

Louise McBee interviewed by Bob Short
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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia. We're honored today to have as our guest, Louise McBee, who is a former educator and six term member of the Georgia General Assembly. Welcome.

LOUISE MCBEE: Thank you. Good to be here.

SHORT: It's a long way from Strawberry Plains, Tennessee to Athens, Georgia.

MCBEE: That's right.

SHORT: Please tell us how you got here.

MCBEE: Well, I had graduated from East Tennessee State University having been born in a little community called Strawberry Plains. Graduated there, worked a couple years after I graduated and then went to – eventually to Columbia University and got a master's degree and then to Ohio State University and got a doctorate. Came back to East Tennessee State and served for two years as the Dean of Women and then the Dean of Students from this institution, the Vice President for Student Affairs they were they called, came to Johnson City and wanted me to come to Georgia. I finally agreed to do that and have been here ever since. That would

have been in 1963 and it was the best move I ever made and it's been a happy life here.

I was born in a little community, as I said, Strawberry Plains unincorporated. My grandparents owned a farm there. My father worked for American Zinc Company and I had two brothers. As little children starting seven, eight, and nine years, we were close together. We carried the paper for nine years in Strawberry Plains. My dad insisted that we go up on the porch, put the paper behind the door. We had our routes divided. But we learned a lot of lessons. We learned about people who pay you or people who would try to not pay you, learned to save our money. We made 20 cents a week by carrying the paper every day to people, and in Strawberry Plains the houses were not in blocks. You walked distances sometimes between a house for 20 cents a week. It was in some ways, we did it for nine years, the best experience as a child you could have. You learned to take care of your money, to save enough money to pay for the paper for the next week, that's what we had to do. And then we would divide the – keep us a little kitty, we called it, to take care of things, but divided the money so that we could use the 10 or 15 cents a piece that we would make during the week a piece for ourselves. We learned the people that would pay, the people who would try to avoid paying you, so on. So it was a good experience. We learned to take care of money and we did that, as I said, for nine years.

We all went to school there. It was a country school. There were 15 or 16 in my graduating class. Only two of us went on to college out of that class. It was not a thing that you just did then. You elected and made preparation to do it. I worked during the summer in Gatlinburg as a waitress in a hotel and then the next three summers I worked at Oak Ridge. That was during the war. You had to have college experience to work in the job. I was with Carbine Carbon, worked

all summer, lived out in Oak Ridge, and was there the night the atom bomb was dropped. Having no knowledge of what an atom bomb was really, but they were selling papers as we came out of the midnight shift, saying that the atom bomb had been dropped.

SHORT: Did you know when you left for college that you wanted to be an educator?

MCBEE: Yes. I got two degrees – I mean two certifications by my work. I was certified to teach in elementary school. They used to separate it. They may do that now; I don't know, but I was certified to teach by law in the elementary school and in high school and ended up one year – I worked one year in a high school in Virginia and then came back to East Tennessee State. They brought me back to the institution there to teach, and I stayed there three years and then went on to my master's and my doctorate.

SHORT: What did you teach?

MCBEE: Physical education.

SHORT: Physical education. You're a prime example of what a good physical education –

MCBEE: That's right. That's right.

SHORT: -- major should look like.

MCBEE: That's right.

SHORT: You came to the University of Georgia after the crisis they had whether or not...

MCBEE: To admit Charlene and –

SHORT: Yes.

MCBEE: Yes, that was all over and they had graduated, but the problems were not over by any stretch. There was still some anger. There were not many blacks on the campus, practically none. The day I went to work I was in -- my office was in academic building that looked down on the Varsity, which at that time was a restaurant. The day I went to work the blacks, the African-Americans were marching around the Varsity because they were not allowed to go into eat, and I know being bothered by that. And we continued to have demonstrations, small demonstrations on the campus and students on the campus – black students.

SHORT: You've seen a lot of change here.

MCBEE: Lot of change. Lot of change. It was under my administration as vice-president I had

put one of my assistant vice-presidents -- associate vice-presidents to work. That was his job to try to bring more African-American students to the campus and he did. Not only the students but principally faculty, to find African-American faculty that could do the job on a college campus and try to – and I know we hired several under my administration.

SHORT: You climbed the academic ladder here all the way to Vice-President of Academic Affairs.

MCBEE: I did.

SHORT: That was before your campaign for the Georgia election.

MCBEE: Yeah. Well I started – I came here as Dean of Women and then I was made Dean of Students, which is the top position in Student Affairs and has the other offices under it. I stayed in that a while and then the Vice-President for Academic Affairs asked me if I would like to come and work in his office. We had just gotten through some of the demonstrations, the Vietnam War, Kent State killings, and I was ready to try something else having gone through that. So, having the opportunity open to me to move into Academic Affairs, I did it and stayed as an assistant and then an Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs and then eventually Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

SHORT: Well the academic ladder is not the only thing you've climbed. Tell us about Mount Everest.

