

Keith Mason interviewed by Bob Short
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Keith Mason

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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. Our guest is Keith Mason, a well known political figure and successful Atlanta lawyer. Keith, we're delighted to have you.

KEITH MASON: Thanks for allowing me to be here, Bob.

SHORT: You've had a long and successful career in politics including serving as a top aid to Governor Zell Miller and as an assistant to President Bill Clinton. But before we go there we'd like to know a little bit more about you. You're a native of Snellville, Gwinnett County, Georgia.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Where, as the saying goes, "Everybody is somebody." Tell us about growing up in Snellville.

MASON: Well, Bob, I grew up in Snellville back in the '60s and '70s. I was born in 1960 the year John Kennedy was elected president. My family has been in that

part of Gwinnett County since the 1830s and we've been involved in community and business activities for a long time there. My grandfather worked for General Motors and taught school throughout Gwinnett County as well as worked on a farm that his father, my great grandfather, had down in the Centerville Community. My great grandfather had served as sheriff of Gwinnett County back in the late '30s and early '40s and that was the first piece of political elected experience that my family had. So I grew up around people who are public spirited and love their community and wanted to see it grow and sponsor and that's you know how I got involved in politics.

As a young child I guess in 1966 my uncle Jimmy Mason, who was my father's only brother, ran for the State House of Representatives and was elected countywide and that was the year that Lester Maddox, as you recall from your experience in politics, was elected by the State Legislature to be governor. And I recall coming home from school that afternoon and you know we didn't have cable television but it was live on channel 2 and all the broadcast networks that Georgia House of Representatives voting to elect the new governor Lester Maddox and I was six years old at the time and that was the first time I really started to pay attention as to what was going on in politics and I recall that Gwinnett County had voted for Maddox even though my uncle and my parents and others had voted for Callaway, probably the only Republican they ever voted for for governor. They were big fans of Carl Sanders who was the previous governor at that time, and my mother had worked for the State Highway Department when she and my dad first got

married back in the late '50s and had worked in the Right-of-Way Department there for Mr. Gillis when he was commissioner so there was kind of an interesting you know it was in the household and it was in the blood so to speak.

SHORT: So you went to high school there?

MASON: I went to elementary and middle school there through the 8th grade and then I went to Marist School over in Atlanta off Ashford Dunwoody starting in 9th grade and graduated there in 1978 and then went to University of Georgia undergrad and law school.

SHORT: And you decided you wanted to be a lawyer?

MASON: I did. I had taken an interest in the law you know primarily out of my interest in politics. A lot of the people that I had grown up and admired that were involved in politics were lawyers and I felt at the time when I was an undergraduate there I felt a particular kinship with people on campus that were going to law school that were involved in a lot of the same types of campus activities that I was involved in and I wanted to find a way to be involved in the community and in public policy and the law is certainly a way to do that as well as other things you can do in life as well.

SHORT: Do you remember your first political campaign?

MASON: I can remember a lot of my political campaigns. It depends on how you want to describe it. I guess the first campaign outside of my uncle and my father's campaigns which I would ride around with them or my grandfather and stop in stores see you know people and you know on their farms and neighborhoods and put out signs and bumper stickers and matchbooks and go to the county fair and blow up balloons and do all the things you don't do anymore. I was doing that when I was 7 and 8 years old but the first campaign that I started to take an active interest in was when Jimmy Carter ran for governor in 1970 and I started following politics after baseball season was over and in Georgia back then we had September primary so baseball was generally over by the end of June. So that left about two months before school went back to you know look at politics on the television and in the newspapers and around town.

So I got involved in that campaign just as a kid volunteer, met Jimmy Carter when he came to my hometown of Snellville in the summer of 1970 and followed that race that year and then later I had taken an interest in the 1972 Senate race for Sam Nunn in the primary and had done some volunteer work for him and it was not anything that was organized. It was just show up where there happened to be an opportunity to put up a sign, put on a bumper sticker, pass out a flier whatever and all but the first campaign

which I got formerly involved was with Zell Miller in 1978 when he ran for Lieutenant Governor for re-election and I had just graduated from Marist High School that spring and was going to enter the University of Georgia in the fall and he had asked me to work on his campaign staff that summer and we still were pretty much a one-party state then and he was virtually unopposed but he had some opposition and he wanted to have a young campaign staff primarily of college age students along with Walt Bellamy who you recall was also a part of that effort a former Atlanta Hawks basketball player. And I was the 10th congressional district coordinator for him that summer, and our charge was to put together his schedule, his organization and deal with his people in that community just like we were the campaign manager for that congressional district and as you know he was considered an ambitious political figure back then and always has been and he wanted us to organize every precinct in Georgia to have a precinct coordinator in every precinct. So our charge for that campaign was to have someone identify at every precinct in our respective congressional district that was a Miller contact person and that's what we did.

SHORT: He ran that race I guess with no real opponents but he got into a runoff.

Do you remember that with the mayor of Jesup?

MASON: That was 1974 his first race.

SHORT: Right.

MASON: It was 1974 you're right and he did and I had volunteered and helped him on that 1974 race and all. He ran against that was when Max Cleland was in the race and there were a whole bunch of other people. I think Frank Coggins and other folks out at state legislature that were running and he got in that runoff with Mary Hitt who was the mayor of Jesup who was married to a doctor I recall and he beat her fairly handily but then I later campaigned with him and Mary Hitt one weekend in the fall that year and we went down to Tifton and went to a big barbecue together and she was actively campaigning for him. Part of the hallmark of his campaigns was he was always able to bring disparate political factions together. He, as you know, had been a staffer for Maddox and had previously worked for Carl Sanders and had worked for Jimmy Carter and none of these three people really got along with each other over the course of their careers but they all had something in common and that was getting along with Zell Miller. So he had a natural ability to do that back in those days.

SHORT: And you also had some experience working with Lieutenant Governor Miller in the senate.

MASON: I did. I worked for him in the 1980 session of the Georgia legislature and that was the year he had already announced that he was running for the U.S. Senate against Herman Talmadge that year in which he challenged Senator Talmadge in that campaign.

SHORT: Were you involved in that race?

MASON: I had gotten involved with him during the summer of 1979 as he was looking to make that race and in fact he had hired this gentleman by the name of Dick Morris as his polester and I first met Dick Morris in Zell Miller's office in the Capital in summer of 1979 and Lieutenant Governor Miller was pushing a sales tax exemption on food and drugs which was a hot issue then and Dick Morris was helping him in that process and Senator Talmadge was bitterly wounded from a number of political issues that had affected his career at that time and he was looking to make that race and which he did and announced in the fall of '79. So I would help him out a lot but on a voluntary basis and then my dad was running for county commission chairman that same year and I you know helped him in his campaign that summer and all.

