interested in that board. Well, this is playing out about like I think it will.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: Bear in mind, I may be politically naïve, but I'm a grandma and a farmer, and I dealt with teenagers. You learn a lot dealing with teenagers, too. And I said what Al told me to tell him: "You tell him that George Busbee did not come this far by promising anybody anything. But all things being equal, friends will come first." Okay. So understand how you do it. If you go and make up an appointment, you don't line up your friends. You line up capable people and you go down the line until you come to a friend.

SHORT: Right.

MIXON: And you've got a right to name someone who shares your philosophy. After all, your

philosophy was the one that was elected. So that's what I told him, and he wrote me out a \$1,000 check. You cannot imagine how big that was in Tifton in '74. And my brother says, "You give that to Eunice, and she'll take that to Tifton." He says, "I know, but I think she'll appreciate it more."

And I saw something else. What he was doing was he signs the check. He's got his credit. If he makes me happy, makes me look good by delivering it, then he's got a friend at court for the same money. And I got full knowledge out of that. When we go into dinner that night - - so I get it Saturday morning, and when we go in to dinner that night, I proudly show that check to - - and George, of course, responds, the way, you know, that you'd like for him to: "Does that have as many zeros as I think it does?"

So when I got back to Tifton, Charles and Ray told me about how they hit the streets and they raised \$6,000 in one day. Well, I raised \$1,000. So I get to be part of the boys. But it never has changed, though. I am still expected to work with the menus. I'm supposed to work with the menus. I'm supposed to see that the tables are decorated, the programs go on, and raise money too. Women do both of it. Men just raise the money.

I'm sorry, I'm stuck on the Busbee days, but they were - - they were - - that was my education.

And look how fortunate I was. I had no idea how mean people could be in a political race, the in-fighting that could be going on in the campaign. Now Charles and Ray, they - - you know, I was the front man, and they're just - - nobody was trying to - - now later, I would have people come aboard, like people to help me. You know, Joe Frank Harris, and Zell, and other people.

And what'll happen there is - - now people will tell you, and they mean it, "I don't care who gets

credit. I don't have to have credit. I just want it done." But if they find out that Susie over there took credit, now they'll get mad as hops.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: And I know one campaign I had, I had a little gal, she could raise more dust in a minute than you could settle in a month. And I spent my time - - people I had worked with peacefully for years, doing. And so I learned - - I learned my politics the way ladies and gentlemen conduct themselves. The only kind of might be a little ugly advertising that was done - - and it wasn't ugly unless you really knew the story. And they would not even - - they did not tell me about it when they did it. It was okay. It was really very effective. There was a - - did you - - Leonard Morris served in the Marvin Griffin days.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: I don't know whether you would have known him or not. He was big and blustery and would be very comfortable with some of the politicians that we don't approve of nowadays.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: But Leonard Morris and A.N. Adcock - - and let me speak up right now for A.N.; he's

given me a check for everything I ever had going ever since then. But they were supporting Maddox. And they had a recreation area with a lake that needed several miles of road paved, and it was paved during the Maddox - - I mean, it did - - it was good for nothing - - it did nothing except go out through the, what Daddy called cemetery dirt. You know, just sandy land that would have scrub oaks on it. It goes out for miles. It doesn't go anywhere except to their recreation spot and pretty lake. And, of course, there are other roads that weren't paved.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: I opened the paper one day, and in the classified ads, there's a little thing that says, "The best thing Lester Maddox ever did for Tift County was pave the road to Crystal Lake."

And I liked it! Now, you know, okay, I'll go ahead and blow my cover. I'm this nice little pleasant southern lady, but I also want to tend to business sometimes. So I'll just go ahead and blow my cover. It tickled me.

I went in and I said, "Charles, that's the cutest thing I ever saw." I said, "That's worth..." Oh, I was just so thrilled. And I said, "Who did that?" "I don't know." "Who did that?" "I don't know." Same thing out of Ray, "I don't know." They just didn't - - of course, they did it. If they didn't do it, they knew who did it. But they were - - there were ladies and gentlemen.

And so the runoff was just a - - just a lot - - it was work, of course. It was work. And we worked. I don't know whether - - I don't know whether people can - - can they break up this record to where they don't have to listen to me this long? Do we need to stop a minute and let

anybody that might be listening at this point rest a minute?

SHORT: Well, Miss Eunice, you've certainly been involved in state politics. That's apparent. Have you ever considered running for office yourself?

MIXON: No - - well, of course I did. When I say - - I didn't consider it in that I thought of it, but occasionally some people that were good friends of mine, people that I trusted - - I remember A.N. Adcock told me one time that if I would run, that he would see that it didn't cost me anything. Well, I wasn't - - wasn't too interested. I didn't - - that one I completely dismissed because I was not attuned completely with his politics. And then Deneen Stafford, who was a local businessman, and his wife Boo was the sort of person that - - oh, Deneen - - I'll mention the fact that Deneen Stafford served in the senate in the days of Griffin and Talmadge, and he was a contemporary with Herman Talmadge. He and Herman Talmadge were in college at the same time. And I asked him one time, I said, "I read somewhere that when Old Gene was in the governor's office, that the governor's staff had to keep the road hot between Atlanta and Athens because Herman was always getting into something." And Deneen says, "Oh, no," he said, "Herman was all right. He was a good fellow. He just couldn't hold his liquor. The night we elected him president of the pan -- " you know, of all of the --

SHORT: Fraternities.

MIXON: - - fraternities. He said, "He drank too much and fell off the balcony and broke his arm."