MCBEE: The year I retired, 1988, I had a student come to – that previous summer come to work with me in my yard to help me sod my yard and he said "Will you help me get permission from the Chinese government to go to Mount Everest." I knew he was a climber, a young guy who did a lot of climbing. I said, "Well, sure I will." And he said, "We'll take you with us." I considered it just a light moment. But I did get permission for them to go to China. It got in the paper that Dr. Sanford, who was the president, and I were going to go with them. So, without much thought – more thought about what it would be than that, we did indeed go. At that point, after we finished the climb, according to the records, I was the oldest woman who had ever gone to the base camp at Mount Everest, which was 18,000 – about 18,000 feet. It was a dangerous journey, one I never would have dreamed would be as difficult as it was, but I did okay and Dr. Sanford who was 20 years older than I was – or I'm not sure of that – but much older than I was, he made it as well.

SHORT: How did you get interested in politics?

MCBEE: My parents always voted; one was a Democrat and one was Republican and we used to – they talked about canceling out each other's vote and we always knew voting – or was told it was important and that it was your public responsibility to do it and as soon as I was old enough

I registered to vote – but you take on a new interest in it when you get into academic settings where the quality of legislators you get has a lot to do with the support for education. So, I had never had any intention of running but Lawton Stephens, who was in – well, was a legislator and lived here in Athens, was called to – what do you call it? A judge.

SHORT: Superior court –

MCBEE: A judge. And his sister called me that afternoon and told me – just she was calling about something else, that Judge Lawton had just been made a judge. He was in the legislature and it had just happened. So I turned around, went to – as soon as I finished that conversation went to the telephone and called the paper and the radio station and said I was going to run for his office. Some people had encouraged me to run for mayor of Athens. They called it something else then. City Manager or something. But I was not interested in that. I had been out of my job at the university for a year or so. So, I just, on a whim, almost without really giving it much thought went and called and said I was going to run.

And then I called Phyllis Barra, who was a Democratic delegate to several of the conventions and so on, and was a friend of mine, and I called her and I said, "I've done this, what in the world do I do next?" She told me what to do. She said "Sit down now and call everybody you call this weekend and ask them to support you." It was going to be a nonpartisan election, which was good. So, I did that. I did exactly what she said and asked them to support me. So, I had a whole list and I set me up a committee. Well, during the next week – to make things interesting,

during the next week Barbara Dooley called me and said, "Would you come over here and talk with me." I knew just as well as anything that she was getting ready to run against me, but I went over there and she said that she had thought about it and she wanted to do that. And she said, "What do you think?" And I said, "Well, of course I'd rather you didn't but it's your right and we'll have a good race." So, she got in it and so did Chester Sosbee, who was a well known, popular pharmacist at Hodgson's Pharmacy. And so there were three of us in the race and I didn't think I had a clue -- the possibility of winning it, certainly not outright, maybe on a runoff with three people. But I won the race with -- won it without a runoff. I got 60% of the votes, 61% of the votes.

SHORT: That's the only time you had opposition.

MCBEE: I didn't have any opposition any time else. And I served for 13 years.

SHORT: That's a compliment to your service.

MCBEE: Well, I hope so. I really did -- I gave it my all. I enjoyed it thoroughly. Speaker Murphy, I had heard about him and knew about him. He was a wonderful man. Unfortunately, not until he died did the papers and all the people who knew and admired him secretly and privately come forth. He got criticized probably more than any politician I ever saw in the paper. But he was a good, kind, honest man, and he was particularly sensitive to women being in the

legislature and tried to help them. So, I went to see him when I first got over there. I knew my main interest was going to be education. He put me on the Higher Education Committee. So, I had 13 years of good service under Tom Murphy. Well, not the last year I didn't, because he got beat. He was defeated in his last run, the same time at my last run.

SHORT: I imagine with your background and education and your work here at the University of Georgia made you very important to the Speaker and to the leaders and the governor.

MCBEE: Well, I was only one of two at that – when I got there. I think there may have been others later who were tied to higher education and just three or four who were actually teachers that came out of that background. So, I was made eventually chair of higher education and certainly worked at a crucial period in higher education because it was when the HOPE Scholarship came along and we had to work with the provisions along with president – I mean Governor – who had been responsible for bringing it to bear. You know, I can't think of the governor –

SHORT: Governor Miller?

MCBEE: Miller. Governor Miller. And so, it was a wonderful opportunity to work with him and later with Roy Barnes in developing and expanding and testing after each year the amount of money we spent and what we could continue to do to give students more assistance and so on.

The Hope Scholarship, in my opinion, was the best thing that happened to this state in that century. Why? It kept the better students in the state. Because when they had good grades parents said "No need for you to go to wherever, go here and go to the university, go to some college in the state." Secondly, it gave hope and promise to students who would have never seen it as an opportunity until -- they could make good grades but school was too expensive for them and they never saw it as an opportunity. Once that opened up they and their parents saw it. And so, higher education became a part of their aspiration.

SHORT: Well since we've passed the lottery and since the people have approved it, we've spent a lot more funds on public schools –

MCBEE: That's right.