SHORT: Well Miller and Talmadge really went at it in 1980 and there as I recall fondly the debates between those two are something to behold. Both were great

speakers. Both were great debaters and the issues were made for a good two-man race at the time. Miller didn't win but Talmadge eventually lost to his Republican opponent Mack Mattingly that fall.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: I wanted to ask you. Miller was really hurt by that loss wasn't he?

MASON: Yeah that loss really scarred him politically and psychologically, with all due respect I think as any tough loss would when you had achieved as much as he had achieved up to that point and to have made such a prolific attempt against such a giant political figure who was later beaten by an unknown and so I think that made it even tougher for him and you know he ran that campaign and I think he would admit to this now he probably has it was you know a pretty negative campaign. It was an anti-Talmadge campaign and I recall conversations that we had had during that campaign about trying to reduce the negativity and reduce some of the liberalism. In fact Zell Miller's campaign slogan was "Best senator money can't buy" and as a contrast to Talmadge who was caught in some financial issues there and he ran as a traditional liberal southern populist and it didn't work, and I think the reason it didn't work was the state of Georgia was changing. It was becoming more suburban and some of the people

who were not going to vote for a old establishment political figure like Talmadge who had some ethical challenges were also not going to vote for somebody who they perceived to be liberal and so they sat that race out or either they voted for Norman Underwood who came up pretty fast in the primary and finished a respectable third to Miller's second and Talmadge's first and then they stayed home and Talmadge won 60/40 or maybe 58/42 in the runoff against Miller and then Mack Mattingly as a result of Talmadge's troubles and some of the enthusiasm for Reagan and the Republicans and its growth played upon that suburban growth and narrowly beat Talmadge in the general. So that race definitely set then Lieutenant Governor Miller back several years and you know as you know he declined to make another statewide race until he ran for governor in 1990 and spent the rest of the 80s rehabilitating is political image and rebuilding for the future.

SHORT: You know Zell Miller very well. How would you describe him?

MASON: I would describe him as a maverick from the mountains. There have been times when I've agreed with him and times when I haven't but that I think pretty well sums him up as a maverick from the mountains, an independent feisty irascible figure but a person who has done a lot for the state of Georgia during his political career particularly during his career as lieutenant governor and governor. I think he was a very

strong proponent for progress in our state's educational system as well as bringing about greater economic opportunity to Georgians throughout the state regardless of their place in life.

SHORT: After his defeat by Talmadge, Miller patiently waited 10 years before he ran for governor. During that time of course he had continued to serve as lieutenant governor but in that race for governor the state political base had changed. The Republicans seemed to be gaining. He had a tough race on his hands in the Democratic primary. Now you are his campaign manager. Tell us about your strategy and how you went about winning the Democratic nomination.

MASON: Well I think the challenge for us back then was that we needed to reintroduce Zell Miller to the Georgia electorate and our poles reflected there was a fairly positive image of Zell Miller at that time. He's had high name recognition but they couldn't identify any particular issues or accomplishments with him despite all of his years of having you know worked on a range of issues and part of his challenge was becoming disciplined. He's a very curious sort who has a lot of interest and he would like to be involved in a lot of issues, and when you're running a political campaign you can't run on 10 different things. You've got to pick out two or three and so looking at his background we you know introduced, we played upon his strength and education, his

long heartfelt interest there dating back from his parents who were both involved in higher education at Young Harris and his career as a college professor and the issues he worked on while in office, and we also played upon his strength as being tough. He was considered a tough political figure not just in the political wars but on crime related issues. You know he came out as he was a former Marine and that experience molded him considerably and we played that up and he was considered a tough on crime political figure. Always had strong support from police chiefs, sheriffs and DAs and that helped blunt the liberal image that had followed him for so long.

And then I think the third thing was we needed to make him look new okay and the lottery was the reason that made him look new. The lottery was viewed as an anti-establishment new kind of issue. It was a populist issue and one that cut across demographic lines. You didn't necessarily have to be liberal or conservative to be for a lottery and that people ought to have the right to vote on it and we tied that to education and I think the combination of those forces is what helped him reposition himself in the election.

I think the other thing that helped him considerably in that primary was having Andrew Young as one of his major opponents. Roy Barnes who later became governor was the favorite of the conservative democratic establishment along with Bubba McDonald who was the favorite of House Speaker Tom Murphy and therefore Zell was kind of in the middle and Andy Young was viewed as an Atlanta liberal. So that gave

Zell quite an opening in that primary because he won that primary with maybe 10 to 20% of the African-American vote at that time and at that time that vote was less than 30% of the Democratic primary. So it helped Zell over time.

SHORT: And then he had the general election opponent Johnny Isakson.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Did you change your strategy to run against Isakson?

MASON: You know against Isakson we pretty much continued our strategy to just run on the lottery and boot camps for first-time drug offenders and exempting food from the sales tax. We had to deal with some of the tax, the old conservative tax and spend you know issues that the Republicans like to throw out at Democrats but Isakson had not yet taken hold of the state and Governor Miller's strong following in rural Georgia as well as the following that he had built up in urban and suburban Georgia through that primary I think held him in good stead against Isakson who was certainly growing the Republican base in the suburban and in some of the rural areas of the state but they just had not quite taken hold.

SHORT: Then there was James Carville and Paul Begala. You brought them in here to help you win that race. Tell us about them.

MASON: Absolutely. Governor Miller first got to know James Carville back in 1980 when he was running for the senate and he was a young associate for a media consultant named Raymond Strother out of Louisiana and he had followed his career in the 80's working for Bob Casey who had lost three times before and Carville helped him get elected and that gave Governor Miller inspiration for what he might could do for him and then he helped Wallace Wilkinson win on the lottery issue in 1987 and had worked for Frank Lautenberg against Pete Dawkins in 1988.

And so, that summer of 1988 Governor Miller and I started having dialogue with James Carville about working for Governor Miller's gubernatorial campaign and we later hired James in January of '89 along with his partner, Paul Begala, and it was very interesting. We had a lot of colorful conversations during that time. I won't go into all those we'd be here to long. But Zell still had this you know traditional view of a campaign manager and James was you know viewed as a campaign manager but really he was a strategist and I was the campaign manager and Zell said to him he said "Now James tell me what you do as a campaign manager. I'm used to having campaign managers that talk on the phone with my field people, my political people and my money people and all that and help me organize and do that. Now you don't do that kind of

thing do you?" and he says "No. He says I don't do any of that governor". He says "What do we get for paying you this \$7,000 a month?" He said "What you get is between here and here." He says "All I do is help you think and come up with good ideas and you know there's nothing more powerful than a good idea whose time has come." He said "I don't sell no matchbooks, no fingernail files, no combs, none of that and the two things I don't do in campaigns" he said "I don't go to no Jaycee meetings and I don't sleep in ratty hotels." But anyway we had a good time and they did a great job for us. I mean they really helped Zell Miller become who he naturally was. They gave him confidence, confidence that he hadn't had before in a political campaign and where he could not worry as much although any candidate is going to worry and he certainly did his share of worrying. They gave him confidence and comfort to go out and do what was really important in a campaign and not worry about the rest of it and help him communicate.