SHORT: Oh, my goodness.

MIXON: But he defended Herman all the way down the line. And Boo and Deneen and Betty and Herman had been associated. I remember Betty visiting Boo and Deneen after Herman was gone.

Let me share this quick thought about Herman with you. I had assumed that we would support - - we had been pretty well involved - - maybe I better save that one. Maybe I better save that for more of the Herman period. I'll go - - let me go back. Let me finish up the things that I enjoy remembering about the runoff period.

SHORT: Okay, good.

MIXON: And after the - - of course, winning was great fun, but I'd developed a tremendous amount of confidence. And my husband, who by the time he got through with me, I had seven years of college. Albert went off to the Army without finishing high school and came home back to the farm. But it never occurred to anybody, least of all me, that I knew any more than Albert did. Albert would have had a little trouble getting into some physics and some fine points about chemistry, but I'm talking about knowing things. And he was so good at evaluating. He kept

that tractor radio on back in the days when you could learn things from the radio. And I'll have to say he was my secret weapon about making a judgment about people and happenings. But he never was interested in the spotlight. Now he would push me in the spotlight and would be so pleased.

I remember the year that I got the Athena award from the Chamber of Commerce. And he was asking me if - - reminding me the night of the chamber dinner. And we always went; I belonged to the Chamber of Commerce. But I was surprised that he was reminding me - - well, that was okay. I did not know I had been nominated for this award, because they had gotten the information from my daughter-in-law and I knew nothing about it. And it was an award that was given to a woman, to a businesswoman, who had contributed to the community business-wise, economic development, and had been a role model for girls. And it usually went maybe to a lady that had a real estate business or a woman whose husband could afford to make sure she did certain things. And so - - but anyway, we're sitting there and they start talking about this award, and they say that it's a lady that has been involved in education, and they're saying some nice things. And I think, "Well, great. It sounds to me like one of our lady principals is going to get it. That's good." Then they said that among her contributions to economic development was hauling off peanuts and selling tobacco, driving a tractor to - - wait a minute. I don't know many people that do that, and so I knew then that it had to be me. And Albert was so much smiles, you would have thought that he had won the lottery. He was so pleased. I've often thought how generous natured he was. And knowing that he wasn't a saint, I've tried to think of some of that motivation, and I finally decided that part of his motivation must have been - - well, of course,

when you love each other, you love when good things happen to them. But I kind of think that he thought, well, she belongs to me, and if she looks good, I look good. Well, whatever. He was - - of course, every woman thinks her husband is the best man that ever was in the world, but - - and, of course, I share that feeling.

And when we were - - I was going - - I was getting back into the runoff. And Albert assured me that it was a done deal. And the Tomlinsons - - Jane - - Jane Tomlinson and her husband Don - - they lived in Tifton for a while. They were not Tifton natives. They were in Tifton for a while, but they were Georgia natives. And they left there, and he went into banking and was a successful banker in North - - is a successful banker in North Carolina. And Jane is one of those people that we lost early to cancer. One of - - and you know the kind of person that you didn't have enough of that kind to start with, but you lose them. And she did some catering. And I think that she had the idea that she could do a cake that looked like the mansion. So she baked - - and I'll have to share that picture with you sometime. Oh, it was - - of course, we thought that it was greater than the Taj Mahal, and it was quite edible. But this - - it's a large - - it's a large cake, and it's a replica of the governor's mansion, and she has it on a large board - - covered, of course - - board. And the lawn - - she does a lawn, and Busbee is on the front lawn. And so I see that. She shows me the cake, and they are going to bring it up to the victory party. And I - - and, of course, you know, we're all supposed to go to the victory party. And I said, "Jane, I'm just afraid to leave. See, it's my very first election, and I just can't risk missing a vote or two that might make it. See, I want Tift County to go for him, if possible, and I just cannot leave Tift County. The polls don't close until seven. I'm sorry, I can't leave for Atlanta until seven, and,

you know, that's too late to go." And I had to teach the next morning too. So - - but I thought the cake was so beautiful, so I called the - - see, that's the - - see, in a town like Tifton, you have a local paper.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: And you can call them and tell them, you know, "Hey, come over and get..." So that I remember so well. Since I was chairman of the local committee, then we were going to - - we wanted a picture taken with the cake and me and do it with, you know, somebody's home camera. And so she called. She lives kind of around the corner from - - and across some back lots from Charles Kent. And so I called her and told her that I was on my way. I called the Gazette and asked the Tifton Gazette to send a photographer of the cake that would go to the real victory party. So they sent a photographer, and I called Jane and I said, "I'm on my way. Is Charles there yet?" She said, "I just saw him jump the ditch." So on the front page, every newspaper in Georgia has a picture of George Busbee the winner. But the Tifton Gazette, which is far advanced in modern journalism, they have a picture of the cake baker and the cake and the chairman and the chairman of the county commission. The chairman of the county commission and the cake baker, you know, are going to take the cake up. And so I got a kick out of that. I thought - - don't you think I must have been dropped down in the nearest the Good Lord could do for a Garden of Eden in modern times to be among the people that I was among. Talented people that were willing to do things. That's why I cook whenever I can, because being a friend

of mine is a lot of trouble. I get into things and I can just hear my friends saying, "Have you heard that last project Eunice has got into? I reckon we're going to have to get in there and save her hide." And so I try to share good things when I can.

