

**Wyche Fowler interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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**DOCPROPERTY** University of Georgia "reference" Reflections on Georgia Politics  
Wyche Fowler

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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. Our guest today is Wyche Fowler, former Atlanta City Councilman, former President of the Atlanta City Council, former Congressman, former United States Senator, and former Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

WYCHE FOWLER: That's a lot of formers.

SHORT: That's right.

FOWLER: Let's look forward.

SHORT: Wyche we are delighted to have you.

FOWLER: Thank you Bob.

SHORT: You've been an old friend and a great public servant, and you are a native Atlantan.

FOWLER: Born and raised. I was born in Emory Hospital. Nowadays of course when people say, "Where are you from," I say I'm from Atlanta and they say, "No,

I mean where are you really from?" as if I just got off the turnip truck. But no, I was born here. I went to public schools, Morris Brandon, Northside High School.

My parents come from Warren County and Wilts County over in the eastern part of the state and they were the first sort of off of the farm and my father was in the insurance business and that brought him to Atlanta. But I was born here in 1940 and my sister five years later.

SHORT: I do know that you were a very talented performer in your early life.

FOWLER: Well, I guess I was sort of born performing, I don't know really where that came from, but I have these big hands and long fingers and when I was four I could get my hands around a guitar neck and all I wanted to do was to be able to strum like Jimmy Wakely, early singing cowboys of our youth, mine and yours. So my parents got me an old Gibson guitar; I still have it; it is extremely valuable. It was a used guitar then but I think it was made in 1938. It still sounds great.

And so I took lessons but I never really learned to pick; all I wanted to do was sort of strum and sing. But when I was five I was going around getting \$3 to play at little five, six, and seven year old birthday parties.

And that is when you and I ran into each other when I was invited somehow to go on Freddie Miller's Stars of Tomorrow, which was as you know, an early sort of Ted Max

amateur hour, a local version. So I came on and I sang and you couldn't repeat then, you weren't supposed to, but you won 24 Brach candy bars and I won singing *Detour*, *There's a Muddy Road Ahead*.

I got my candy bars and then the next week a little Brenda Lee, as she was called then and still is, came, and she was from Augusta, with this hoarse deep voice and she stood on the piano bench as her mother accompanied her and little Brenda was--and I don't know what, but anyway she won and got her candy bars but the cards and the letters came in and said wouldn't it be wonderful if somehow little Wyche Fowler and little Brenda Lee could come back together.

So you as the producer and Freddie Miller sort of did what became like a gospel intervention in the show and we sang together, *The Old Rugged Cross* with me on the high tenor and Brenda on the--but I'd sing '*but I'll cherish the old*' [high pitched voice] and little Brenda would go '*old rugged cross*' [deep pitched voice]. Of course the end of the story is that she went on to stardom and I went on the penury, but we had fun.

SHORT: And then you went on to Davidson.

FOWLER: I did. My father took me, we drove up the coast and we went to Washington Lee and VMI and Davidson and Chapel Hill and I don't know why, now that I am so involved with the University of Georgia, I was probably the first or one of the

few statewide elected officials that didn't go to the University either undergraduate or law school or something. But Davidson was just, Chapel Hill and Duke were just too big and it just didn't appeal to me at all. I hadn't done any research on schools or anything and I didn't know anybody.

I was a Baptist up until the time that I went and they made a Presbyterian out of me, but it was just that small campus. It was all male then and I didn't like that once I was there for a year, but I went to Davidson and really my closest friends now, I don't know how many people can say that, out of say five or six, four of them are from those Davidson days still. So it was the right school for me and the right choice.

It didn't help my political career because when I came back and started running I didn't have any network of people I had been to school with or fraternities or anything like that, but I'm on the Board of Trustees there now and it's a fine place.

SHORT: Good. Then you wound up at the Pentagon.

FOWLER: I was in ROTC so I went into--I was infantry but they--intelligence was a different division and I went to New York, I got interviewed at school and I went off and my first job was at Citibank in New York. I was really waiting to go in the Army for my intelligence class to start. But I had a great two years watching the Yankees, watching Marius versus Mantel, the great home run race of 1961. And also I

fell in love with New York at the time. But finally, my time came and I went to infantry school at Fort Benning and then to intelligence school in Fort Hollenberg in Baltimore, which has been torn down now. I had a great time and then they sent me to the Pentagon. I requested an overseas assignment, but I didn't get it so I was sort of an analyst during that time.

But the most interesting part, now that we are going down memory lane, is I was on the desk and in the group that investigated what we would now call domestic terrorism. It was really watching for alleged communist cells, and this is 1963-1962, we'll get it right in a minute when I tell the story.

Anyway, it was in August of that year that I was doing that and they had the march on Washington and I had actually met Dr. King on several occasions but they were worried, the Army was worried, that there would be communist infiltrators in the people who came to town and maybe there might be violence so they put these task forces together to monitor. I was in charge of the whole operation really to having troops here and there in case they had to be called in, but thank goodness it was peaceful and so it had many dimensions for me, the stirring nature of it still brings great emotion to people who were there at the time or even who saw it on television. I was just thankful that at the end of Dr. King's speech when all those people disbursed that there hadn't been any trouble because if there had been trouble then I would have had to make some decisions.

SHORT: Then you met--knew Charlie Weltner, a great Congressman from Georgia's 5<sup>th</sup> District.

FOWLER: Right.

SHORT: And you served as his Chief of Staff in Washington.