SHORT: -- than ever.

MCBEE: That's right.

SHORT: Are we getting our monies' worth?

MCBEE: Well, we still have a long way to go. There's some data that is really interesting to me. It was Roy Barnes data but I expect it's still accurate. He says for every ten boys and girls

that go to college – I mean that go to school, public schools, six of them finish the eighth – let's see, no – nine of them, ten of them finish the eighth grade, three of them go on to college – no, three of them go on to high school – I mean to college, and two of them finally get a degree.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

MCBEE: So we still don't have a high percentage of – I mean they need to correct that data on it. I'll look to be sure that I'm right on that, but it's one out – it amounts to about one out of ten.

SHORT: We hear suggestions from time to time that the state should provide vouchers for students in order to attend the school of their choice. Is that a good idea?

MCBEE: Well, in effect, they have a voucher, if they come out with a B average in high school they can go to any college in the state. It costs more in some of them and some of the schools don't admit them, but they can go somewhere in the state because private schools get it as well. So there's no reason why if they have done the work in high school they can't go wherever they want to go and where the college will admit them.

SHORT: I've been asked to ask you your position on ERA, Equal Rights Amendment.

MCBEE: Well, I don't have any problem with it. Georgia hadn't passed it yet. Why not? Why

shouldn't there be? Why? Why not?

SHORT: Let's go back for a minute to the composition of the Georgia Legislature when you were there. According to my calculations, only 10% for the House of Representatives was female.

MCBEE: Uh-huh. It's a little higher now. I think it's maybe up 15, maybe – seemed like there were about 45 of us.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

MCBEE: Forty or forty-five when I was there. There are a few more now. But not nearly enough. But country wide I think it's what? About 23%. So, aside from Arizona, we do about as well as anybody. But it's not high enough anywhere. That was one of the things that I admired about Speaker Murphy. He gave women leadership positions. He saw that they were listened to on bills, he put them on committees that they requested and had some expertise in, like children's and education and so on and tried to support them in their – and help them with bills. He was a great help to women.

SHORT: Tell us, if you will, your role in educational legislation while you were down in Atlanta.

MCBEE: Well I had four bills that are my picks for what I have – what I did while I was there. I'm going to get them so I can give you – even give you the numbers of them. There are four that I take great pride in. One was House Bill 202, which gave teachers credit toward retirement for unused sick leave. No teacher in the state, man or woman, whatever, had got credit for unused sick leave when every other state employee did. It took us two years to fund it, but Roy Barnes, Governor Barnes helped me get it funded by splitting it into two years. But now teachers get retirement just like other state employees. And that was something that I was really pleased to be able to do.

Another bill was House Bill 424 which established a college saving plan. Parents or grandparents can deposit monies, tax free, in a saving plan that's managed by the State Treasurers Office and when the student starts to college the money can come out interest free. They've made interest on it but it's theirs to use for that child's education. We encouraged parents and grandparents at the birth of a child, as we – as I worked for the bill, to do that, to put a little bit of money in each – into the child's plan that would be tax free so that they would be ready to go to college.

The third bill was the one that – the work that I did with the Hope Scholarship after it had been in practice, we had used it for a while in the years that I was there, we thought it needed a study and I led the study commission bill on that. And then a fourth bill that I worked on that not many people even knew about but probably did more for Athens than anything in terms of the environment of Athens, and it was one that – there was a person who tried to set up a landfill in

Arcade. The way it would have been there would have been a truck every three minutes coming from all over the country, bringing in garbage to put in Arcade, 15 miles from Athens. I was able to work on it in the House, and with help in the Senate to stop that bill. The bill that I wanted that – for which there was – I had the greatest disappointment was a bill that I had put in that would have put up dollar tax on every pack of cigarettes. Why? Because there's all kinds of data that show that the cost of the cigarette is a deterrent especially to young people. The bill that beat it was one that the current governor had in that put a 25 or 50 cent – 25 cents, I think, tax on it. My bill would have produced over \$600 million each year and could have been used for so many things, and in addition, kept young people – would have reduced teenage smoking. So those were the things that I was – that I did in the legislature that I was most pleased with.

And I was on the Retirement Committee and on the Budget Committee and on Higher Education, and those were three that gave me an opportunity to work for the things that I knew the best and to try to bring funds into the thing that I knew the best.

The Speaker was good in that he would try, if possible, to put you into committees where you could be the best advocate and the best sponsor and know the most about it. And so, that was what he did for me and I feel like I did a lot for education when I was over there, and particularly for the teachers in terms of getting the same retirement that other state employees had always had, and that none of us who had worked for it got.

SHORT: We hear a lot about our students' average on the SAT scores and what is considered to be an awful dropout rate.

MCBEE: Yeah.

SHORT: What can we do to improve those two and maybe bring them up to the national average?