SHORT: So you became his executive secretary?

MASON: I did.

SHORT: Which is the top spot in any governor's administration. Tell us about that.

MASON: Well we started the administration in the winter of 1991. It was the day the Persian Gulf War began. One of the first things we did was appoint our adjutant general, and we had to work through tough economic times. We had to cut the budget that we were currently in as well as propose a budget for the following fiscal year that was going to be fairly austere. We set in motion passing the lottery. We passed a constitutional amendment to allow the people to vote on the lottery fully dedicated to education, and we had to postpone one of the main promises of the administration and that was exempting the food from the sales tax because we could not afford that revenue loss at the time and then we worked on other programs as it related to drug prevention efforts and our efforts in the prisons to begin the boot camp initiative and those were the kind of things we were dealing with then. And we also had the Olympics which it had just been announced that Atlanta was going to host the Olympics and so a lot of the planning for the Olympics had began to take place those sorts of things.

SHORT: The relationship between Governor Miller and Speaker Murphy which I guess you could say were ornery while he was lieutenant governor seemed to vanish when Miller became governor. How did he manage to win the speaker over?

MASON: You know I think a lot of that has to do with both of them. I think

the speaker was somebody who respected authority, and he knew what the chain of command was and he knew that the governor was in charge. No longer was Zell Miller his rival across the hall you know heading up the state senate while he headed up the state house and so the speaker made the first overture to then Governor Miller came to see him on election night. Governor Miller respectfully told him "You know I could win without you but I can't govern without you" and paid particular homage to the speaker.

Governor Miller being a good student of human nature knew how to deal with the speaker on a personal basis. Speaker Murphy liked to deal with people on a personal basis. Everything was personal to him both good and bad. When you offended him on an issue he took it personally and when you helped him on an issue he took it personally, and so Governor Miller knew how to play to that and to deal with him with his family and make him feel good and warm and welcome in the governor's office and I think the speaker appreciated it and we got great cooperation from the speaker. I think the speaker really helped Governor Miller succeed in his administration. I honestly believe that. I think that Speaker Murphy helped him get elected because he was a great foil for somebody like Zell Miller who had been around politics a long time, just as long as Tom Murphy, to look new. He made Zell Miller look new and progressive and different and that helped him with these new voters in the state and then I think once in office as governor the speaker helped him get his programs accomplished in a way that allowed him to be successful.

SHORT: Including the lottery.

MASON: Including the lottery.

SHORT: He had opposed the lottery.

MASON: He had opposed the lottery but he did not stand in the way of the lottery at a time when we needed it to pass and by just a few votes margin for the constitutional amendment.

SHORT: Some people thought that Miller would hurt himself by pushing a lottery. Was that ever discussed?

MASON: Oh yeah that had been discussed a lot in the campaign but we had polled that and we knew what the voters thought and we couldn't let the insiders, the conventional wisdom crowd, determine how we were going to manage that issue and so that became a real test of our campaign and then Lieutenant Governor Miller's resolve to stay disciplined throughout the campaign. I recall conversations where you know he would come in and say "I'm just tired of talking about that lottery. I mean people don't

want to hear that anymore. They want to hear about water and sewers and roads and all that" and we said "No they haven't heard enough of it yet." We'd just have to show him the polls and he would say "That's right, that's right" and once we went on television with that lottery and he could feel it out there in the streets and he could see it in the numbers you know he never really got off of that and that helped him a lot.

SHORT: I think it would be helpful to know exactly how the administration went about promoting the lottery as an issue because it required an election.

MASON: Yeah. I had to work on that a lot in my capacity as his executive secretary then and it went through a couple of stages. You know we came in the ball of fire, the lottery was ours, we got it through the legislature to have the referendum, the next year we set up the enabling legislation so that it could be enacted if it were successful upon its passage with the voters in November of '92 but there was a two-year lag between when the lottery was hot in the minds of the voters and when the voters had to come back and it was a lot more popular when the people wanted a lottery versus when the governmental leadership wanted the people to let them have the lottery because when we started that that lottery was like 70/30 favorable and it only passed 52/48 and the only reason we were able to get it to pass was to frame our campaign as an anti-establishment campaign. We had to go back out and villainize our opponents to get it back up there

because people had lost faith and trust in government. You know this was 1992, this was coming you know during Bush one's re-election he had lost confidence. Obviously the people had voted him out. Ross Perot and that whole anti establishment and we're mad as hell movement was out there and so we were not a part of any of that but we were in the middle of that environment and we had to deal with it. We had to prey on people's anti-government, anti-establishment instincts in order to succeed.

And this was so ironic, it was so bad that Governor Miller couldn't even go out and campaign for the lottery because as you recall his numbers had gone down that summer because he had come out to support the change in the state flag. And the flag and the lottery forces were teaming up the people who were against both, and we had to kind of take a backseat and just let our paid television and everything else kind of ride it on out and what made the difference was in the suburban areas. That's where we got our margin of victory both in the '92 race and in his '94 re-elect when he won from those families who had gotten the benefit of the lottery to allow them to send their children to college.

SHORT: The Hope Scholarship.

MASON: Yes.

SHORT: What is your opinion of the Hope Scholarship?

MASON: I think that has been one of the more transformational things occur in Georgia in a long time. I think it has changed the culture of our state in terms of people who live here and stay here and go to school here. I think you have a lot of people that come into Georgia because of that Hope Scholarship when companies are making decisions whether to relocate to Georgia and that's certainly something that they look at and families when they you know decide where to send their kids to school and where the people want to stay later. I mean you look at the number of people who have gotten access to higher education in Georgia since that was implemented and it is astounding and in the diversity of our state I think it's helped in that regard too. You look at the diversity of the University of Georgia and it's much different than when I was there 30 years ago and all and it's certainly a lot brighter as our long-term mutual friend the late Hamilton Jordan told me several years ago he said "I couldn't get into the University of Georgia anymore much less get out with my race," and I feel the same way.

SHORT: Back to 1992 while you were campaigning to pass the lottery you were also campaigning for Bill Clinton.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Zell Miller has been given a lot of credit for Clinton's election because of his being able to hold Super Tuesday.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Tell us about that.