FOWLER: I was actually in the Army still and this is in 1963, when those little girls were bombed in church in Sunday School in Birmingham, and a freshman Congressman from Atlanta whom I didn't even know his name, I hadn't been in Atlanta because I had been in New York and I had been in the Army and Washington, but this freshman named Charles Weltner took the floor and made a statement that said that we all share the blame for this tragedy because those who have been elected to lead have failed to lead.

So I have reasons you just heard, since childhood I have never been bashful, so I just called him up to compliment him and introduced myself on the phone of course, and I told him I was a young lieutenant and that sort of thing, and he said well come over and I'll have a cup of coffee with you.

So that began a friendship and I was getting out of the Army in about four or five months and our friendship had developed and he saw I was interested in public policy

and so he invited me to be on his staff so I started work the day after I got out of the Army on January 1, 1965. And I was with him for the year and half until he resigned, as you will remember, in the summer of 1966, because he could not support Lester Maddox and at that time, when you paid your fee to qualify and you filled out your papers, you had to take a loyalty oath to support all other members of the Democratic Party who were running for office. It was just a mimeograph form; nobody had paid any attention to it in 20 or 30 years, I don't know when it began to be a part of the papers, but Charles, with his legal mind and his sense of ethics took it very seriously. So he won the primary for re-election but the same night Maddox won the primary to be the Democratic nominee for governor and it didn't take him six hours; the next morning he said I can't violate my oath and I can't support Maddox and his politics I have always opposed so he resigned.

SHORT: That was a very courageous thing.

FOWLER: Well I thought so and hundreds of thousands of people from all over the country thought so. I think we had over 200,000 letters and telegrams, mainly people saying before yesterday I had never heard of you and now I will never forget you.

SHORT: Yeah. Well he was a great lawyer too.

FOWLER: You know he actually was not a very good politician because he wasn't naturally garrulous and he was a little uncomfortable around people initially; he was not a backslapper, but a superior legal mind.

When he died you know, he was Chief Justice of the Georgia Supreme Court and he was writing over 60% of the opinions of the Court himself without, I mean he had legal assistants, but the truth of the matter is that if it was a difficult case assigned to another member they would go down the hall and ask Charles to do it, to render the opinion after they decided which way they were going to go. Never happened before. But he had just an incredible legal mind and was a genuine legal scholar.

He had taught before he was elected to the Congress, he taught at night at Woodrow Wilson School. He didn't have any money and he had four young children. He was always scrapping together for money, but he was in my opinion, the finest of public officials because of his intellect, his ethics and his concern for the public interest.

SHORT: Now getting back to Wyche Fowler, after your experience with Weltner you decided to go to law school?

FOWLER: Actually my father was all over me. He was upset that I had taken the exams and the tests and I had been admitted to Emory and many other places, including Yale I think, but like you do, my senior year--and I had planned to go to law

school and had told my father, I had actually clerked--my Sunday School teacher was Judge Claude Shaw and Sunday School teacher was Griffin Bell at Second-Ponce de Leon Baptist, so they got me interested in the law. So I had been accepted but then I had these more attractive offers, so to speak, so from the time, and I might have never gone to law school if Weltner hadn't resigned.

So I didn't think about then and I went off to the London School of Economics for a year and then at the end of that year, or through that winter I was cold and I was miserable about every day. I was living in this place you know that was \$10 a day or something, with shilling meters you had to get up every three hours and put those shillings in there to get a little heat. Anyway, my mind escapes me but the Dean of the law school was Ben—

SHORT: Johnson.

FOWLER: Ben Johnson, who was a fine state Senator. And you know he knew me through being a staffer for Weltner; he didn't really know me, but I came back and it was about the middle of September and I went to see Dean Johnson and I said, "I would like to go to Emory Law School." "Wonderful," he said, and I said that I was accepted and he said, "I don't think there is going to be any problem; you've already been accepted but you know, we'll get the right paperwork and this pleases me greatly"-- and that sort

of thing and we will get all this stuff and welcome you back next year. I said, "You don't understand Dean Johnson; I want to start now."

He said, "Now? School has been in operation, Wyche, for two weeks." And I said, "I know, but I also know that from the experience of parents that the first couple of weeks you have some dropouts and people who don't last more than two weeks; they decide they don't like it." And I said, "I think I can catch up"-- because I was older then see, I was about 28 and I had been in the Army and with Weltner, been in New York. So he let me do it, but boy those professors.

I walked in the first class of Constitutional Law and Bill Ferguson said, "Class, I am closing my book. We have straight from Washington a genuine constitutional scholar and we would like him to lecture this morning on *Marbury v. Madison* and the role of the Congress." I have never been so embarrassed in my life. But they all did and of course I barely got through that first quarter, nobody would know the teacher was going to give me more than a C. But, I went straight through Emory Law School and they were on a quarter system then so I got out in two years and three months, but when I graduated and starting practicing law I was a little over 30, but it was the best thing that would ever happen to any politician because you've always got something to fall back on.

SHORT: Right.

FOWLER: And I tried a lot of cases, for ten years, before I was elected to Congress. I mean I was on the City Council as you know, but that was part time, and I tried a lot of cases. I really enjoyed the litigation part of the law.

SHORT: As I recall, during your experience at Emory while a student you served as Night Mayor of Atlanta. How did you arrive at that idea?