MCBEE: Well, of course we all know that the best education the child gets is what he gets home starting at three years old when parents read to them, encourage them to read and start with books and keep them away from TVs and so on. So, a part of the job is to educate parents. We have particular difficulty I think with that where the parents both work and that's the situation generally in the poorest families. Both parents work, mother has to come in, get supper, get the clothes ready for the next day and all the chores of a housewife, and not much time left to work with the children. Unless children are encouraged to read from the time – or are read to by the time they're three years old, they say they never catch up. I've seen data on that. I don't know it to be a fact but I assume since they put out as a fact that it is, that unless a child is read to starting at least by the third grade that there's a lapse there that never allows them to catch. And when both parents work and particularly in the homes where there's not help and homes where the financial situation is not as good, that's the place where they don't get read to and they put them down in front of the TV set and they eat too much and get too much weight on them and don't learn the things that they need to learn to get through.

SHORT: How effective has Governor Miller's pre-kindergarten program been?

MCBEE: Well I think great. We know from all kinds of data that the better the student the earlier the start. And unfortunately, at this point anyway, there are not enough of them. There's students in this state who are eligible for it who can't get to it, they don't have enough programs. But the lottery money is there for it. I don't know what the hold up on that is, but they say that there are still places that they don't have adequate pre-kindergarten.

SHORT: Going all the way back to Governor Herman Talmadge in 1948, every governor has called themselves the education governor. Which one has come closest to being a true educational governor?

MCBEE: Well, in my opinion, I was not here until in the 60s and I didn't know as much about it, but in my opinion, Zell Miller, because of the HOPE Scholarship. I don't think there was anything in that century that did for this state what that did. As I said a little earlier, it did two things. One, it kept good students in the state. They were going to Chapel Hill and Vanderbilt and places, but the HOPE Scholarship, when they were eligible for it, parents would say, well, you just stay here; you got that, you need to just stay here and then you can put the money on your master's degree and so on. So it kept the better students in the state – good students in the state. And secondly, it provided an emphasis and a feeling among the children who had not seen a higher education as a possibility. It gave them hope that that was a possibility and opened the

doors to more people. There's no question about it. We've had – what is it now? Over 900,000 – maybe it's over a million now who've gone to college on the Hope Scholarship. And then it also encouraged students to make better grades. The students who saw that as a way to get into college, to have help to get into college, to do well while they were in high school.

SHORT: Besides education, what were some of the other issues you were interested in when you were in the legislature?

MCBEE: Well I asked to be on the Retirement Committee because, as I said, teachers – I was the first one to get – I left the university without a retirement committee. I was able to put that in and work for other benefits for people – teachers who were retiring. There's a thing going on right now that the governor's behind that – it's a terrible thing. He's trying to take that one and a half percentage that teachers get each six months, make it optional for them to get it. Maybe you get it if there's money available. Well, there is money in that fund. There's \$50 billion in that fund right now. Plenty in it but he's wanting to look at it for other things. When it's teacher's money who have gone into that with that idea. We have teachers now all over this state who've made \$25,000 and \$30,000; that was their salary. Without that one and a half percent that comes in addition to their salary that comes now every six months they can't make it. And I have – I just came here out of a meeting where we are encouraging them to write the committee that's making a decision on that, to keep them in that where they don't have – where that can't be taken away from them by the governor. We have not had an education governor this time,

unfortunately. He has not – he's a Georgia graduate, and I'm sorry I can't – I have to say that, but I must say it, that his greatest interest has not been in education.

SHORT: Getting back to your service in the House, who are some of the most effective members with whom you worked?

MCBEE: Dubose Porter, who's chair of – or he was chair of the – some of the large committees. Bill Cummings, who himself was a teacher, the current Secretary of State -- right now his name slips me – who was in the house then and was Governor Miller's floor leader. Kathy Ash, who is still there. She's into her probably 18th to 20th year, Nan Orrock, those are some of the ones. Now most of those are Democrats because I was there when the House was predominantly – House and Senate predominantly Democratic and certainly the leadership was Democratic. It's not the case now and I don't – so I've had no opportunity to observe them in the same way that I did when I was there.

SHORT: Did you have a mentor in the House?

MCBEE: I guess Bill Cummings. He had been there 20 years. He was a teacher. He was chair of the Education Committee and I served as vice-chair of it with him. He – and he particularly knew public education more than higher education. There were only – there were just two of us that were from higher education in the whole Senate, the whole House – the whole Senate and

House. There were just two people from higher education. I was one and an African- American from Atlanta, who was at one of the black colleges. We were the only two that represented higher education.

SHORT: You were also on the Appropriations Committee.

MCBEE: Yep. And I fought in that for education. That was first and foremost my whole time over there was to do what I could for education. And unfortunately, that's – that has slowed down some in recent years, and not to our credit. Not to the credit of the – of the leadership. Education is job one for – if we're going to have a good state. It's job one. We're just not putting the money and the interest and the time on it that it deserves.

SHORT: The local school boards seem to be concerned about the governor's order to spend 65%, at least, of the state appropriations in the classroom. Is that a good idea?