MASON: Well Governor Miller liked then Governor Clinton a lot. He was a progressive Southern governor much like him and he patterned a lot of his programs after the programs of Governor Clinton. I think the Hope acronym which was created by Governor Miller but there was some kind of a Hope acronym in then Governor Clinton's administration that had caught his eye and so he just took it like all good politicians do. It's better to steal somebody else's idea than have one of your own and he you know he recast it in his own way. It wasn't the same kind of program but it was just the acronym that was there and of course he came from Hope, Arkansas, and that's why Bill Clinton had a Hope program for something over there dealing with education.

But anyway Governor Miller wanted to be involved in presidential politics. As you know, he had been involved in politics in the '80s. He had been Walter Mondale's state chairman in the primary of 1984. He had been the first statewide elected official to

come out and actively campaign and endorse Jimmy Carter in his first race for president in 1976. So he had a long-time interest and he was his former state party's executive director. So he followed that process a long time and been to all the politic conventions and he wanted Georgia to be a player and he wanted to a player in 1992 election and that summer of 1991 we were looking at the presidential primary process coming up and George Bush was a little vulnerable. He was getting vulnerable that summer with the recession coming on, the glow off the Iraq War was off. You know you could feel it out there, and he wanted to get involved. I remember him walking around as he would do looking out windows and said "You know I don't know why Georgia is participating in Super Tuesday. I've never been for being in Super Tuesday. I think Super Tuesday is terrible for us. We don't need to be in Super Tuesday." And so there was a young intern over at the state party office that had done some research and figured out if we just moved back our primary one week to I think it was to March 2nd we would at that time constitute over 40% of the delegates elected prior to Super Tuesday. Big deal, and so we went about a process to change the law but you know we had already missed the special session and the '91 session that wasn't a priority. So we were left with having to you know change the law the first week of the legislative session and get it approved through Section 5 pre-clearance with the Justice Department by a certain date in order to get the ballots done and to hold it on March 2nd or 3rd whatever day it was. So we put a strategy together to get everybody lined up Republicans, Democrats, leadership and otherwise to

get this bill done, working with Attorney General's office, the state party chairs of each party, house leadership, senate leadership both sides, and we got that bill passed and signed into law within three days, transmitted to Washington and it was a bill that already pending introduced by your friend and mine the late Senator Colquitt that allowed us to have that vehicle to get it done so quickly. And so it went to Washington, Terry Adamson's wife, Edie Holloway, was an official in the Bush White House. She was secretary to the cabinet for President Bush and she agrees to skids over at Justice Department to get that thing approved quickly and turn it around and it came back to Georgia approved the day after the MLK holiday. We got the word that we're done and we could hold it and then of course that week you know then the campaign was in the middle. We were helping Bill Clinton. Governor Miller had helped introduce Bill Clinton to James Carville and Paul Begala. They later hired them after they had helped Harris Wofford win that '91 special election senate race and so we were heavily involved in what was going in that '92 effort but it started with that primary process.

SHORT: Clarify for me if you will the 1996 presidential race in Georgia.

Clinton had won Georgia in 1992 with 43% of the vote which is not a majority.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: But he won Georgia over Bush and Ross Perot.

MASON: Right and in '96 he --

SHORT: '96 he strangely he lost Georgia to Bob Dole but he increased his percentage --

MASON: By a few points.

SHORT: -- by three points I believe it was.

MASON: Right. Right.

SHORT: Now that indicates to me that you and Governor Miller were not active in that campaign is that correct?

MASON: Oh we were active but it was tough. We were coming off the heels of the '94 Gingrich revolution, Gingrich was from here, he had a lot of influence over the state and the climate here. Of course you know Gingrich kind of he stepped on it during that process when the government shut down and a few other things that you know lead

to Bill Clinton getting reelected nationally but it was tough and Georgia was becoming a more Republican state during that period of the 90's. But we only missed it by about the same number of votes we won it by in '92 and one of the things that happened in that '96 campaign on the eve of that '96 campaign Bill Clinton wanted to come to Augusta and make an appearance and Max Cleland was running against Guy Millner. And Cleland's people vetoed it and so Clinton didn't make that trip, and we believed then that him not making that trip cost him the state. The Cleland people were afraid of having Clinton in the state for fear it might hurt Max but Max also won by a couple of points or whatever but back then you didn't have to get 50% because the rules had been changed after the Wyche Fowler runoff loss to Paul Coverdell in '92.

SHORT: Which has since been changed?

MASON: Which has since been changed back to 50%. That was a change done by the Republicans. It all depends on who is in power as to how you want the rules written and you know typically we've all kind of benefitted and hurt ourselves by trying to play with the rules politically I think here in the state.

SHORT: Same with reapportionment.

MASON: Absolutely.

SHORT: Were you ever involved in reapportionment?

MASON: Not that much. You know in 1991 we took a hands off view of that. Governor Miller didn't want to be involved in that. He felt that was a pride of the legislature and he had been involved in it when he was lieutenant governor a lot you know in the early '80s helping split my home county, Gwinnett County, into two districts which was a good thing and all for Ed Jenkins and Doug Barnard and all but I hadn't really been that involved. I mean only as an observer not a participant had I been involved much in reapportionment and I've watched Governor Barnes and his administration and how they had gotten involved in it. Now one which I think contributed to his loss in some measure and also I think you know governors get involved in reapportionment it can come back and bite you.

SHORT: Let's go back for a minute to Governor Miller's first term. As I recall the first big big problem he had was the recession and no revenue.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: How did you how did he go about solving that problem?

MASON: He worked very studiously on the budget. He spent countless of hours hands on in budget meetings with department heads, budget analysts, other policy staff, other members of the staff such as myself going through that. I mean we had a special session in the summer of 1991 in which he called the legislature back into session but before they officially opened the session he got the legislature to buy into his proposal. He knew it was going to be brutal and it was going to be a special session that dealt not just with reapportionment which was already on the books but with the budget and he feared for the calamity that might ensue and so what we did is we got the house leadership and the senate leadership that dealt with the budget to meet at the mansion for a week or more and go through our plan and took their advice into account so we would come into that special session with a unanimity of purpose and we had just very few differences during that time and he put a few things out there for them to chase you know that were small budget items like cutting the extension agent's budget which wasn't a lot of money but it was a big political force and so there were a lot of people raising cane about that and he gave that up and all but he got 99% of everything he wanted in that budget done with very little fanfare and the legislature was already ready to get to work on reapportionment and they knew couldn't deal in reapportionment until they dealt with the budget and so that's kind of how that came down and all but he showed frugality in

that first year which allowed him in 1992 to come in with his Georgia Rebound Program which he proposed several hundred million dollars in new fees in order to be able to re-invest in Georgia through a major capsule expansion program as well as begin to raise salaries for teachers both in the public school system as well as higher education.