FOWLER: Ivan Allen was the Mayor and he was a great friend of Charles'. You know they both were so progressive, both involved in the--see Charles' is short tenure was all the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That year I spent was almost all my work was on the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Well I go to law school and I have forgotten why, but I called Mayor Allen about something and it was about five minutes after five and I got the line that says City Hall is closed. Well again, you know I had just come from Washington and I'm this big--I thought it was outrageous. So I go down to the city to Mayor Allen and I told him it is outrageous, what do we do about these people who have got to pay their gas bills, they have got to work all day and they are out there digging and they don't have secretaries, they are working with their hands and their backs, and he said you know you're right. He said what do you think we ought to do and I said well, again the Army experience, I said I think you need a duty officer of some sort, to take all the calls and refer them and

the next morning at 9:00 -- but, to sit down, you know after hours, and he said that is a fantastic idea, what fool can we get to do it. C'est moi!

So of course, I hadn't been down there three or four nights when the press, the *Atlanta Constitution*, had found out about it. So they send this reporter down there to see me and when he started asking me what I was and what I was doing, the term "Duty Officer" sort of caught in my throat and I said well I'm sort of the "Night Mayor." The next morning the headline *Night Mayor at City Hall* and Allen says, "You son of a bitch, what are you running for?" [laughter] and that's how that happened. But that did make me famous.

SHORT: Yeah.

FOWLER: That made me famous in a local context so that when I ran for the City Council the next year I only had one billboard and it was a movable billboard on top of my Corvair that said the Night Mayor is Running for Alderman, it was called Alderman then. And I would take it and I would park it at Lennox Square and then I would take it over to Piedmont and park it there for the weekend and move my billboard around and pass out my cards, but people knew.

It got enough publicity because people--you know, there was no talk radio then, hard to believe but--so people would call wanting to talk and they would want to yell at

the City for not picking up the garbage and the dead cats and the sewers were overflowing and that sort of thing, but basically they just wanted somebody that would listen to them. So that was my job, but it was the springboard to my being elected.

That, and being at Emory, because I hadn't been at Emory more than three quarters when this City Council seat came open and I had two things, I had Charles Weltner's mailing list and I looked around and I saw all this free labor sitting there, all these students, so I organized the students and with that mailing list that is how I was elected.

SHORT: Do you remember that campaign and your opponent?

FOWLER: I had, you know, I really can't name them all. There were five or six, but they were all first-timers. It was the seat of G. Everett Millican; he retired. But I can't right off the top of my head remember those guys. You know there were some businessmen that had some backing, and nobody took me seriously because I was so young. I mean I really wasn't young but unfortunately I was a student, so you know, they kept saying this student running. But I do remember the whole race was run on \$3,100 and I raised the money thanks to Manuel Malouf. That was my office, that little place in there was my headquarters and we would have tube steak suppers--hot dogs, to raise money.

SHORT: Are you very close to Manuel?

FOWLER: Yes.

SHORT: He was quite a political operator.

FOWLER: Yeah, a wonderful man. But unlike Charles, he had very good political instincts and could judge people very well. And you know he would call a spade a spade.

SHORT: Then you later ran for and were elected President of the Council.

FOWLER: Well the seat I won was citywide, they changed the name from Alderman to Council, but I was always citywide. And then Maynard Jackson was the Vice Mayor and City Council President, then he decided to run for Mayor against Massell so he was vacating that seat so I ran and won. But by then I had some kind of political base, I had been in office for four years citywide.

SHORT: Ran against--

FOWLER: And again, things were so different then. People just can't imagine that now a politician can't get on television unless he pays for a 30-second ad; it's all journalists sitting around pontificating about public policy and how bad all of us elected officials are. But then they just died for 6:00 and 11:00 for you to come by and let them interview you for two, three or four minutes. And I was single and I was young and certainly made myself available, so I had four years of huge exposure through radio and television.

SHORT: And movie lines...

FOWLER: And movie lines.

SHORT: I remember you handing me cards at the Hiltz [ph] Plaza Theaters.

FOWLER: Yeah I didn't invent the technique but I--my first was in the *What's New Pussycat* line and I had sense enough I thought to start at the back of the line and go forward, you know when people starting moving in they wouldn't--you work your way backwards. And I could get about three lines that way, but my great coup was I had a little mischievousness from my mother and I printed up 1,000 Wyche Fowler for City

Council President tongue depressants and passed them out in the *Deep Throat* line.

SHORT: [Laughter.]

FOWLER: That made the newspapers.

SHORT: I'm sure it did.

FOWLER: I would work the porno crowd too [laughter].

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the demographics of Atlanta during that period. The city was growing, most of the people who came here moved into the suburbs, the African-American population had increased, I think at around 60% of the city. Those demographics indicated that there would be the necessity for some sort of future plan to deal with suburbia. Do you recall anything about that? I think Massell tried to get the city limits expanded to take in some of the suburban areas.

FOWLER: Yeah he did but he wasn't the first. I think every Mayor since Hartsfield had tried to do that. I mean they, since all the way back to Hartsfield's day that the little donut that you know now is only about 500,000 people actually in the City

of Atlanta with five million; well then it was a little donut with a million and a half.

SHORT: Uh-hum.

FOWLER: So there was always that effort with the legislature, with going you know, nowhere. Sam did that and the thing that I will always remember Sam for, how brave and what a difference it would have made is that he wanted, went we built the MARTA system under him, he wanted free ridership, for it to be a free system and I think if we had done that, even though we would have put it different places now I think, different stations and different lines and different ways, I think you would have had whites and blacks and everybody riding it, it would be the only system in the country that was free. But anyway, that failed.