MCBEE: Well, I would want to see the – I have not seen the details of it. I'm pleased that he's interested in putting more money and emphasis on education. I have not been pleased thus far with what has been done under the current Secretary of Education, Cathy Cox. I think – I don't know much – I don't know how much of it is interference from other areas but it doesn't seem to me that she has had the freedom and the energy, the direction or whatever is needed to move us forward in education. We don't – we're not graduating enough of the people who start in the

first grade. Until we keep them through and graduated from high school, students – students who don't graduate from high school can't get jobs. We can never raise the level of this state without working with those people and more deliberately and putting enough emphasis on it that during their – around the 7th and 8th grade and freshmen is when we lose them. They'll stay that long and then they pull out. We just can't – the state can't move up with its about – what? Aren't we about 45% black? A lot of that happens in the black community. They drop out and go to work. I've just been in a meeting where we've been talking about that and where if we could keep them in the technical colleges where they could learn a trade or some way to make a good living. Plumbers, electricians, those people make as much – make more than teachers. If we could keep those students in until they were eligible to get into the technical schools, they could go even though there are college – there are college level courses they can take now in the technical college, which I thought was a mistake. But it's done so it's there. But there are also the technical roots they can then take where they can learn to be plumbers and electricians in areas that don't demand high academic skills but where there's a good wage that goes with it when they get trained in those areas.

SHORT: Has the Federal *No Child Left Behind* pact been effective?

MCBEE: All I've heard about it, it sounds good, but I don't know anything it's done. I have not seen any data that show it's been effective.

SHORT: Talking about the Appropriations Committee, are you familiar with The Green Door?

MCBEE: Well, I always heard about it but it was not one I was every behind or even knew where it was.

SHORT: Really.

MCBEE: I heard Paul Broun was supposed to be on it and he was from Athens. I don't know that I ever asked him about it. I guess if I had he would have certainly told me. I thought it was more kind of a charm and mystique or something than it was – I knew that there was a meeting after we did appropriations and so on and there was always one up in one of the large meeting rooms and anybody could go and sit around the edge and try to hear what they were talking about and what they were saying, and I use to do that, just to show them that I was there and that I was interested in what they were putting on higher education. But if there is indeed any kind of a room – a green room where the final decisions are made I never saw it. But it could be – I think it's maybe another room – maybe has a different color now but they still call it green because in the time I was over there I don't remember seeing any green door.

SHORT: It seems that the General Assembly spends a lot of time on appropriations considerations.

MCBEE: They do.

SHORT: And you were on that committee. Tell us how the State Legislature appropriates our money.

MCBEE: Well there are subcommittees that look at – you know, at different parts of it, that look at county governments and city governments and universities and public schools and different committees handle those and then it all comes back -- funnels back in later to a full committee. A lot of attention is paid to that because no one can – no one can know the full budget. You have to put people – the chairs of those committees who know about it and can make wise decisions. Then they appear before the full committee and make their case and I don't have any particular problem with how those things are done. I think sometimes it's changed after it's been put together. I mean when you think it's been put together it gets changed that I object to – or objected to the green door, glass door, green door, whatever kind of door it was that have final say. And I remember the one who had a lot on that is now in prison. The guy from Augusta.

SHORT: Charles Walker.

MCBEE: Charles Walker. He was the chair in the Senate and very powerful. What he said went and I remember that last year he was there and I was on the committee and how he would roar into the room and make pronouncements. As it turned out, you know, he was not completely

ethical in his own private life and he appealed to be let out early not too long ago but it was denied. I think we have three in prison right now from the legislature. He's one of them. The other guy was – I had his name in some of my notes – was from the same town.

SHORT: Robin Williams.

MCBEE: Robin Williams, that's one. And then there was one that was put in this past year just as an African-American from there in Atlanta.

SHORT: Ron Sailor.

MCBEE: Right. I knew all three of those. When things like that happen it's – it puts a distrust in the larger population for the legislature whole when it mostly they're good, honest people who want to do what's right. So, I'm for locking them up and keeping them there. I'm angry enough at what they do to disillusion the public about it. Because a lot of people who are on those committees work long and hard and are honest and want to do what's right.

SHORT: How did you look at lobbyists?

MCBEE: Well, I knew a lot of good people were over there and gave – were able to give you good information and I went to some of them when I didn't understand things. They stayed –

most of them anyway -- well informed about different bills and so on. I didn't ever have one influence me. I've had some talk to me but not in an effort to persuade me to vote a certain way. They've asked me why I took certain stands on it and would I consider doing something else and -- but they were always -- most of them were past students at the university. That's what I found when I was in the legislature that most of them, they knew me and I knew them. A lot of them called me Dean McBee because they had been students here when I was a dean. It made it easier to work with them having known them as a student and there having known me and we respected each other and it was a large percentage of Georgia graduates in the legislature.

SHORT: The university has been very fortunate over the years to have some strong representation --

MCBEE: That's true.

SHORT: -- over there, including you.