SHORT: Before we get away from this let me ask you this question. When Governor Miller ran for governor the first time in 1990 he said he would only serve one term. Then comes 1994 and he offers for re-election.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Was that because he wanted to see his Hope programs and some of his other programs through after having the tough fiscal time in his early years?

MASON: I believe that was the main reason that he wanted to run for re-election. He liked the job and I mean #1 he liked being governor. He was good at being governor and he was not able to get a lot of things done that he thought he might get done in that first term but he had a very ambitious aggressive agenda throughout his tenure even through the end of the second term but he certainly did the first term as he liked to say we plowed deep early and he wanted to see those programs through.

But I think too he kind of got caught up in this thing of one term. I mean what happened is he had said that some time back when he wasn't seriously looking to run for governor in 1986 or so over in Athens at a bi-annual institute where a reporter had asked him and he made some statement like "Well I tell you what. If I ever run for governor I'm just going to do it one term. I can get it done." And it was reported and then it came back to him during the 1990 campaign a reporter had found that quote and asked him about it and he was very sensitive to being labeled "zig-zag." He didn't want any zigzags out there. "I don't need any of that" and so he decided to just go ahead and say "yeah that's right" and it would've been kind of forgotten. It wouldn't a big issue and it came up in the last debate of the campaign with Isakson and somehow it came back out again.

So that was the thing that happened before he was re-elected before he was elected that is so that's what people remembered and then the press through his weekly press conferences that he liked to hold they would bring it up from time to time and it became the self-fulfilling prophecy and he started believing it too that he didn't want to run for re-election. Then he decided he kind of would like to run for re-election and he did.

SHORT: One of his legislative failures was his attempt to change the flag.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Tell us about that.

MASON: Ooh that was during the spring of 1992 and at that time you know he had taken a strong interest in his national political image. He wanted to be viewed as a progressive Southern governor just like Dick Riley, Jim Hunt and others you know in this region and he felt like the flag was a symbolic issue that someone with that objective in mind had to begin to address and it was beginning to boil in the state among the African-American community which had strongly supported him in the general election and he wanted to get out front on it. And Michael Bowers who was then the democratic attorney general wrote a letter to the newspaper saying that he thought the flag should be changed, and I knew when I read that thing over the weekend come Monday morning Governor Miller's mind was made up. We're going to change the flag and what he said. He said you know he'd been thinking about it and he wanted to go ahead and do it and there was a matter of how were going to do it and he thought that he could get it done and we all thought that he could get it done through kind of a greater good approach. And he wanted to do it early.

He wanted to do it that June, announce it that June and make it an issue in the campaign so that it could be done in the '93 General Assembly and we had a lot of debate

about that. I was hesitant quite frankly about doing it because he had already challenged the state a lot, challenging them on the lottery, we've got to pass the lottery. If we don't pass the lottery then I mean the game is over. We had that on there. We were carrying Bill Clinton you know for president and we had an African-American state labor commissioner Al Scott that we had appointed to fulfill Joe Tanner's unexpired term who was going to stand for election that year and we had the first African-American justice of the State Supreme Court, an African-American woman that is, Leah Sears-Collins running all people who were derivative of Zell Miller for their political success and there was some reluctance on our collective part about taking one more thing on.

But he wanted to do it and we did it and we tried to get people you know business community, religious leaders, political leaders, community leaders to buy into it and they did initially. We had some private meetings. We rolled this thing out and then, we didn't push it. We just lit the fire on the kerosene and never went back to kind of manage it until after the election was over and by the time we entered the '93 session that thing was considered dead, and we had a lot to be proud of. Bill Clinton had carried the state. He had gotten elected. You know Zell Miller had done his keynote address in 1992. We had gotten that lottery passed. You know we had a lot to be grateful for but he wanted to push that thing on through and say that I gave it my damndest and that's one of his great attributes. He's a very determined, persistent individual, and I think there was a quote in a newspaper story by somebody that said it was dead, no way, not going to

happen. Well all that did was just infuriate him well we're going to try.

So we pushed it for a while and gave it a shot and then decided to pull back in the face of greater objectives. You know it was getting in a way of a lot of things we wanted to get done and the whole reason he wanted to push this thing was he felt like the flag was a distraction to bigger issues in the state and the only way to take it off the table was to remove that divisive emblem but instead it had the reverse effect. It became more of a distraction by the fact we were pushing it. So it was kind of a Catch-22 deal.

SHORT: Well we both know Zell Miller and we both know that he knew and still knows how to use political power. There's a story that I want you to remember if you will about Miller using executive power at a meeting at the mansion when he decided he wanted to change the highway commission.

MASON: Yeah I remember that.

SHORT: Tell us about that.

MASON: Well every governor had wanted to install their person as transportation commissioner dating back to Jimmy Carter putting Bert Lance in over Jim Gillis in 1971 and George Busbee trying to put Joel Cowen in over Tom Moreland in

1975 and no that wasn't Busbee. Busbee had somebody he wanted in and he didn't get it and Moreland got it or something and then Joe Frank Harris wanted to put Joel Cowen in over Tom Moreland in 1983 and didn't succeed so two other governors had kind of failed at getting their person in that job and he thought that he could succeed because he was you know he had a better plan. And he wanted to put Wayne Shackelford who was a good friend of mine and the governor's from Gwinnett County in that job. He had been a good friend of Speaker Murphy's and also of then Lieutenant Governor Howard. But then Commission Hal Reeves was a controversial figure among legislators, contractors, property owners, local governmental officials. He was not considered that warm and effective figure among the constituents that paid the most attention to that department and so Governor Miller decided we would do it a little different. We would line up. We would line up the speaker. We would line up the lieutenant governor. We would line all their leadership up to support our person because they're the ones who elect the board of directors for the highway department and who then pick the commissioner.