Actually my best legislative coup in all of my career was toward the end of the debate before we got started and actually it did to where the--there were big fights you know over where the lines were going to run, but the biggest fight was the line going to the airport. I better not accuse him, but all of Atlanta's premier real estate developers, you would know all of their names, in the two years that we saw what was happening, they went out and bought land all around the airport with all wanting the last station to be on their property and they were going to build air rights over it and things that are done in all stations now all over the country.

Well I had gone as part of an official delegation and I had looked at the San Francisco system, the Toronto system, Paris, and I probably didn't say anything about it, but it was crazy not to put the train in the airport. If you wanted people to take the train to the airport, you put it in the airport. Well, there was this huge fight and real estate developer A got two or three members on his side and B and--so the day of the vote came and we had 37 votes eliminating, you know, this site. We would vote that down and then the coalition would go outside and get together with the real estate developers and they would come back in. And then finally it came, on the 33<sup>rd</sup> vote, it was to put it in the airport, and there was a 9-9 tie. I don't know how but the racial composition then was interesting, there were nine blacks and nine whites and I could only vote in the case of a tie. I don't think it broke down on racial lines, but it was 9 to 9 as a tie and I cast the deciding vote to put the thing in the airport.

Of course no real estate developer ever spoke to me again for 20 years, much less got a campaign contribution, but of course, that is the real glory of the MARTA system now. You can't imagine what it would be like if you didn't have that train going into the airport.

SHORT: So you wanted to be a Congressman?

FOWLER: Well I guess in retrospect I was seduced by being with Charles those

two years working in the Congress, but, or maybe not but, my public policy interests have always been, since college, national and international interests. You know, what to do about old folks, how do you have a better transportation system for the country, what should our foreign policy be, how do we deal with friends and enemies and on and on and on, as opposed to state issues of roads and schools and agriculture.

So I never had any interest in running for governor at any time, and I came up through the city system and so I wasn't in the state legislature like most state politicians. But it is really my interest today; my interest always has been more public policy than politics. I happen to have been a reasonably good politician I think, but that is just because I like people and am comfortable with people, so that part was never difficult.

But I love the public policy part of trying to make very difficult decisions, especially when you knew that the public who didn't have all the facts but were going to be against your decision. And Charles taught me that because of the voting for the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, immensely unpopular with all the white voters in this district, which were the majority then, barely the majority, but that's why I ran for Congress.

And again, you have to be lucky, the timing has to be right and as you'll remember, I had been City Council President about three years and I was coming up to the end of my term. I guess I was thinking about whether I was going to run for mayor, but Carter was elected in 1976 and Andrew Young was then in his second term as the

Atlanta Fifth District Congressman, so he picked Andy to go to the United Nations, so he vacated the seat in January of 1977 and there had to be a Special Election within three months. And I just jumped at the chance.

That was the fun race because there were 27 candidates. The first one to announce was Paul Coverdell who was in the legislature and he announced at the same time he was going to spend \$200,000 and I don't know why he did that, which as I said my races had cost \$6,000, \$8,000, and that was an unheard of sum, but he was a Republican and the Republican Party probably told him they could get it for him.

Anyway, also Marge Thurman, who was the Democratic Party Chairman, Hosea who I had already dealt with and had fun with in the City Council Presidency race, and the blacks all got together and said, well they didn't really say it but this had become--there had never been a time in history, in Congressional history apparently, that once a seat had an African American Congressman that it went back to a white. In fact, all this gets very complicated but all the redistricting was trying to ensure that you had more blacks and also make the black seats safer.

So they got together with John Lewis and in comes John, so this was even before I got in the race, you had all these prominent people. But again, there wasn't any question about name recognition because all the free television time. I can't think it out loud; I can't emphasize that too much. I never thought about it. I am sure it was a lot of self promotion, but I was genuine and I had three calls every night from all three stations, will

you come by and talk about this ordinance or come by and talk about that and they were just filling in the space, which you don't have now; even the President gets 20 seconds.

So I got in the race and with all those 27 and there ended up a runoff between John and myself and we campaigned together, we drove around together in that three week runoff and he knew I was going to win and I knew I was going to win because I had, through those two different City Council terms I was getting 35% to 40% of the black vote. So I won.

And one of the nice stories of politics, that was 1977, because it was a Special Election--

SHORT: Non-partisan?

FOWLER: Non-partisan, all the Republicans and Democrats are in there together. But then ten years later, or nine years later, when I decided a year in advance that I was going to run for the Senate and vacate my seat to run for the Senate, I called John a year in advance. And I said you can't tell anybody but I am going to do this and it is definite and you can count on it and I wanted to give you a year to prepare if you want to run. He did, Julian Bond ran against him, but we won. I won the Senate seat and he won my seat that night together and that was very satisfying.

SHORT: Right. Well let's get back to Congress. You were elected in 1977, Carter is the President and you go to Washington. You wound up on the Ways and Means Committee, which is a plum. How did that happen?

FOWLER: I had to run for it, they didn't select me. They had a Committee on Committees, the major people in the Congress, the old bulls, and they picked--there were five vacancies, which was very large and strange. But they picked Ed Jenkins who was elected only three months earlier, of Georgia, but they put him on there and they certainly weren't going to put two Georgians, I mean California I think had two at the time, but....

I was reading the fine print and it's not--the Committee on Committees makes the recommendation, but the whole house, or the whole democratic part of the house, it was the whole house, made the ultimate decision. And again, it was something like timing and it said you know, if you want to challenge anybody you can do that; if you want to challenge the slate.