But I get this telephone call when the victory party is over and the cake from Tifton goes up. And then they're have a democratic convention - - the Georgia democratic convention. Well, I had heard of national democratic conventions, and I'm just clueless. The telephone rings, and this lady said the meeting in Macon - - she may have even said convention, but it went over my head if she did. She said, "The meeting in Macon, Governor Busbee wants you to serve on the platform committee." And I think, "Oh, my Lord, I'm teaching." And the platform committee, when we had a barbecue for him, drove me crazy. If Don and some of my youngsters had not taken over - - the only platform I could come up with where we had the barbecue was I borrowed a cotton trailer. Have you ever tried to decorate a cotton trailer? You know, you've got a nice, flat bed, but there's no - - well, anyway, they - - it came out beautifully, though, because Don was real talented. And so we had a nice platform, and we put some chrysan - - And I said, "Platform committee? Wouldn't it be better for some ladies - - the ladies in Macon to do the platform in Macon?" You know, I don't want to go to - - I don't want to haul a cotton trailer to Macon. And - - but I'm so glad it was on the telephone. You know, these - - and she says, "No, he specifically said he wanted Eunice Mixon to serve." And I'm so glad it was on the telephone because she couldn't see it. You know, those light bulbs that you see in comic strips? I thought those were just in comic strips, but one went off. It suddenly dawned on me that there are political meetings, and there is a platform committee. I recovered beautifully. I deserved the

Academy Award. I just matter-of-factly said, "Well, yes, if he wants me, of course, I'll be glad to serve."

And Albert and I - - I got out of school a little bit early. It cost me a little bit, but I did. And Albert and I went up and attended the convention and enjoyed - - I loved serving on the platform committee, because there is where I met other people that were going to be part of his brainpower for his administration. I remember people like Norman Fletcher, who recently retired.

SHORT: Judge Fletcher.

MIXON: Yes. He retired from - - he retired as chief justice, didn't he?

SHORT: Yes. Uh-huh.

MIXON: And Norman Underwood and, oh, just lots of interesting people, men and women. And I suppose - - I suppose maybe we know too much now. I suppose we're too well - - oh, and when I say we know too much, we know not only the good things about politicians, but we know to look for feet of clay, and there's going to be a little clay around everybody. But I didn't think there was a bit around George Busbee or Joe Frank Harris. With George Busbee, I thought that it was a holy crusade. If George Busbee was not elected, the state would disappear. We were fortunate, weren't we?

SHORT: We were. He was a great governor. Perhaps - - well, I can say he's one of the greatest in modern times. He did a lot of things for Georgia that needed to be done at the time, and I could recite them all to you, but I'm sure you know them.

MIXON: No, you do. Then it won't strain my memory for it.

SHORT: Well, there are certain things that George Busbee deserves great credit for. One is his realization for the need to develop technically trained workers in Georgia, which he did through his education program. Then bringing the jobs to Georgia that they could occupy. His work in the Far East on business connections, and that he did a magnificent job there. But there are two things that I think George Busbee deserved credit for that perhaps nobody else had ever thought of. One was the establishment of international banking in Georgia.

MIXON: Yes.

SHORT: And making the Atlanta airport an international airport.

MIXON: Exactly.

SHORT: Now that's quite an accomplishment for one governor.

MIXON: Now, can you imagine the difference in our history if that had not been done at that time? You know, timing is important for getting into banking. Time is important for getting your airport ready. We say that timing is everything in politics, but for progress of a state, timing is certainly everything.

I had to smile when you mentioned the Far East. I'll tell you my knowledge about that. I wound up with a house guest one time. You know, George would go over to Japan and say, "Y'all come." Well, somebody came, and it was somebody that was interested in agriculture. And he's Japanese, and he doesn't speak English worth a hooey, and I don't speak Japanese at all. And he's interested in agriculture. Well, who would enjoy having a Japanese house guest for a week or so? Oh, Eunice, she enjoys everybody. We'll send him down there. He's too important to put in a hotel. We'll send him down to Eunice. Well, you know, we're just who we are, and if he was interested in agriculture, and school had just gone out, and I was putting stuff in the freezer, so I sent him and Albert to pick butter beans. Let him learn what you do down on a South Georgia farm. But I also was aware of other things that we ought to do. Enjoyed him. He was such a gentleman. Now, you know how people bring hostess gifts?

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: Which was foreign to me anyway. On the farm I grew up, we gave things to people that were leaving. When somebody came to see you, you didn't - - they didn't leave empty

handed. No, no, no. If the garden was in, okay, or pecans, you'd send him home with pecans. Or if the garden wasn't in, Momma Carrie would send him home with - - my mother would send him home with two or three fine specimens of pickles or jams or something. You just did not - - well, not only did he practice the urban way of doing visiting by bringing the hostess a gift, he brought two or three. I understand that they don't - - when they give a gift, they don't give just one. So I got a fan and a scarf and I think chopsticks or something. Anyway, several little things that were nice. And I think - - I can't remember whether he gave that doll to Albert then or sent it to him later, but a Japanese lady carrying a turnip as big as a water tank across her shoulder. And I did the logical thing, I cooked like I wasn't sure, you know, since I don't know - - if I knew what he liked to eat, I wouldn't be able to cook it like his wife cooked it. So he ate what we ate. And so I planned - - I thought, well now he - - I need to take him, if he's interested - - he was especially interested in vegetables. Oh yeah, that's how he wound up in the butter bean patch. He's especially interested in vegetables, so I thought, well, we'll just visit the farmer's market. And we'll go by the capital, go by the governor's office, and get a commemorative picture, and we'll visit the governor's mansion. But here is quite an organization thing, because I want to go on a day that Albert can go, and I want to go on a day that George Busbee's in the office, and I want to go on a day that Tommy Irvin - - Tommy Irvin had already been serving for a while as ag commissioner - - a very good one, as you know. I teased him he learned everything he knew about tobacco from me, but he's a fast learner, and might not have many row crops in Habersham County, but he got busy and crossed this state and he learned. Well, and, of course, consumer affairs, now, is the most important.