So we had a meeting at the governor's mansion and the governor and the lieutenant governor and the speaker all rode out there together to show unity to the highway board members who were in attendance along with the new designee then Commissioner Shackelford and we had a meeting out there and we let Wayne Shackelford tell his story about why he ought to be there, what his vision for the

department was. And then we started hearing from the members of the board and they said basically that we appreciate what you had to say here governor, Mr. Speaker, lieutenant governor but we are going to support Commissioner Reeves and we're not going to accept Mr. Shackelford and all and we're prepared to keep Commissioner Reeves in office. And then Governor Miller told them "Well let me tell you what this means." He says "Essentially I set the budget, the budgets starts with me, the budget ends with me, I set the budget. The constitution says that the motor fuel tax shall go for the purposes of constructing and maintaining roads, highways and bridges. It does not go to the Georgia Department of Transportation and we got a session coming up and we're going to be doing reapportionment for members of Congress which also include members of the board and we're going to find some members of the board perhaps running the same districts they're in now running against each other. We also have a new environmental policy act that we have started, and we're going to apply it to highway projects. I appoint the EPD director and if you think OSHA is bad you haven't seen anything yet" and he also said "I can set up a bureau of transportation and appoint the superintendent and all of its members and we will dedicate that money to that bureau and outside of the department."

So he gave them some things to think about and they kind of nodded and said well we just still don't think we're going to be able to do this governor and all and then Speaker Murphy or I think it was Lieutenant Governor Howard asked Governor Miller

and I to leave the room and we left the room. We knew this was going to happen. We were going to have to nuke them. Oh wait back up. Back up I'm sorry. Before we left the room, Governor Miller said to them he says "now all right I hear what you've got to say but y'all think I'm I want to tell you something I'm a little bit crazy. I'm not going to leave this meeting and go out there to the members of the press and we had a nice steak and we talked about it and y'all going to think about it. I have it on good authority that at least two of you have used your positions on this board for your own financial gain and I am prepared to go out there and tell the members of the press that I am directing the attorney general and the GBI to conduct an investigation and I am going to name them land lot lines, project numbers and district numbers." And at that point they got all nervous because they all were a little bit guilty and they didn't know which ones were and so they asked us to leave. We did and then Speaker Murphy I don't know if I ought to say this on television or not he said "Let me tell y'all something. Zell Miller he says he's a little bit crazy, he is. I tell you another thing. He's meaner than cat shit and when he says he's going to do something you better pay attention. Y'all need to listen to him and we can't have this."

And so they worked out this compromise that we would Reeves would resign, they'd do a national search and that Shackelford would be the first one that they interviewed and they did and then they started bucking a little bit with Shackelford so we had to have one more meeting at the mansion. So we decided we would then meet with

each board member or two with their respective members of their legislative delegation to show them that their constituents see the people who vote and elect them were behind our man and ready for them to pick him and not dawdle on this issue. And so we had the lieutenant governor, the speaker and the governor and Mr. Shackelford all out there at the mansion and it only took one of those meetings for it to actually get done because after we did that they finally saw the light and said "We don't want to go back to anymore lunches at the governor's mansion with Governor Miller."

SHORT: Governor Miller left office in December of 1998.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: With approval rating of 80%.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Which is I think the highest of any governor in modern times.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Would you describe for us what you consider to be his legacy?

MASON: I think his legacy as governor is the Hope Scholarship. And the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten program too which doesn't get as much acclaim as the Hope Scholarship but certainly I think has helped a lot in terms of early childhood development that's so important in our educational system. I think you know those two signature issues were his you know major legacies as governor.

SHORT: Were you surprised when Governor Roy Barnes appointed Miller to the United States Senate when Paul Coverdell died?

MASON: No, I happened to be heavily involved in that process. I had been an early and active supporter of Governor Barnes and his campaign for governor in '98. I served as one of his three transition advisors along with Tommy Lewis who had been executive secretary to Governor Harris and Shirley Franklin who later became mayor of Atlanta and had done a lot of work with him and helped him in a lot of his political endeavors and worked with him in his relationship with the Clinton-Gore administration during that '99 - 2000 period and it was interesting. I had gone to Nashville for a "Gore for President" national finance committee meeting on a July day of 2000 learning that Paul Coverdell was sick and might not make it. I learned during the course of that time

was concerned about his well being and thought he would make it but you begin to pick up as you always do in these things interest about well what might happen if. Anyway, I was thinking about Governor Miller about what he thought about this because I knew he liked Paul Coverdell and he also understood the political implications of this appointment meant to a sitting governor who was around during the times in which Jimmy Carter had the opportunity to appoint successor to Richard Russell and we had looked at it briefly during Governor Miller's tenure when then President Clinton and his transition was thinking about appointing Sam Nunn to secretary of defense and he had asked then Governor Miller who would you appoint if I were to appoint Sam Nunn to defense secretary. And you know we thought about that issue. It was important and I remember Governor Miller said that is probably one of the greatest privileges a governor can have is to appoint somebody to a U.S. Senate seat.

So I called and I later went on to Washington that night and I called Governor Miller the next morning because I was going to see Governor Barnes in Washington at an event he was speaking at for the Democratic Governors Association at the Mayflower Hotel. And I called Governor Miller at Young Harris and we talked that morning about the situation with Coverdell and also what the prognosis was and the issues surrounding Governor Barnes' appointment to that seat and, I said "You know we had already figured out that person has got to run that year and win. This is a big deal to his administration because if his appointee doesn't win then that puts him in a vulnerable position going into

a 2002 re-election." And he had tackled some tough issues with growth and transportation in his first year as governor in 1999. He had pushed hard in 2000 on education reform. He was becoming you know a major figure in state and national politics and Governor Miller had become an admirer of Governor Barnes' leadership abilities because Governor Barnes was very popular at that time. He had 70 something percent approval ratings in his second year in office. And Governor Miller and I talked about it and I said "You know what you think." He said "I don't know". He said "you know I don't know what." I said "well you know we talked about some people that he might appoint and what" and I said "well you know he's got to appoint somebody that's going to clear the field of all this the Democrats who might want to run and clear the make it tough for the Republicans to put up anybody who can win" and I said "the only people I think that he can do that with would be you or Jimmy Carter." You know and the historical nature of Jimmy Carter you know had some appeal but anyway and I said "What about you?" And he says "Oh no. I'm happy. I don't I like what I'm doing now but I don't know." I said "what do you think about it?" I said "Would you be interested in it?" He said "I don't know if I'll be interested in that or not. I'm not sure. That's really not going to happen. Maybe Paul is going to make it you know?" And I said "All right." I said "Well you know it would be tough." You know we talked about the other people who were interested in it and we left.