I wasn't as smart as I thought I was because I didn't know that you had to run against and beat the whole slate. You didn't just have to beat one. But we were on a Congressional Break and I didn't think anything of it. I mean here I was a freshman and I thought the rules were the rules and I just decided that I would stay at my desk during that Congressional Break and call all 435 members and tell them that I wanted to be on the Ways and Means Committee and would they vote for me because I was going to run

under this provision. I didn't keep a list of who said yes. I wasn't pressuring them, I was--consider voting for me, but I reached half of them in Europe or wherever but I got a hold of or during that week that we were all out I reached all 435.

Then we come in to have this vote and I beat the whole slate by about 300 votes and Tip O'Neal called me up and said what a goddamn race horse, he said what do you want to be you can have majority leader if you just won't run again and beat the whole ticket. Boy it was unusual but I did it in naiveté, but I enjoyed it.

I was on the Ways and Means Committee and I was on the Foreign Affairs Committee when Donnie Fussell was the Chairman. He was a great friend of mine. He let me go off on my own and investigate different things. I went down with the Contras in Nicaragua and then when the Intelligence Committee was formed I was a Charter Member of the Intelligence Committee. Tip put me on there because he thought I was going to run.

SHORT: Well let's talk about that for a minute. You were involved in the Boland Amendment?

FOWLER: I was. Actually he gave me credit and that shows what a man he was. That we can't put monies to try to overthrow a government and I came back from, he sent me down to Nicaragua for a week and I came back and there was no question that

we were financing these Contras secretly and illegally. So, Boland trusted me and he wrote this amendment that made it firm for the first time that you could not finance a secret war without Congressional approval.

SHORT: Which we did.

FOWLER: Which we were doing.

SHORT: Yeah.

FOWLER: And then of course Reagan kept on trading arms for the money from Iran to the Contras, but right before he died Boland told the newspapers that it was really my amendment and that I had done it and that I had actually wrote it on the plane coming back and gave it to him and he did it.

SHORT: Any other memories you have of your service in the House?

FOWLER: Well, of course I have a lot of -- the thing that might be interesting to you is that I liked the House so much better than the Senate. I liked the camaraderie, I liked the debate and there were always 40 to 50 to 60 people on the floor and you could

get recognized and you could enter into a debate anytime. You had to do a lot more work and politicking to get other members to help you on one of your causes or one of your bills, whereas the Senate was then and still is just sort of you are alone and there is nobody up there on the Senate floor and you go over and you read a speech and there is no debate, except in very rare instances. I just found it not nearly as satisfying on a day-to-day basis.

SHORT: So getting back now to your political career, you made the decision to run for the Senate. Did you see an opening there?

FOWLER: No. I got to be careful here now, Mattingly had beaten Talmadge and he was on the Finance Committee and I was put by Chairman Ostenskowski in a lot of the conference committees with the Senate, both Jenkins and myself. So we would go over and have these conferences and we just found Mac, I had become friends with him and I liked him--now I like him--but we found him very difficult to work with.

Truthfully, it disturbed me that we had this guy from Indiana who was a United States Senator from Georgia. It just didn't feel right or sit right and I just decided, as I said, a year in advance, that I was going to run. I had been in the House for ten years and I wanted to try something different I guess. Just like the Republicans do now, they had so much money, well until this latest election, the Obama McCain sort of reversed things for

the first time in my political lifetime, but I think he was sitting on something like \$6 million dollars and of course I didn't have a dime. And there wasn't any presidential race that year so there wasn't any horse to ride and I knew I was going to have beat him on my own, and nobody paid any attention to me because I was the Atlanta Congressman, which meant I was the liberal Atlanta Congressman, which meant I was the liberal Atlanta Congressman with a 76% black district then. But that helped me, because I quietly went on the Georgia tour, you know, with the Speaker and I was the Federal Representative and you know that Chamber of Commerce--

SHORT: Pre-Legislative Forum--

FOWLER: Pre-Legislative Forum it was called. I did several things like that. Nobody knew, some were suspecting but nobody thought that I would be fool enough to run or anybody would be fool enough to vote for me. So I got in and I won, but I think it was a lot of luck. I barely won by 50.1% and they took me for granted a lot and Mattingly wouldn't debate me and I was going around to all these radio shows and playing my guitar and cutting up and that sort of thing. So I don't know whether it was a protest vote or what.

SHORT: I bet you enjoyed that.

FOWLER: Well I -- people who like people like me enjoy the politics more than the governing because it's easy.

SHORT: You had in that race the support of Speaker Tom Murphy and his democratic base?

FOWLER: I was going to say that. We really liked each other. I got to know him when I was City Council President and I sought his help on how Robert's Rules of Order and how you did this and that and I went to see him and told him I was going to be talking to him about Atlanta legislation and he knew that, but we hit it off and we were good friends. And he did openly campaign for me in his network and I am sure I couldn't have gotten elected with out that.

SHORT: Your class that year was inclusive of several present-day leaders in the Senate. I think John McCain came when you came.

FOWLER: I was in the House with John.

SHORT: Harry Reid?

FOWLER: I was in the House with Reid too. And of course in the Senate with them too. We all are the same, within two years of each other, whether Harry came two years later or not I can't remember.

SHORT: So you got on the Senate Appropriations Committee? You have led a charmed life.