But I kept trying to get them lined up. I wanted Tommy Irvin, you know, to meet us at the farmer's market. Well, I just couldn't get them all lined up on the same day, so I finally went when Albert could go and George would be in the office. And so Tommy sent one of his people out to the farmer's market to meet us, and they - - and my first tour. We had the grand tour behind a tractor. The wagon is stacked with hay and we ride that, but thank goodness it's like the surrey with the fringe on top. There's a parasol - - I mean, there's a canvas cover. And so we get a tour of the farmer's market, and, of course, he loves this. He and Albert could communicate better than I could communicate with him. He had this little Japanese-English dictionary, but I couldn't use it that well. It takes too long. But he and Albert, I don't know how they did it, but they did. And, of course, Tommy set us up for lunch at the cafeteria there. And we went by the - - at some point, we went by the governor's office and had a picture made with him, and we visited the governor's mansion.

And - - but now I do not get into a project by myself. The reason we had as fluid a visit as we did, I knew someone that had been missionaries to Japan. I called them, and I said, "You've got to go with me. You know I can't talk - - we're going to do so-and-so. Please go with me."

"Okay." So they went with me. And then Betty Gleaton who, of the Plant Telephone Company, and, you know, when you're your own boss, you can get off sometimes. Sometimes you work harder than the employees, but she'd slip away sometimes. And I called Betty and told her I needed another vehicle and would she take a vehicle up. So we went up, a pretty good little entourage of us. But, you know, several people can have a good time as easy as one.

SHORT: Sure.

MIXON: Yes, indeed. George was a first in many, many ways. You know, you have to bring a certain talent to be able to see those opportunities.

SHORT: And you also have to have good relations with other people, other politicians. It's been said, and I certainly agree, that George Busbee was just the kind of person you wanted to help because you liked him.

MIXON: That's true. That is true. That - - that is the same reason you vote for people. Even until today, you and I, as much as we watched, if there are two people running for an office and one might have a slight edge - - might have a slight edge in overall ability but did not relate to people. See, if you can't like him, he's not going to relate well - - as well to other people. And you would find yourself - - now, you wouldn't vote for somebody that wasn't capable. I don't mean that. But someone that maybe wasn't obviously as capable, because you liked him, and you would consider that the smartest thing to do; because if he is not likeable, he is not going to be able to use what he needs. He will not be able to get people to help him do things. He can't do things on - - I'm glad you mentioned that.

Well, that was fun. That was fun.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about party politics in Georgia. You served on the Democratic

executive committee. Over the years, unfortunately for Democrats, their power has diminished to the point where now it seems that they might not ever regain it. What happened?

MIXON: What happened was that we didn't keep our eye on the ball. We got distracted. And a big tent, is - - now I'm going to answer this just like I know, and you know, of course, I don't know, but we're talking opinions here. So bear in mind, I'm not using facts. Now who was it that said everyone has a right to an opinion. They've got a right to be wrong in their opinion, but they just don't have a right to be wrong in their facts. And so if I say something wrong, don't worry about whether you ought to take it to the bank or not; just say, "That's her opinion."

Okay, so my opinion, right or wrong, is that we really were doing the - - we were really doing what we ought to do. I serve on the disciplinary board of the state bar, and I'm around as a civilian member, of course, and Bill Smith is the general counsel. And occasionally, we will deal with an attorney that is just in all kinds of trouble, not because of some sorry, trifling thing that we accuse attorneys of doing sometimes, but the guy was really trying to help somebody. But it was a shady way of - - and so Bill will rear back and say, "No good deed goes unpunished." And we wanted a tent big enough to hold everybody, and we got - - and when diverse groups came in, they were not able to buy into the whole body of people. And at the risk of offense but with no malice intended, and purely opinion, and somebody can challenge it any way they want to, but I felt that the Democratic party did the right thing for all kinds of reasons for changing the - - I could argue the point from four different viewpoints and very nearly prove that we should change - - should have changed the flag. And we did that.

The people that that mattered the most to were, of course, minorities. And then you had farsighted business people that realized that the state would move forward if it were changed. But the minorities whose people had suffered under that flag, as they felt, but what it meant - - because of what it - - it represented something to them that it didn't represent to other people. I had never seen it until some skinheads had it - - some Nazi skinheads had it. So it didn't mean - - you know, the first Georgia flag that I knew did not look like the battle flag. And so it did not represent the state of Georgia to me, and I did not think about how it affected people whose ancestors had been affected by it. But it was a very, very emotional thing with them.

In fact, I don't think I had any thought - - any real thought of the tragedy of slavery until my first son was born. And I remember holding him up to a mirror in the hospital room, and his father always had this tan. He was naturally - - you know, we have different complexions, and he just bronzed in the sun. But when my firstborn son was born, I held him up to the mirror and he was darker than I was. Of course, you wouldn't think of him as being dark, but in that particular light. And I was thinking about all the things that I wanted his life to be. You know, mommas do that and daddies do that. And it suddenly hit me that if I were a slave mother, I could not think about a good future for my son. And if all of the people that wanted the flag changed had voted for Roy Barnes, he wouldn't have been defeated.