And so I saw Governor Barnes that morning and that was top of mind

conversation. You know he said "Paul is not going to make it, probably not going to make it to the end of the day. We're going to have deal with this." I said "What do you think?" I said "I don't know." I said "I was talking to Governor Miller this morning about it and getting his thoughts on it because he really knows how important this is to you and your administration and what it means." He said "What did he say? Does he want it?" I said "No he doesn't necessarily I don't think he wants it or anything." He said "Well did he close the door?" I said "No he didn't close the door." He said "good sit down let's talk." And we talked about it and we talked about various figures. We talked about Jimmy Carter a little bit and he felt like you know Carter would be more of a national international figure, not really care about what happens here in the state and help him get things done here locally and all that would be you know a little bit of a reach. We're not sure if he'd take it. And then we talked about Andrew Young as a possibility and some other people. We're not sure they can win, put the money together or win. And he liked the notion of putting Governor Miller in if he was interested in it. And so later that evening when Senator Coverdell had died I got another call from Governor Barnes saying he had arrived back in Georgia and I was talking to he and Bobby Kahn his chief of staff who is a good friend of mine about this and you know Bobby Kahn was not a big fan of Governor Miller's. They didn't really like each other for a lot of reasons back then but they had kind of begun to understand and respect each other and all and Bobby Kahn was a big proponent of Zell Miller being appointed as was Marie Barnes.

And they said "We want to go see Zell tomorrow. We want to talk to him about this.

What about calling him tonight?" I said "Oh don't call him tonight please. He's not too good at night. He'll be dark because of Coverdell's death and all, you need to catch him when he's fresh. Call him in the morning."

So he called him the next morning. He said "I want to come see you and talk with you about this Senate thing." And he did and then I got back to my office that morning, I was still in D.C., and Paul Begala was coming over to see me. We were going to talk about it and maybe talk to Zell and we talked to Zell about it and he said "Governor Barnes is coming by to see me. Do you know what he wants? He said he wants to talk to me about this senate thing. Steve Ridley tells me he's going to probably appoint me." I said "well." He said "what do you think?" I said "I don't know." I said "He might. That's a good chance." He said "Do you think it or do you know it?" and I said "Both." And he said "Oh no I don't want that. I don't know. I don't know. I've always wanted to go to Washington. I've always wanted to be in the Senate. I always...I don't know. It's a lot. I've got to think about it." And I said "well whatever you want to do is fine with me." I said "If you want to run for this thing I'll help you put your money together, your team together and all that. I can't go to Washington and work for you but I can do that much and get you elected and try to make it as easy as possible and kind of be treasurer of your campaign and do all those kinds of things from where I am now." I said "I don't need this anymore than you do." I said "I'm Gore's

state chairman this year. You know I got that thing to deal with. I just had two twin girls one of whom has special needs and that requires 24 hour help and I don't need to be away from home more than I am already, but if you want it I'll help you get there." And he said "Oh that makes me feel good to know you'll be there" and all this other stuff and I said "Now you realize if you decide to do this that we're going to become an instrument of the Barnes political operation because this is his appointment and we are his appointee."

And so we got to draw upon his team and his network and his money folks as well as ours to get this to get to November. And we did that and so we went through a lot of internal -- it was like those two or three days seemed like months of agony and of decision making and all. But I recall he called me again after Governor Barnes had met with him and he said he was great. He you know he tried this case like he was talking to a jury and all this stuff and you know and he was very impressed with what he had to say and he said he left here telling me he says "and I remember this I don't have a plan B." And so Governor Miller thought about it and you know he went on and he decided that Friday morning that he would accept it and so we arranged to speak with Governor Barnes that morning and later that afternoon to give him the final word and then we started putting things together over the weekend for it to be announced on Monday morning and then it kind of took off from there. And then you know went to Washington on Wednesday to be sworn in and Thursday morning or something like that.

Anyway it was but it happened and all the Republicans cleared the way. None of them. The only thing they had to go bring Mack Mattingly out of retirement to put up a candidate which is another irony. There are several ironies in that appointment. Roy Barnes who had been a rival with Zell Miller in the Democratic party and you know against him as governor in 1990 would later become governor and then appoint Zell Miller to that position to serve alongside of Max Cleland who Miller had beaten in the 1974 primary for lieutenant governor then to stand for election in the seat of Herman Talmadge that Miller had tried to beat earlier 20 years earlier against Mack Mattingly who was the man who defeated Talmadge. So it was just a ton of ironies going on in that campaign.

SHORT: Well Keith you perhaps more than anyone I know can explain Senator Miller's conduct in the United States Senate. What happened?

MASON: I don't really know. I have some theories but obviously he wasn't happy and that's kind of all I probably ought to say about it but I just don't think he was happy serving in the U.S. Senate.

SHORT: What was your reaction when he accepted the invitation to speak at the Republican National Convention?

MASON: I was not pleased but not totally surprised. I think he likes, as I said before he's a maverick and he likes drama and he likes the political theater and I think that was what appealed to him in making that decision as much as anything but anyway I mean he did it and it's history.

SHORT: He was a good friend of President Bush.

MASON: That's what I understand, yep. But you know the interesting thing that puzzled me about all of that was in the 2000 race for the U.S. Senate there was only one Democratic incumbent senator in which George Bush the "uniter" not the divider appeared on television on behalf of their opponent and that was against Zell Miller. He appeared in an ad on behalf of Mack Mattingly and the Republican party here in Georgia in the final week of that campaign. He didn't say anything critical about Zell but he was appearing on he was going to win Georgia and so on. But Zell was the only incumbent Democratic senator that Bush appeared on television against.

SHORT: I didn't know that. Now let's talk a little bit if you will about President Bill Clinton and your work at the White House. You went there when in 1993?

MASON: Right.

SHORT: Leaving the Miller administration.

MASON: Right.

SHORT: What was your role in the Clinton administration?

MASON: My role was there deputy assistant to the president for the intergovernmental affairs, operation in the White House, working with governors and their staff and their associations around the country on behalf of their issues related to the administration and the White House as well as helping the President and the administration advance our agenda with the governors on the domestic front as well as on the international trade front.

SHORT: Is that a job you apply for or does the President look you up?

MASON: Well I don't know what the real process, the formal process is. You have to fill out a lot of forms. You've got to go through the FBI background check

which I fortunately passed but, you know, it's a political appointment. It's one of about 40 to 60 people in the office of the President have what they call commission appointments. So you're an official of the White House. You get a certificate Oath of Office signed by the President and Secretary of State and all and so it's a presidential appointment obviously.

SHORT: So went out on behalf of the President out into the states and worked with the governors and --

MASON: Right. I would go with him when he went to meetings with governors both in Washington and around the country and I would attend their association meetings, and I would deal with their problems and all. At the time we had a lot of issues going on, healthcare. I was not that involved in healthcare. There was another colleague in the office who had sole responsibility for healthcare but I was involved in NAFTA, reinventing government initiative, the crime bill, welfare reform. Those issues were the ones I have dealt with and I dealt with a lot of issues in dealing with the Department of Interior and the EPA and Energy as well and it was basically whatever happened to be on our agenda and their agenda I would work on particularly when we had natural disasters. I mean we would have a rapid response team and I was you know in the middle of that and helping us deal with all the issues surrounding that

within the cabinet and the White House and all.