FOWLER: Well, I think to a great extent I have led a charmed life. I also -- it has been a very adventurous life. I was sort of an institutional man, the leadership in the House and the Senate knew that I could be sort of counted on to uphold the traditions of the institution and that's how I got on the Appropriations Committee. Senator Byrd, who was Majority Leader then, I worked with him on a lot of matters, institutional matters, so he did that for me.

SHORT: You also were Assistant Floor Leader.

FOWLER: Well I helped Mitchell. Mitchell asked me when there were three of them running, Mitchell, Danny Inouye, and Bennett Johnston from Louisiana, and I liked George but I didn't know him that well and we sat down and talked about what he

wanted to do and how he was going to do it and I said I would help him so I sort of became his campaign manager and then when he was elected he made me his Deputy.

SHORT: What memories do you have about your service in the Senate?

FOWLER: Well, as I say, I could go on forever. The most famous, shows how George Mitchell, like many others who have helped me are so much smarter than I was, we had the funding and had a week set aside for the funding of the National Endowment of Arts and Humanities. So Mitchell asked me, which was unusual, to handle the bill in its entirety on the floor, he had to go somewhere. Well, we both knew but we didn't know how serious that Jessie Helms, Senator Helms from North Carolina, was determined to kill both organizations. He wanted to abolish arts and humanities because he was upset about pornographic art and you know, advanced art and he didn't like a lot of the books in schools and all that kind of stuff that we still have today.

So what I left out of my background in this chronicle, and which nobody there knew was the fact that from the time I was about six or seven years old until I went to Davidson I thought I was going to be a Minister. I won't say I was a scholar of the Bible, but I was certainly a student and knew my Bible very well and the Bible stories.

So Helms gets up and he's got some pictures of some awful art. You remember he had one of them where this guy did a crucifix floating in urine and things like that;

Mapplethorpe was the guy's name, and he had a very famous exhibition of all that kind of stuff in Brooklyn. And he had 10% financing of the National Endowment of the Arts.

So Helms brings all this stuff out about sex and pictures and violence and he would pass them around and the Senators were like, eww I don't want to look at that you know, and all these different sex positions and animals and so here I am stuck trying to save the whole -- I mean the Senate was just about to abolish the whole because they didn't want an ad run against them in the next campaign that they voted for pornography and have all these terrible pictures.

So I got to -- Helms just went too far. So when it was my time to question him we were talking about violence first and I said I am sure the Senior Senator from North Carolina knows he is Christian and worthy of the great Christian traditions and knows his Bible stories, so I started out first on Sampson killing all of the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass and then Sampson pulling the temple down on his head. If that is not violence, I said to the Senior Senator, I am not sure what is. Then we went over to Bathsheba and David and mistresses and concubines and all these stories taught in Sunday School and man, he got up and he said you are the anti-Christ. He said that to me on the floor.

So we went back and forth like that for about three days and in the galleries watching this were all the heads of museums from all over the country, but I didn't know that. But all the museums from all over the country and all the Rockefeller, Ford

Foundations, all these people dependent upon matching monies from the federal governments through Arts and Humanities.

And so the final vote, when we defeated all of his amendments by one or two votes every time, I was a big hero with that community. One of the men there was the Chairman of the Schubert Theaters and the Schubert Foundation in New York, which finances more than any other organization, regional theaters, playwrights, ballets, and that was 25 years ago and he just died two weeks ago.

But when I came back from Saudi Arabia he asked me to join the Board of the Schubert Foundation, which I did, all because of that one episode. They needed a fighter for the arts, you know, and that kind of thing.

SHORT: Well Senator your first term ended and you offered for re-election?

FOWLER: I did and got beat. But that was not unusual. It was only my second loss. I lost one time for running for Congress in the primary; very unique circumstances.

Georgia has only one in the nation requirement that unless you get an absolute majority 50% plus one in the general election, then you have to have a run-off between the top two. Like I say, nobody else has that and I think it is unconstitutional but it has not been tested, and I, my main opponent was Paul Coverdell and I ran about 600,000

votes ahead of him, but because there was a Libertarian in the race that got about 2.5%, it kept me just under the 50%; 49.96% or something like that, and with a huge lead, but we had to have a run-off three weeks later. Only 12% of the public voted, but Paul won 51% to 49% by about 1,200 votes or something.

So the bad thing was that only 12% of the public elected their Senator after you had a huge turnout and of course in any other state in the union I would have won. I ran six points ahead of Clinton. He got 42% and stayed, so I guess almost eight points ahead of him and all the other southerners running for re-election like Fritz Hollings got--won with like 45%, Terry Sanderford with 45% or 46%, but I just got caught in that.

But since this has been sort of a life history, my mother was a tremendous influence in my life and one of the things that she taught me is that you are either in the front of the rowboat looking forward or in the back looking at the wake and it doesn't do any good to look backwards. So I didn't like it, it hurt like you say, you are too old to cry because any other place or time or circumstance I would have been the winner, but I got over it very quickly.

And this will lead into what you have already told me you were going to ask me about, people say well, when you, when I was in Saudi Arabia you know, how much do you miss the Senate and I would say, after that first month I never thought about it again. And of course would have never had the opportunity to be our Ambassador in Saudi Arabia if I had won, and if I had to do now that I know what I've done my five years in

Saudi Arabia or my six years in the Senate, I mean it is just no choice. Saudi Arabia was the most defining experience of my life.