SHORT: While we're on that subject, there's also - - [clears throat] excuse me - - there's also a feeling that teachers helped defeat Roy Barnes. Do you think there's any credence in that?

MIXON: I don't - - there is. There is. I think winning an election is kind of like our home remedies curing a common cold. We use everything we can think of, and when we get through, we're not sure what made us better; we just know we got better. And when you go to win an election, you try to get this group, and you try to get that group, and you try to get that group, and you finally get elected and you can't point to one that elected you. And then when you lose, you probably lost for multiple reasons. I don't think that teachers alone would have defeated him. I don't think the flaggers alone would have defeated him. And, of course, there were people that didn't like the idea of the flag being changed that you wouldn't classify as flaggers even.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: I think that there were multiple reasons. And I think that he just - - and I think there is a certain amount of inertia of rest and inertia of motion. You know, when something starts moving, it continues in the same distance at the same speed until it's acted on by an outside force. And if something is - - and we, the human being, exemplifies inertia of rest. If we're in a spot, it takes a lot of outside force to move us.

And so Roy Barnes had exerted changes several ways. Just change in general is scary, and change of the flag, the change with the teachers, the change with predatory lending. As a matter of fact, economics is not my field at all, though I do have a grandson that's a bank examiner. By the way, he says that the four C's that they look at, collateral is the last thing that you would

consider. The first thing that - - the most important thing, the first C, is character.

I don't know much about economics, but Roy Barnes did. And if you go back over the things that he wanted to do in this state, if somebody in Washington had been doing something like that - - had understood it; I'll put it that way. I won't say that he did enough to cure it, but he really did understand. If you had had someone in Washington with the thoughts that Roy Barnes had and the power to put them into action, we would - - we're filming this during a restless economic time, and I firmly believe - - my opinion is that it would be -- not be like this.

I think that we -- I think that the Democratic party reached out for more of the people that weren't as well represented. They made room for people that were - - you didn't have to pass any litmus test of pro life. You didn't have to get into anything about the gay community. If you wanted government as the - - we got into the - - we made room for social problems, and we made room for personal opinions and people that were really different and said, "Look, you deserve to be heard too." But they were not able to move their allegiance to the overall party of what that eventually - - we either - - you know, if we do not join in and support this central movement of the party, then we're all going to lose. And we - - the idea was we'll bring them in and make room for them, but they become part of us. They've got the same opinion, but they become part of us. And they would go - - and they would get a voice and it would be a voice of their own. I don't think I'm making much sense. I'd hate to give you a test on this, on what I've just said. It may not make much sense to you.

SHORT: But it brings up this question, and some enchanted - - disenchanting Democrats believe

that the party leans too heavily on minorities and labor unions for support at the expense of some of the old Democrats in Tift County, Georgia.

MIXON: They do, and they almost have to because of - - I'm sorry I'm getting on the other side of the coin here - - because some of your - - no, Lord, it's not the majority. If it were, I would call my friends in Australia and tell them I was coming to see them. We - - you do have an element. When we talk about change, we do have an element that feel that, rightly or wrongly, yes, there was a time when the black man was absolutely on the bottom and he was mistreated. And a gay person was moved in some areas almost at the risk of their life. And they feel that it's turned upside down. There - - I've heard this expressed. I have a lot of different kinds of friends, thank goodness, and they express the feeling that instead of a minority getting an even break with the white man, and instead of the gay getting an even break with the others, that somehow the minorities are getting some kind of advantage. Now this doesn't have to be true for people to act on that, because perception is not truth. But perception may as well be truth because people act on their perception, and they act on their perception just as though it were the truth. So you have some fairly nice people out there that are kind of contrary in their voting. It just dawned on me, if I had the complete answer to this, I would've straightened it out before now.

SHORT: Is it too late? Is the Democratic party --

MIXON: Oh, no, no. No, no, no. As a Christian and an educator and a farmer, there's always another shot at it. Now it may not - - it may not - - we may evolve into something that we haven't thought about yet. It may evolve into - - we've got to have some kind of order though. If any number can play, you've got a banana republic.

SHORT: What do you think of the Democrats who switched to the Republican party to make a majority in the Georgia senate?

MIXON: I could have wrung their necks, but I understand. I - - that is kind of a curse, don't you think, to understand? When you disagree with somebody, to understand their position, and so it's hard to jump on them. And I believe - - I firmly believe that they didn't wake up and say, "Well, I'm going to save my political hide and the devil take the hindmost." I don't think they woke up like that. I think they woke up like, "Well, my people thought enough of me to elect me. And perhaps I should think enough of them to get into a position that I can do the most for them." And that's a whole other argument about whether that's appropriate or not.

Because I was door-keeping, I noticed when the Republicans came to town. And I don't appear on a ballot, so I can participate without changing my name. I can be a Democrat. And when Albert was - - Albert left in '98, the summer of '98 - - and that winter - - and, of course, I've lived where there used to be so much life on that farm. There was livestock, cows and hogs and horses, and yard dogs and house dogs, and little boys to feed and hands to feed, and so much going on. And then it slows down over the years and there's Albert and me, and then all at once,

there's just me and a security system. And so I close the door and come to Atlanta. And my friend had told - - a friend of mine told me that they hired people during the legislative session. And I said I don't know what I could contribute during the legislative session. I don't think somebody that's good at setting up a biology lab --

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: - - I don't think there's much carryover. But I decided to ask, and so I asked if there were anything that I could do that did not require being a sweet young thing or magic with a computer. And they said, well, door-keeping just required judgment. I said I've got judgment. If I like them, I'll let them in.