MCBEE: Starting way -- starting way back with --

SHORT: Chapel --

MCBEE: Chapel Matthews, and then of course with Paul Brown, who was there thirty -- what? --

33 years? Part of that was while I was there. The one who now has certainly, in terms of years, a status is Keith Heard. He doesn't live in Athens which limits his influence. I thought you were supposed to live in the town where you serve but maybe that's not the rule. I don't know.

SHORT: In the district.

MCBEE: Or in the district. Well –

SHORT: That brings up an interesting thing that to me at least is reapportionment.

MCBEE: Yeah.

SHORT: We've had several reapportionments and each time there's always some sort of confusion and opposition.

MCBEE: It's the most political, in my book, degrading, dishonest thing that goes on. What does it do? For example, the smallest town in Georgia is Athens and it split it. Ralph Hudgens did it. Why did he do it? I don't know. He's never given me a good explanation. He said he thought it strengthened the city. Well how do you strengthen it? He took the reapportionment away from Madison County, said it was not best for them, but then he divided Athens. I thought it was so he could get tickets to the football game.

SHORT: Is it fair to say that our legislative districts have been drawn to protect parties...

MCBEE: That's right. No question.

SHORT: ...and for racial reasons rather than binding communities together --

MCBEE: No question.

SHORT: -- that seem to be falling apart.

MCBEE: Why would you split Athens for any reason other than to afford you a seat in it so it would give you leverage? No reason at all. A lot of the -- some states do it different. Iowa is one state I believe that does it different. I don't know whether I put in a bill -- I think I maybe did put in a bill. I wanted it so much to be some kind of a citizens committee that would work with the legislature. I don't know -- I don't think the committee -- I'm pretty sure I had the bill drawn. Whether it ever got -- it didn't get out of committee if I did. But to stop that kind of unfair, unjust, wrong kind of things like splitting Athens, the smallest town in the state for no reason, for no reason other than political reasons. So, and I'm sure there would be some that go on even if you had Citizens Committee, but I believe it would be limited.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Getting back to Louis McBee, you decided in 1994 not to run again.

MCBEE: Right. Two reasons. I had family problems in Tennessee where I needed to be free to go back there and see about them. Then I saw that it was going Republican; I knew I would lose my chair, my position on higher education, and so, those were the two things that entered into it.

SHORT: Now, speaking of going Republican, I'd like to ask you a question or two about party politics.

MCBEE: Okay.

SHORT: As we all know, the Republican party has now taken control of the legislature.

MCBEE: Right.

SHORT: And the governor's office.

MCBEE: Right.

SHORT: What happened?

MCBEE: Well, I really don't know. But that's when I left dodge, as they say, because I knew that things were going to – going to turn and that I would lose my chair and not be able to do as much. And as I said, and because of personal problems. But I think we're going to see a shift back to a more balanced party this next year. I don't think the Democrats will take over but I think there will be more of them there. I may be wrong. We'll know day after tomorrow. But what interested me this year, and I've asked several people and they have no explanation, why so few had opposition. Not a one of ours had opposition. Well I guess – I know Keith didn't and the other one didn't. Well I don't think any of them did. Yeah, Kauser, a woman's running against him. That's right. Kauser, you know, the senator had opposition, not formidable opposition I don't think, but opposition. But why don't they run? One, it's costly. When I ran the first time in 19-- was it '91 or whatever? I put up \$15,000 – well when Barbara Dooley got in it I knew she would raise a lot more money and I finally raised 35,000 but I didn't spend it all. Now they tell you up front you got to raise a \$100,000, got to have that to start with and it will take more than that. Well a lot of people – and that means you got to ask people for money or put your own money up. I know one senator over there, a woman, who put \$500 -- \$5,000 of her own money up. Well, you got to want it a lot to do that kind of thing. So, that was one of the reasons I backed off. Then I saw it was going Republican and I'd lose my chair and then I had some problems in Tennessee, so all of that together, I decided to back out.

SHORT: Some people, Democrats, believe that Tom Murphy in the House of Representatives was the key to Democratic politics in Georgia. Do you agree with that?

MCBEE: That's probably – that's probably true, yeah.

SHORT: With Murphy as Speaker?

MCBEE: Yeah. But also, a difference in population trends. Atlanta grew rapidly. Where'd they come from? They didn't come from south Georgia; they came from all over the country. I think that new mass that moved into Athens – I mean into Atlanta and Georgia, and particularly Atlanta, came with Republican leanings, and it's going to be interesting. Some people are predicting Obama will take Georgia this time. I don't much believe he will but I think it will be closer than it would have been a few years ago.

SHORT: Now speaking of that, politics in Georgia certainly have changed, but perhaps not as much as politics in other areas. What do you think the Democrats need to do to regain their majority in Georgia state government?

MCBEE: Well, I don't know. They say – I've talked to several of them. They think they'll take back a few seats this time. But if you've got a Republican contingency, I mean population around you, and you've got a governor who pours money into it and other people who support people in their races. I noticed in yesterday's paper the man who owns the Falcons had given \$65,000 and it listed a whole bunch of other people. He just happened to be the name I

recognized. Did you see that? Where they'd given \$65,000 to candidates?