So I say I have led an adventurous and fortunate life. It was actually what sort of rounded out my public policy experience and my intrigue and interest in foreign policy and hands-on in a difficult part of the world when my country needed me that I never would have had if I had remained in the Senate.

SHORT: So you were appointed as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia by President Clinton? Is that a job you seek or does the job find you?

FOWLER: I was teaching up at Harvard, at the Kennedy School, and I got this call from President Clinton's office and they said the President wants to see you at 10:00 in the morning. So I had sense enough not to ask about what and I said I'll be there. I had no earthly idea, none, I could only imagine it had something to do with Georgia and might be appointing judges or something, I didn't know. Because see I had lost the day he had won, or three weeks later, and I should have been serving with him.

So because I was involved I hadn't read the papers with the thoroughness that -- but there had been an attack, the first terrorist attack really in Saudi Arabia on our Air Force installation there that killed 19 American airmen 48 hours before but I just didn't know it.

So I walked in and after perfunctory greetings he says to me, "I have a foreign assignment that is not for everyone." And I said all I could think about was Rwanda, Burundi, and of course I am a traditionalist so you don't say no to the President. Whatever he was going to ask me to do I was going to tell him I would do my best or something.

So when he said I need somebody to go clean up the mess in Saudi Arabia after this terrible bombing, and I didn't say I don't know what you are talking about, I was still so shocked just by it all. So he said how soon can you leave and I thought he was making me an Envoy and I said well I have just got to give my exams and he said you can get somebody to give your exams and I said well I guess I can leave tomorrow then. And he said well that won't be too soon and he said we'll worry about your confirmation later. I said what confirmation and he said well you are going to be my Ambassador.

So you know, he nominates and the Senate has to confirm but I left with the clothes on my back basically and then came home two or three weeks later after we got our investigation going and got things in place.

**SHORT:** What was your impression of Saudi Arabia when you arrived there?

**FOWLER:** Well I got by for a long time on my "greenness" or my supposed greenness, but the truth of the matter is because of what you know, because I had been on

the foreign policy committees in both the House and the Senate, and the Intelligence Committee, I never asked President Clinton--I don't know why he chose me and I've never asked him. I don't know why I never asked him because I campaigned with him twice for Jim Martin, the last month. I don't know why he chose me, but I had been in and out of Saudi Arabia a couple of times, but only for brief meetings on a Congressional delegation.

But I have always been interested in an energy policy so I had made many trips to the Middle East, many trips to Israel, but also the gulf countries, all the oil producing countries, so I was no stranger to their customs and ways, although Saudi Arabia certainly is the most peculiar because it is the most insular and very few people had been there when I--they didn't have any tourists or anything like that.

But when people ask me about Saudi Arabia, the first thing in my service that is if you are curious about, if you have a natural curiosity, you can't help but love a place like--I mean it is unique in its history, it is unique in its geography and it is unique in its religion, it is unique in its interpretation of that religion. There is no place like it and it has been, despite what they say on Fox News, it has been the best Arab friend of the United States since the second World War.

They fought all our wars, whether it is after that in Afghanistan fighting the communists there and the Russians, we launched our first Gulf War to liberate Kuwait from Saudi Arabia and they paid for the whole war, \$60 billion dollars. We couldn't

have done the second, this war that we have engaged in now, without Saudi permission to use their soil and support and intelligence, munitions and money, everything. And that is aside from our dependence on oil and energy.

The King released an extra 500,000 barrels a day the morning after 9-11 to stabilize the energy markets and make sure we had adequate supplies here. So again, despite some of the public discussion, it's a difficult place, but they have been very loyal friends of the United States.

SHORT: Tell us a little bit about their governing.

FOWLER: Well I used to make people sort of mad or thought I had lost my mind because I said when I got there I learned that it wasn't the pilgrims it was the Saudi's who invented the Town Hall Meeting.

Because they have what is called a *majlis* which is the gathering, but the rulers, including the King and all of his brothers, once a month at a minimum, have an open house. Any Saudi, low or high can come and sit at his feet and tell him what is wrong with the kingdom or the government or his pension or...and I have seen them get up and shake their fingers right in the face of the King.

But they govern by consensus and it can be a slow process and very laborious, but it is amazingly effective. And I'm always having to assess political risk for American

companies who want to do business, whether the kingdom is going to fall or the monarchy is going to be overthrown.

I usually start out by saying that people have been predicting that they were going to be overthrown for the last 60 years, but they are superior politicians and they don't move until they have got not only a majority coalition for the policy within the royal family, but a majority they feel in the country, of support for the direction they are going to go.

**SHORT:** As Ambassador, what was your relationship with the King?

**FOWLER:** Well King Fahd at that time he had had a couple of series of strokes and so he wasn't in the best of health, and so he sort of went in and out but the Crown Prince of Abdullah, who was number two and who is now the King, was really the de facto ruler of the country.

We established a very, very good relationship, which remains to this day. He is a wise man and a man of great ethical standards. But as a southerner, I think you would like this. They put family first and a lot of State Department people don't get along with Arabs very well because they don't know how to make small talk, you know, before you get down to the business. If you are going to go over there and say we want to bomb Iraq from your territory tomorrow, you know you can't just go right into that.

So when I first arrived, nobody told me that and it was obvious. The King asked about my family and I would tell him and then I would ask something politely about his and then he would tell the story about his grandfather and how he raised goats out in the desert. So I would make up a story about my grandfather raising goats and it would go on like that. I would just pretend that I was in a Metro Goldwin Mayer B-movie and made up or gave myself an extended family with all sorts of interesting tales.