And so I came up and lived with my sister-in-law. My big brother's gone now, and I live with my sister-in-law during the session and door-keep. They don't pay much. I couldn't possibly afford to stay in Atlanta, but since I can stay with her. And it's extremely interesting. I get to - - it's kind of in a cat bird's seat for debate in the senate.

And so when the Republicans took over, I thought, well, okay, old girl. You know how the system works. You've had the run of the capital and the governor's mansion for 28 years now. Let somebody else enjoy it. And I said, well, the mansion's okay, but dang it, I do a good job and I don't want to be fired. And they probably would have been just as pleased if I had just faded gently into the good night. But I rolled the dice. My idea was that they control the senate so they can control the legislature. But - - and if they've got to look bad to do it, they will. But

why look bad firing an old lady? There's no percentage in that. So I rolled the dice. And nothing beats the truth. I said, "You know, I've always been a Democrat, but I don't chuck rocks at people, and I think it's my job to make life as pleasant for all of us as I can." Well, it worked. But they had to - - you know, you've got a lot of new employees, and I love the way - - being around politicians, you understand how they use hyperbole . I mean, you can have given them a lot of personal time to get them elected, but they really can't do anything for you except let you share in the same good government everybody else is getting, and so they speak in hyperbole. They try to make you feel good, and so said, "I want Miss Eunice to be in charge of the visitor's gallery. She knows - - because she knows everyone and is diplomatic enough to be Henry Kissinger's aide." I don't care what - - maybe all those times of explaining to a momma that her dimpled darling just can't possibly rate an A+, maybe all of that stands you in good time - - good stead after a while.

But I noticed - - I noticed that in the senate that there were people that they came in and, you know, they want to do something good or they wouldn't have got elected. And, I mean, they all came in, and, I mean, they wanted to save Georgia from all of these evil Democratic years, but they all want to save it in a different way. And they would just - - some of them went off on real tangents.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: But the ones that made the biggest difference and kept it going, there were some that -

- some of them didn't take off their hat before they were - - Sonny wasn't nearly as good a Republican as they were, you know. He wasn't of the true faith, and what he wanted, to heck with that. And some of them seemed to understand that, you know, we kind of rise and fall together, and if our first Republican governor after all this time doesn't look good, none of us are going to fare so well. Of course, people don't - - I've learned a long time ago, people don't think like I do. But that doesn't mean I'm not right sometimes. And I thought that was - - I think maybe that's a good example of what happened with the Democratic party. They finally get a voice and they don't realize that they need to continue promoting the Democratic party, because that's the way that they got there, and maybe the way they'll stay.

I remember when my friends - - Albert and I quit growing tobacco years ago, not because of what we knew about health. Certainly, as a biology teacher, I understood that very well. In fact, the old folks did. You know what the old folks called cigarettes. You're old enough to remember some old folks calling them coffin nails.

SHORT: Coffin nails.

MIXON: Yes. They instinctively knew anything you stuck in your mouth and set fire to wasn't good for you. But we quit growing tobacco. We worked our heads off, we weren't getting rich, so, you know, after a while, you quit. You never have had money, so you don't have to have a lot. But I had some friends that were mad with Democratic leaders in Washington that were making it hard on the tobacco program, and they were going to vote Republican. And I tried to

talk with them about the fact that, okay, so you've lost your tobacco program. Well, that leaves your - - you're leaning on your peanuts and cotton a whole lot more, and who has supported you to get - - that guy Armev, whatever his name was, from Texas; he went to Washington with the sole purpose of destroying the peanut program, and he succeeded. But to me, you don't get mad with the Democrats because they took tobacco away from you. You stick with them to keep that guy from taking the rest of the stuff away from you. Like I said, people don't think like I do. And - - but I really do think that - - wait a minute now. People vote for what they think is best for them, and when they vote against their best interests, they haven't thought through what their best interests were. And they are - - they vote emotionally. It's a lot of trouble to dig into stuff. It really is, and it's not all that interesting to some people.

SHORT: Let's talk for a moment - - a minute about some of the other hats you wear. You've been on the executive committee of the Democratic party. You're on the bar association's --

MIXON: No, I do not serve there any longer. When my term was up the last time, I had reached the point that I had to vote for some Republicans. And I just - - like our sheriff. You can't vote for a fool if he is a Democrat for sheriff. And I felt that it was not ethical to serve on the state executive committee unless I could vote a straight Democratic ticket. I am a Democrat. I'll be buried a Democrat. When I look at a ballot, I'll look to the Democrats first, and if they measure up, I'll vote for them. But if they don't, I'll do the - - let's face it; you didn't get involved to help the Democratic party. You didn't get involved to help the Republican party. You got involved

because George Busbee or Carl Sanders or somebody who just happened to be a Democrat you felt could make a difference for the people - - for you, the people that you love, and the community you try to serve. And if they had belonged to the Prohibitionist or the Abolitionist party, you'd have gone with them. And so I - - but I'm a Democrat like my folks were Democrats. The world would be so much better off if it was run by the old line southern conservative Democrat. But remember the old line conservative Democrat did not have to keep his neck - - foot on a black man's neck to keep himself happy. He had a sense of what was fair for people. They were like my mother, but also like - - but you hated to take action.