SHORT: Well there's no question that President Clinton had some troubles while he was President but did that have any effect on his presidency as far as these governors and state governors were concerned?

MASON: You know he had controversies throughout his tenure. I think you know he had there was a dogged pursuit of him from the right from the very beginning. So there was always something you know going on in his administration but his relationship with the governors I think was very good. I mean Republicans and Democrats. You know he had been a governor for 12 years. He had been president of the National Governors Association. He had held every position known to man that had to do with the governors, education commission for the states, you name it. And he knew them all, knew their families and he would be obliged to try to accommodate them Republican or Democrat. I mean he wouldn't do anything that was obviously not in his political interest but he wouldn't just diss them. I mean if he was going into a state and that was the thing. I mean there are rules you have to operate under. I don't know whether this administration operated under them or not but whenever a President goes into a state you have to call. For that to be paid for by the taxpayer all the state wide elected officials have to be notified and invited to appear with the President as are the

members of Congress and the local government officials and we would do that. I mean we had Republicans working with him all the time and all. But you know his relationship with governors were pretty good.

But here's the thing. He didn't he thought governors were more bipartisan and they are when contrasted with members of Congress but during that period of '93 and '94 the Republican governors some of whom like Pete Wilson in particular had taken on a more rabid partisan tone and they were out to set traps from time to time and all. We had to be prepared for that because they would fax in letters while they're holding press conferences blasting the President administration about some policy or whatever and all and you know I don't think if they were dealing with the governor to governor they would do a colleague of another party or another state that same way but that happened.

SHORT: We've heard a lot about Hillary's role in the administration. Was it as active as we've been lead to believe?

MASON: It was pretty active. Absolutely. She was definitely an important figure there. She knew what was going on and she was you know heavily involved in a lot of what was going on. But she had you know the issues that she cared about and the people that she cared about you know she would pay close attention to. Obviously healthcare being one of them and children's issues were another. But she didn't go off

and try to get involved in environmental issues or energy issues and things of that nature and all but she was definitely around. I mean she had an office in the West Wing. Her chief of staff's office was right down the hall from mine over in the old executive office building. I would see her quite a bit.

SHORT: What did you think of her presidential campaign in 2008?

MASON: I thought she ran a pretty good campaign. I supported her because of my long history with the Clintons and because I thought she would represent safe change for the country. I wasn't quite as convinced that the country would elect someone like Barack Obama which we now have and I thought that Hillary was kind of viewed as a moderate Democrat who could bring about important change in this country and be a good role model for women. I thought her campaign had some operational and strategic difficulties that caused them to fail primarily by not paying sufficient attention to the delegate selection process and the caucuses. I think they thought they could kind of overwhelm the process and have it over with fairly early through some convincing winds in the early primaries that didn't happen quite the way they wanted and then we got rolled from you know during the month of February up until the Texas and Ohio primaries where we got beat in all these caucus states and that's what made the difference.

But I think she became a better candidate over time. She certainly ended the

campaign much stronger than when she began the campaign as a candidate. The fact that you would have blue collar older white men driving pickup trucks in Pennsylvania and North Carolina going to the polls and you know voting for Hillary I don't think you would've predicted that before. And some of that had to do with the fact that she was running against Barack Obama but I think it became more genuine over time.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about local party politics in Georgia. The Democrats which held forth for so long are now in the minority. What happened?

MASON: I think that Georgia had you know been a fairly conservative moderate state lead by conservative moderate Democratic figures but the Democrats who had lead Georgia had been about progress. They were not all about power and principle per se. I think that we were able to blunt a lot of these culture issues but I think the flag issue more than anything gave rural white Democrats a chance to align with conservative suburbanites to become the majority party in the state for this recent time. I think that more than anything is what hurt us but I think we were vulnerable throughout the 1990s to Republican dominance. We just happen to have had good leadership at the top. We had Sam Nunn in the U.S. Senate. We had Zell Miller as governor. We had Pierre Howard as lieutenant governor all of whom were attractive political figures to the swing voters and we had the lottery which helped us tremendously. The lottery helped elect

Zell Miller in 1990, re-elect him in '94 and get Roy Barnes elected in '98 and we had the advantage of running against a rich Atlanta businessman by the name of Guy Millner three times that allowed us to keep some of our people out in the state who might otherwise want to vote for a Republican but they didn't like this rich Atlanta businessman. So he was kind of a controversial figure. I think if we had drawn you know Johnny Isakson or Saxby Chambliss types back then we might not have won some of those races so by the time you get to the early 2000s you know we were vulnerable and all and you throw in Governor Barnes' effort on the flag that succeeded and some of the other issues that were going on in the country post 9/11, Bush euphoria, scare everybody to death. You had a senate race going on at the same time. I think all that served to hurt us and once that happened it was kind of you know it was a critical period with Georgia Democrats. Do you really want to be a Georgia Democrat or do you just want to be in charge? And so you had a lot of people in legislature and otherwise start switching parties because they like their office more than their party and they weren't accustomed to being in a minority. Most of them are white males. White males aren't accustomed to be in minorities by history. You know women, African-American Democrats they've been in minorities all their lives. They're not afraid being in a political minority but a lot of these white Democrat males you know started to switch but I think we're seeing a change. Georgia is becoming a more diverse state and you know Republicans have had a chance to run the state for a while and we'll see what the voters

have to say here going forward in the next couple of election cycles. I think the fact that Barack Obama as different as he might be got more votes for president than any Democrat running for President in the state of Georgia with the exception of our native son Jimmy Carter says a lot about where people stand going forward and most of the growth that is occurring in the state right now is not a bunch of conservative suburban northern transplants. It's non-white younger and urban voters. That's where the growth is and they're not inclined to vote for Republicans.

SHORT: You know when you think of it, Keith, Georgia was the last state in the region to elect --

MASON: That's right.

SHORT: -- a Republican governor.

MASON: That's right. We were. Every other state had been demographically probably more Democrat than us had already elected a Republican. I mean Virginia and North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky. Every one of them had elected a Republican except us.

SHORT: So you don't think the Yellow Dog Democrat is dead?

MASON: No. I think Yellow Dog Democrat is coming back and barking a little bit.

SHORT: Keith, you've done a great job for the state of Georgia and your country and we appreciate it, and we appreciate you being with us today.

MASON: Absolutely. It's an honor for me to be a part of this program and I've got a long history with the University of Georgia and the Russell Library. I used to go over there as a student when I was on campus and still like to go in there and spend a few hours just learning about Georgia history and I think it's a great resource for the students and the people of the state and I'm proud to be a part of your program, Bob.

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