But we got along very well and I have retained, I have been home now about seven years, but it seems like yesterday, but I go once or twice a year and see my friends, Saudi's and others in Saudi Arabia.

SHORT: How many Americans are there?

FOWLER: When I was there, before the terror attacks and before the world fell apart on 9/11, there were 50,000 Americans, including all their families, the safest place in the world; never any problems, then it went way down--well, it is probably 30,000 now. The major American companies, not just the oil, but technology, health, all of those are still there and they didn't leave after 9/11 and after they started having a lot of bombings in Saudi Arabia.

Saudis are fighting the same people. Again, the news never goes back, but it was Osama Bin Laden who was a Saudi of course, who called for the overthrow of the

kingdom and called for all American forces to leave and all bases to be shut down.

Based on that they expelled him and took away his citizenship and threw him out of the country.

And then he started making war on both of us so the Saudi's, from the very beginning, they had the first attack, which sent me over there into Iran in 1996, and then those attacks have continued. Ironically, during the almost five years I was there we didn't have a terrorist attack. I am certainly not taking any credit, that was just luck, but we did all the security and everything we could do to prevent it, but we didn't have one.

Right after I left the Al Qaeda cried and really starting blowing up housing compounds and that was their mistake because they were killing Arabs then and that turned the population against them. So Saudi Arabia and America have worked hand in hand sharing intelligence, databases, military secrets, they have almost eliminated it in Saudi Arabia and of course, fortunately, knock on wood, we haven't had another attack here.

**SHORT:** Are we winning the war on terror?

**FOWLER:** Not really. We are--it is ill-defined. I mean you are always going to have people with grievances if they don't have an outlet and are willing to kill themselves in order to kill you. You are not going to be able prevent it.

But until we regain respect in the world and respect for our values, which we have gone a long way to losing, every poll in every one of these countries shows that we are not going to get on top of it.

SHORT: What do you think of our policy in the Middle East?

FOWLER: Well it's hard to have a comprehensive Middle East policy, because these states, even though they are all Arab and they are all Islamic, they are all very, very different. But I guess the only intelligent answer would be, until we use our weight--until and unless the Israeli/Palestinian matter is settled; two state solution with each having their own territory and agreements, until that is done, as Dylan Thomas said that is still the worm beneath the nail.

We are accused by all of the Arabs of not being an honest broker in that settlement and of only doing Israel's bid. If we could show that we are even-handed and use our undeniable authority and power to help fashion a solution, then a lot of these problems engendered by terrorists and the Al Qaeda's of the world will go away.

Some of us like me, I must say, are hoping, and also I happen to believe it, that the election of Obama for President will go a long way to undercut the recruitment by terrorists. I mean it is hard to say let's go bomb Americans when you've got a guy that looks like Obama and comes out of a multicultural background, including education. He

is a Christian but he attended Muslim schools when he was very young and all the evidence in the months since he was elected is that everybody in the world is really giving America a second chance.

They all are pulling for Obama because he looks like somebody who will listen and is not an ideologue and the criticism of America being a bully throwing their weight around with our military might, they just believe that that is going to cease.

SHORT: Well you have had a very illustrious public career.

FOWLER: Very fortunate.

SHORT: You have been an outstanding public servant. If you had to look back over all of your years in public life, what would you say has been your proudest accomplishment?

FOWLER: I just--I'd have to think. It is sort of like somebody asking you whether you like Paris or Rome better and the answer is you like them both but for different reasons.

I guess the real answer that I have formulated with my friends is that the election of Obama, and this may be immodest, in my mind validated all of the things that I have

worked for in my public career. I mean he hasn't done anything yet, but what I see in his temperament and his judgment and his understanding of what the real problems facing the country are, we need and I have always hoped for somebody like that at the top to follow, to lead.

The other part of it that Charles and I, as you know, when I was running I could get black votes, but all my black opponents and I barely ever had a white opponent until Coverdell. John Lewis and Julian Bond, he just got out of the race at the last minute, but he ran against me for over a year. I was fortunate in the sense of the black/white thing because I could black votes but they couldn't get white votes so that is why I got elected.

And we enacted during my career civil rights legislation, voter rights legislation, but it took a long time, you know, to filter into any kind of structure where black folks were given sort of an equal chance, at all levels, but certainly the presidency. So I guess I sort of look back on it that I put a few little building blocks in there and had to stand up to racism a lot, because I foolishly did Town Hall Meetings in every county when I was in the Senate, three times, 159 counties, three times. Of course I learned the hard way that the only people who come to a Town Hall Meeting are people that are mad at you, so it didn't do me any good [laughter]. I probably lost the election because of my Town Hall Meetings trying to be a good open public servant and tell them what was going on and what I thought and why I voted.

SHORT: What's ahead for Wyche Fowler?

FOWLER: Well, I am fortunate to still have good health and I do mostly non-profit work now, well about half and half; but I practice a little law and I am comfortable. The non-profits I do have something to do with public policy or foreign policy or environmental policy so I keep my hand in that way. I have returned to Georgia and I live here full time, I still travel a lot both for business and pleasure, but I'm glad to re-establish my Georgian roots after being out of the county.

SHORT: Well you know I would like to talk to you forever, but unfortunately our time is about up.

FOWLER: I told you more than I know, much less more than you wanted to know.

SHORT: Well I want to thank you on behalf of the Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia, and myself for being with us.

FOWLER: Thank you Bob. I enjoyed it.

[END]

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