I was - - I guess the word is my consciousness was raised of the unfairness of segregation. I was a little girl sitting at the supper table. I can't - - you know, nowadays they talk about everybody having a meal together. Well, the meal was a certain time. You were there and you ate. And Daddy talked about things and Momma talked about things and I talked about whatever was interesting to me. And one night, I distinctly remember. I must have been about - - I think I was going to school. I'd started school because I rode a yellow school bus. And my mother says, "Rob, I see these colored children walking by here to school in the mornings. They can't learn if they've got to walk all..." - - you know, she knew where they lived. She said, "They can't learn very well if they have to walk that far to school." Daddy didn't say anything, so Momma says something else. Daddy doesn't say anything. He keeps eating. And even at six or seven years old, I knew that Daddy knew that what my mother was saying was right. I also understood at that age that my mother is bringing a problem to my father that she thinks he ought to do something about, and Daddy doesn't want to do anything about it. He doesn't want to do the

things that he would have to do --

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: - - to make a difference. But somehow, I think people like my daddy made a difference when integration came. The reason I say that is that in Tifton, we had peaceable integration. It wasn't done until they had to, but they did it quite peaceably. And since I served on the library board, I remember - - enjoy remembering this one. The little lady that operated the Tift County Library called the Sheriff Tom Greer one day because some young black students had come in to integrate the library, and they were sitting around in the library. And she's a dear, sweet little lady with certainly a good heart, brought up just like you and I were, that you're supposed to treat people the way you want to be treated. If you do that, color doesn't enter into it. But she knows the law too, so she calls the sheriff, and she says, "Sheriff Greer, these people are here, and what do I do?" He said, "Check them out a book."

I was plopped down in a good part of the world. Of course you've got - - good Lord, we make the crime pages and all down there. You don't have perfection. But there was a large group of people that wanted to do - - wanted to do the right thing. And we sure do need some energetic leaders now.

George Busbee appointed me to the Heritage Trust Commission, which, as you know, tried to save threatened areas back when they had some money. And he also - - he - - I served with Joe Frank Harris. I think one of the best things they ever did was - - well, first, I asked Joe Frank

Harris to appoint me to his Blue Ribbon Committee for - - whatever that committee was that year. You know, every governor will redo the school. And I asked to serve on it, and he said - - because I thought I had earned it. And he said, "Eunice, I can't load it up with teachers. I've got to name the president of GAE," and so on. But later he asked me - - but then he asked me to serve on the Georgia Student Finance Commission, which dealt with student scholarships, and then I was sitting there when the Hope scholarship came along. And that was - - I thought that was important. I enjoyed that.

I served on the - - I served as the chairman of the Appeals Committee and with that. And by the way, Sonny Perdue did reappoint me to that one. Now he did not - - I did not ask to be reappointed. I was serving on the State Board of Elections, and that is a blood sport, very partisan. And I couldn't vote a straight party line even as a Democrat. And I knew if I asked him to appoint me to the State Board of Elections, I would imply that I would be a team player --

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: -- completely for the Republican party, and I couldn't do that. So I didn't ask him. He might not have appointed me anyway. But I asked him to appoint me to the Georgia Student Finance Commission because I felt that that was somewhere I could serve real well, and he did. I told him that I - - that he knew I was a Democrat but - - and I knew there were well-qualified Republicans that could serve, but speaking on my own behalf, I'm also qualified. A new broom sweeps clean, but an old broom knows all the old corners. And so it worked; he reappointed me.

And I just remembered, though, that you asked me about whether I had ever considered running. And, you know, you're tempted to run because you think you can make a bigger difference. But -- and I did -- I was -- I didn't want to, when someone mentioned it to me, but when Deneen Stafford and the chairman of the school board and some others told me that they would like me to run for the legislature, I just kind of laughed and said, "Well, I'd rather people wondered why I didn't than why I did," because you don't know whether you'll win or not.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: But the truth was, I went home and asked Albert about it. He put his foot down so flat, I was just shocked. He had never given me such a flat no. And I thought, well gosh, he's being cantankerous. But then I decided that he had backed me up in everything I ever wanted to do, and if he wanted to be cantankerous about that, then he had earned the right. And only after he was gone, and you think about things, I decided, you know what? He wasn't being cantankerous; he was just protecting me one more time. He knew I would have broken my heart, because you cannot do what you want to do. You know, on a board, you think that you're going to get certain things done, but you don't. It's monolithic. You don't do it. But I really enjoyed it.

But I sure lost that, that Hope scholarship job, in style. I had -- he reappointed me one time, and when I got reapportioned out. And I thought, well now, let's see, I'm being put in a district with this person that's a banker, but I'm a better board member than she is. I believe I can beat her

time. And so I decided that I would ask the governor to reappoint me. By the way, I was the only one left standing though. You know, when you are getting where you want to do things your way, boards have new faces, and I was the only old face left on the Georgia Student Finance Commission. You know, he could afford to do that. And he could've afforded to have appointed me again, but there was a very good member. I'd have to say he was as good a member as I was. It was a Republican attorney.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: And all three of us were in the same district. And I said, okay now. This is a cat of a different color here, and I think I'll just sit this one out. I think I ought to be nice about it, because I've had a good run. And so sure enough, the time comes that they call me from the office to tell me that the governor - - you know, she's sorry, the governor will not be able to reappoint me. I said, "Oh, that's all right." I said, "I understand that," but I said, "I want to make sure. Is it..." you know, and I named the person. I said, "Was that one appointed?" And she said, "Yes." I said, "Fine. He's a good member, and it's okay." And so she went on telling me how the governor really wanted to appoint me, but my term was up and so on. I said, "Look, it's okay. I understand." I said, "This call is harder on you than it is on me, because I knew it was coming, and it can't be much fun to keep calling people with bad news," you know. "It's okay." And so they went on well.