SHORT: Yes.

MCBEE: When it gets that expensive it causes people to back off on running. And I'm sorry to see that happen because it restricts people who would be good legislators. And it tends to turn it to the wealthy or the people who have influence and tend to leave out the more moderate and the poorer people.

SHORT: Some disenchanted Democrats believe the state Democratic party is too urban and too dependent on minority and labor support. Do you agree with that?

MCBEE: Well, it's probably pretty accurate. A lot of people are concerned about what Obama will do if he's elected in terms of the people who will have elected him and what the expectations there are from those people. Some people, particularly Republicans, are very concerned about what will happen to the country with -- I'm hoping he will have a proper perspective on it and won't be -- try to make too many changes too rapidly. But there are some people that thing that he'll be -- that he's a risk because of that, because of his promises to make life better for people who are poorer and many of those, or in this state anyway, are the black, but we'll just have to wait and see on that.

SHORT: Now many states require party registration to prevent cross over voting.

MCBEE: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Should we do that in Georgia?

MCBEE: I don't have any problem with that. I believe you ought to vote on – for what you consider to be the best person and make party less of an issue than it is. I know that that doesn't sound like somebody who's run as a party person, because you have to, but I wouldn't have any problem with – and I vote – I cross party lines to vote. I vote for Republicans as often as I do Democrats. I voted for Republican presidents. I try to vote for the person that I think is the best for the country and I know that that's not strong political ties but that's the way – that's the way I do it anyway.

SHORT: Do you believe in term limits?

MCBEE: I'm torn on that. Generally I do. I think they should be lengthened maybe to – not just ten years. You know, we got people – that guy that's been stealing us blind in Washington that they just sent home, you know, has been up there 27 years or something. That's too long I think. If you had a procedure where you didn't rotate them all out at the same time, I mean, you'd have to get some kind of pattern to keep the people with experience – some experience in,

but I think that some limit on it might be good.

SHORT: But you agree there's power in incumbency?

MCBEE: Yeah. Yeah, theirs is. There's no question. No question.

SHORT: Some people think that one reason the Republican party in Georgia has been successful is the quality of candidates.

MCBEE: Well, maybe I look too hard but I don't have to look very far to find a few Republicans that I don't think were good choices. I think our – of course, and he's the first Republican we've had in – the current governor is the first Republican we've had. I believe people will – there will be a Democrat the next time.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Well, back to Louise McBee. Very wonderful, academic and political life.

MCBEE: Well thank you.

SHORT: Did you ever think of seeking higher office?

MCBEE: No. No. No, I didn't. No. One, the cost of it, the – I look at Jim Martin who's a

good friend of mine. I sat in front of him for 13 years and on vote and policies that I was not sure on I discussed them with him. He's a good man. He is really a good man. I see the punishment he's had to take to be – have his life criticized when he's been so good. Of course he's criticizing his opponent at the same time. I never did have to do any of that when I was running and I don't think I would do it if I were running, but I don't like that part of it where they tell things about the other person that if they're not untrue they're certainly bordering on untruth, and where they're so unkind to the other person. Women do that less than the men I think. I think women are going to be increasing their running for public office. They make good candidates because they're conscientious, they're generally more honest. If there's been any dishonest woman put out I don't know about it. Has there been? For taking money?

SHORT: Not to my knowledge.

MCBEE: Not to my knowledge. They certainly are more dedicated and they're interested in things that we need to look at, like family, and home, and children, and strengthening the American fabric, and I think we're going to increasingly see – it's about 23% now across the country, about the same here in Georgia, of women in public office, but I think we're going to see more than that going into public office and I think it will put a better quality on the total body for having them there. Don't you?

SHORT: Yes, I do. Yes. If a young lady came to you today and asked your advice on getting

into politics what would you tell her?

MCBEE: Well I would tell her that it's a very challenging thing to do, it's a costly thing to do. It takes a lot of your time. It sets you up for criticism that sometimes hurts. But it's a wonderful way to serve and that I hope they will consider it and do it, knowing that those things are part of the – a part of it. Because I think where women have been elected they serve well and they perform well. I don't think -- there's one exception to it right now that I'm concerned about. The Secretary of State, I think she has not been as accommodating as she could have been in trying to help people get the vote. I think it's important for people that they want to vote and need to be able to vote. And to wait 12 hours seems unnecessary to me. She has, either because of the regulations in her office, but apparently just because of her own unwillingness to make any changes, has kept people who want to vote at very difficult circumstances, where they have to stand hours and hours and hours in trying to get other hours – the hours extended or an additional voting places. It looks like to me that we could do that when people are wanting to vote.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Well, as you look back on you career, what has been your greatest accomplishment?

MCBEE: Well I think probably in terms of public service, and all of it has been public service, whether it's higher education or the legislature, in terms of the legislature, I think it was the three

bills – four bills that, really three that I mentioned to you in the beginning, that I was most proud of. Then in terms of higher education, I think it has been to have been in a position in a – primarily in a wonderful university where I had the opportunity to make it better, which I think I did in my 25 years and that I have been able to work with some of the leaders of this state and some of the best, finest young people in this state who now themselves have taken leadership positions in the state and it's a source of great pride to me when I see students like Cathy Cox who's now the president of Young Harris and who was a very fine Secretary of State and then others who are over there now who – that I had an opportunity in their young life to have some influence.

SHORT: Your biggest disappointment?

MCBEE: Well, I don't know. I think probably it was a piece of legislation that I failed to get through that I thought would have brought money into this state that could have been used in so many ways and would have stopped people from smoking. That bill that I had put a dollar on a pack of cigarettes for tax. I forget how much, just the 25 cent tax, how much money it made, but I think it was 600,000 a year maybe in tax money. Would one, stop students from smoking, young particularly who another dollar would just be too much for them, and so protect health but also provide money that could be used for education purposes, not be able to get that bill through.

SHORT: How would you like to be remembered?

MCBEE: As somebody who was honest, open, cared about people, and tried as best I could to do what was right.

SHORT: Well, thank you very much, Louise McBee, for being our guest today.

MCBEE: Well, thank you. I've enjoyed talking with you.

SHORT: Good, thanks. Anything we missed?

MCBEE: No, I don't think –

SHORT: Oh, there's one thing that I didn't ask you to do which I would like to ask you now if you will is tell us about some of your extracurricular activities that has resulted in your winning all kinds of awards. Some are education, some are community.

MCBEE: Well I won the first Regents' Award for Excellence where they take you to Atlanta and it's called the Eldridge McMillan trophy, but I got the first one. That was for my work in higher education.

SHORT: You were also a Fulbright Scholar.

MCBEE: I was a Fulbright Scholar in Holland for a year.

SHORT: What happened over there?

MCBEE: Well I taught in a [Indiscernible] a high school – a higher school. It's a higher level student – women students who were going on to university. I taught for a year there and then went to the Holy Land during the end of the year and then traveled in a car that I bought while I was there. A friend came over and we traveled all over Europe that next summer. So that has to be one of the highlights to have lived a year in Europe and taught in a wonderful school. I lived in the home of the master – of the – he was the harbor master of Rotterdam, which is the largest – was then, I guess it still is the largest port in the world. Then climbing to 18,000 on Everest is something that at least the data that I have seen, there's no woman beyond that high on Everest yet.

SHORT: You still do a lot of physical activity.

MCBEE: Yeah, I do. I do. I was – I played tennis – I was still playing tennis on a team until when that car hit me and knocked me down in the shopping center. It messed up my rotator cuff and I can't – I can't do it any more. The doctor said it was too bad shape. I can't raise my arm

enough to hit a ball down. But –

SHORT: But you do like – you do –

MCBEE: But I walk two miles every day and work in my yard.

SHORT: You like water canoeing.

MCBEE: Yeah, well I – yeah, I've gone several times down the Chattooga. You ever done that?

SHORT: You know that's my home area.

MCBEE: Well, I'll tell you it's exciting.

SHORT: Yes, it is.

MCBEE: Yeah, I've gone down that half a dozen times. Then I went down the Colorado River on a raft. I've traveled all over the world. Really the only place I have not been is in the Middle East where they fight so much over there you can't find the time to go. You know. But other than that, I've traveled all over the world.

SHORT: Do you still maintain an interest in politics and --

MCBEE: Oh yeah. Oh boy, you better believe.

SHORT: -- campaigning?

MCBEE: You ought to see how many times I contribute to their campaigns. That's one of the problems. I try to help local people but the people that are running for office in Atlanta and for the legislature, they know that I was there and they're still there so they want you to give money. Well you can just give so much. But yeah, oh, I stay interested in politics for sure. I was going to look on this page that I was trying to think of things. I think I mostly told you. I've had a good life.

SHORT: Well, you've certainly been successful.

MCBEE: Had a good life. Had a good life.

SHORT: You've done great things for the state of Georgia.

MCBEE: Had good parents and two good brothers and I got a lot more I'm going to do.

SHORT: Bless you.

MCBEE: I'm not through. You may want me back in five years.

SHORT: Yeah, of course. Well you're very well respected and have done great things for the state of Georgia.

MCBEE: Well I appreciate it. But the state's been good to me. When they wanted me to come to the University of Georgia I said no, and the guy that -- Dr. Sorrells came up there and he said well at least let us bring you down there one day. You know why I got this on don't you?

SHORT: Yeah, you told us.

MCBEE: Yeah.

SHORT: Yeah.

MCBEE: I said, "Well I will come down there." So I came and met all the staff and so on and -- but when I went back I said I don't know, but I agreed to take it. Well, after I got back I thought I'm just not going to do it, I don't want to leave here. So, I had been meaning to call the paper and I mean say I'm going to write up a reason why I'm not, and it came out that I had been

appointed and so I got to – and I cried all the way down here but the minute I got unpacked, from then on it was pure sunshine.

SHORT: Well that's wonderful.

[END]

**University of Georgia
Louise McBee**

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