But let me tell you what happens, how nice they are to old ladies. I'm sorry that you won't ever

get to be an old lady, because they are really nice to old ladies. I got a call from the director, and he said they wanted to do something to commemorate my retirement. I thought, well here's diplomacy - - you know, you get fired but you're retiring. And I said, "Well, that would be very gracious of you," and I assumed that they were going to have me at the next meeting and give me a plaque and say something nice, you know, how they always do. And - - but guess what they did? He said that they wanted to endow a scholarship at Abraham Baldwin College in my name. I said, "You can't do that!" You know, we're talking about public money. We're talking about scholarship money. I didn't think they could do it. And he said, "I don't see why not. I talked with legal, and I talked with the governor's office." I said, "Well, I can tell you right now, it's okay with me, you know, if it is with everybody else." But as a matter of fact, the Abraham Baldwin College named me distinguished alumnus about four or five years ago. That's another interesting story to me.

But anyway, they endowed \$50,000 in my name at Abraham Baldwin College. And so Dr. Bridges told me - - I told the president of the college, I said, "Use it any way it can be used, but the only thing I would like for it to be given to someone who has shown that they'll use their education for something other than just get a job, that they are interested in the community. And I would like to use my maiden name." I said I have Mixon, and, of course, I would have never gone to college if I had not married the kind of man that I did, and his name will be commemorated. But not only did my parents teach me to go with what you got, but also Grandpa told me that his grandpa, the grandson of the Lastinger immigrant, came to Southwest Georgia in 1826 when he was 22 years old to teach, Grandpa said, in the little three-month

schools.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: Some things don't change though. We no longer have three-month schools, but I read an old publication on pioneers of Southwest Georgia, and when they interviewed him, he complained that he had paid for his passage to Southwest Georgia, but he had to drive an ox cart all the way - - much offended, even after he was an old man. I suppose that's like you having to drive a broken down Volkswagen now. I'm not sure what the problem was. But I like the idea that the name Lastinger goes on from that long-ago teacher. And also Dr. Bridges said that he wanted the money kept with the foundation board rather than with the other board. And I said, "Well, it doesn't matter to me." And he said, "Well, if we - - if it's in our hands, we can add to it." And I said, "Oh, Dr. Bridges, I've asked people for so much money for so many causes over the years, I just don't have the heart to ask them to contribute to a scholarship for me." He said, "Oh, that's all right. I'll do it. You don't have to do it. I'll do it. I'll just use your good name and I'll do it." And sure enough, we got a nice little amount, and we had a party for it. And they decorated the room with my parasols, and they did my - - they did a pink scrapbook with the letters from people all over.

SHORT: Mm-hmm.

MIXON: You know how they do retirement scrapbooks. And they put it, “The Power of the Parasol – Eunice Mixon and Friends.” So I - - when I get fired, I get fired in style.

SHORT: Well, you’ve certainly had a very interesting life. And I want to thank you on behalf of the Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia for being our guest.

MIXON: Oh, can I - - well, I want to tell you where I got my corsage.

SHORT: Oh, please do.

MIXON: I got that because I - - the Chief Justice called me. I served for several years on the investigative panel of the disciplinary board. I didn’t know it existed. Did you know the lawyers have a good way to get rid of bad lawyers? They really do. If you know a bad lawyer, you don’t have to put up with him. The bad lawyer - - the good lawyers don’t want that to happen. Called and asked me if I would - - he said, “The general counsel of the state bar would like to know if you would...” Well, I thought that I’d been caught in something, you know. It sounded like sending the head lawyer after me. But he explained what it is, and so it sounds like being on the grand jury when they’re dealing with problem attorneys. And so, yeah, this sounds interesting. Don’t pay me anything, but they pay my expenses, and that’s sufficient. But last summer - - I’ve served a number of years - - and I’m not going to have to retire. I was suspicious when they said they wanted to give me a plaque or something. I said, “Does this mean I’ve got to retire?” They

said, "Oh, no. We want you to keep doing what you're doing."

But the Chief Justice called and wanted to know if I could come to lunch on October 1st. I said, "I don't know what's happening October 1st, but if you're having a party, I'll be there." I said, "The only thing I like better than going to a party is giving a party." So they said, "We just want you to come to lunch and give you a plaque or something, because you've served so well." And I said, "Well, I'll certainly be there." And I thought, well, a plaque - - you know, you and I have more plaques than we've got wall space, but you do love the thought. And this is special, and I think about I'll take my great-granddaughters.

And so I came up actually yesterday, but when I told some of my friends where I was going, there are 11 people in Tifton that are attorneys that are former students of mine, and Rob was my first one, Rob Reinhardt. And you love them all, but Rob I've been associated with a good bit. And he said, "Well, Miss Eunice, you've got friends in Tifton that want it to really be a special day when you have lunch with the Supreme Court. What can we do?" I said, "Oh, you're glad for me. That's all you have to do." He said, "Well, we think you ought to have a corsage." And so this is a corsage left from lunch yesterday. And they gave me - - oh, that wasn't just a plaque. They framed something with a bunch of "whereases" and Latin language, and I think "amicus" means friend. I think I'm friend of the court or something.

SHORT: Amicus curiae, friend of the court.

MIXON: And then they - - you know, a picture of the chief justices is all in the frame. And they

gave me a gavel that has a clock on it that I ignore, because I'm sure that we've run over whatever time we had. But it's been a - - you were interested in things that I had done. I'm interested in the things that you've done. We've got to have some equal time here.

SHORT: Well, maybe one day we'll do it.

MIXON: I'd like that.

SHORT: Thank you.

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