

**Carlton Colwell interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Carlton Colwell**

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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 Carlton Colwell

who spent more than three decades in the Georgia General Assembly representing the mountain counties of Georgia. Carlton, we are delighted to have you.

CARLTON COLWELL: Thank you, Bob. Thank you for having me.

SHORT: You're a native of Blairsville in Union County up here in the North Georgia Mountains. Tell us about growing up in Blairsville.

COLWELL: Well, Bob, I lived -- there were six boys in my family and my father, we lived on a farm and he worked for the public most of his life. And we farmed, and I'm the last one living of the six. I've lost five brothers, but we grew up. It was -- we were poor I guess and didn't know it. But we had a lot of love in our family and my father was -- he was real close to me. We were real close and we grew up down on right next to Nottely River and it was -- but we, we survived it all the time.

SHORT: Good. Well, Union County has produced several outstanding public servants in addition to you. Let's talk a little bit about Judge Tom Candler.

COLWELL: Well, Judge Candler was a special friend of mine. He was real close to my wife and his law assistant was Effie Mahan and they were big friends. And Judge just helped me tremendously when I was first elected to the General Assembly and he was just a great person,

had a lot of stories to tell. So I was real appreciative of all his friendship over the years.

SHORT: Well, tell us a Judge Tom Candler story.

COLWELL: Well, Judge, he told my wife when we -- when she was expecting our daughter, said this -- we've had all boys. Said, "Now, I know this is going to be a boy," so said, "I want you to name it after me." He said you name it and she said, "Well, I don't know," kind of worrying her. So when we had the baby, it was Carla, our daughter. And he goes up to the hospital, tells her, says, "You'll do anything in this world to keep from naming someone after me." So later on we lost our -- one of our little boys in a car wreck, which has been real devastating to us over the years and so she was expecting again and she had this boy, and he called the hospital and said, "You just don't do anything about that." He said, "I'll be up there," and he went up there and wrote down Thomas Candler Caldwell. So my youngest boy is named Thomas Candler Caldwell.

And he was just a great storyteller. He had a lot of them that he would tell.

SHORT: Well, there's a district in Union County by the name of Choestoe. It seems to me that it's produced more appellate court judges than any other section in the state. In addition to Judge Candler, there was Judge William Henry Duckworth, who I'm sure you remember.

COLWELL: I remember Judge Duckworth and Judge Reed. Judge Reed was from here. Judge

M.D. Collins was school superintendent for years and like you say, Choestoe has produced some real famous people for this county really.

SHORT: Yeah, well also Lieutenant Governor, Governor, United States Senator Zell Miller's family, father's family came from Choestoe.

COLWELL: Governor Miller has a lot of relatives and I guess he has more relatives in Union County than those in towns and all of his people grew up there. I never did get to know his father. His father's dead. But I knew his mother real well and we had a lot of contacts with his mother over the years.

SHORT: Also, Congressman Ed Jenkins came from Union County.

COLWELL: Congressman Jenkins is a dear friend of mine. He went with Congressman Landrum, he went up there with him when Congressman Landrum retired, he ran and was elected. Let me tell you a story about that. He was in Gainesville when the first election and they were getting the returns from different counties. And so they come in Union County and he was leading, I think he'd gotten about 91% or 92% and they said, "What do you think about that?" "Well," he said, "I'm a little dismayed. I thought it ought to have been around 96% or 98%." So this is Ed and he's been very popular in this county over the years.

SHORT: Well, let's get back to Carlton Colwell. You ran for the General Assembly in 1964.

Why did you run?

COLWELL: Well, I came back. My father worked for the county for years, kept up the roads in the county and just they scraped roads, you know. They didn't have access to quarries or gravel and I saw him try over the years to keep the roads in better shape and he was a friend to Mr. Jim Gillis and Mr. Jim Gillis told me, he said, "I want you to run for the Senate." And I had worked at General Motors for about 12 years, and when my father died I came back and took his job for a while and Mr. Jim said, "You run for the Senate."

Well, I was at that time, you know, Governor Miller or representative, he was a Senator Miller then and we shared, every two years we had three counties, Rabun, Towns, and Union. And he was the Senator at the time and then I was supposed to replace Senator Miller and it was Union County's time. So I ran in the early primary. Well, they reapportioned the Senate and I didn't get to serve any time in the Senate. So I waited two years, ran for the House because I just had a deep burning feeling that I needed to, if I could do anything, they had the rural roads authority and I didn't think we had gotten our share at that. Basically I guess that was the biggest thing. Another thing was our school that we needed some new schools and we were building a hospital. So I ran for the House then. Served one year in the House and they reapportioned the House. Half of the House had to run after one year. Well, guess what, I was one of the runs that had to run again and I had to run against a man who'd been in the House for 15 years, but I was elected. And I never thought I'd serve 30 years in the House of Representatives, but I -- I did and

sometimes I wonder if I served too long. But the biggest thing that bothered me was being away from my family and it put a burden on my wife. That's one thing that -- that's always kind of bothered me that I had to be away and she had to raise the kids. So -- but it was, it was a great privilege. You meet more friends. I have met more friends and I still have friends all over this state that you don't make any money down there but you sure create a world of friends.

In fact, Bob, I think I met you years ago and down there. You were one of the first ones after I was elected that I met who's been my good friend all these years.

SHORT: Well, thank you, Carlton and I remember that. I was working down in the governor's office at the time. Let's talk a minute about campaigning in the mountains. It's very difficult, isn't it, to get out to meet all these folks scattered all over the hills here?

COLWELL: It sure is and we would talk about that, especially in reapportionment. It wasn't too bad with the first time I ran was -- of course I just had Union County. Then the next time I ran in Union and Lumpkin. Well, mountains are barriers and, you know, a map doesn't show that. It shows flat and a lot of times, it's hard to get them to take into consideration just how hard it is to run with all these mountains and they are barriers to a degree when you have to run. And Ralph Twigs was a special friend of mine and we had post one and two, and at one time we had seven counties in this northern district. And it's very difficult, I'll tell you, to cover seven counties.

SHORT: Well, I grew up in these mountains as you know and when I think back, I can

remember when there were very few paved roads.

COLWELL: Well, we were, like I said in the beginning, we were just in dire need of roads that were passable and I know in your county over there of Rabun, the first thing that when I ran in Rabun that they wanted was the bridge, that one lane bridge on 76 that was in dire need. And that was one of the things that we went to work on and got that bridge there that -- and it was all over the district, and of course I contribute a lot to Mr. Jim Gillis. He, you know, he helped this area tremendously and he's from South Georgia. But you know, looking back I had so much good help that, you know, Governor Miller who was in, Jenkins, Congressman Jenkins was there. So we had -- I was kind of the peon, I guess, and they -- I had great help in doing all the work that I accomplished up here.

SHORT: Getting back to the reapportionment and your election to the Senate, there's a story there. Would you mind telling us that?

COLWELL: Well, of course I ran and like I say in the early primary and thought I was going to be the Senator. And, but like I say they reapportioned that in that period in a special session. And so that's when Senator Miller was in and he ran and I didn't run in that, so then I ran in the House, like I say, two years, and Judge Candler, I'll never forget what he told me. He said, "Son," said, "Look like the federal judges don't want you to be down there in that House."

SHORT: But if you had decided to run in that district then you would have been running against Senator Miller.

COLWELL: That's right and I knew better than to do that. So I just, I waited and ran for the House in two years.

SHORT: Without opposition.

COLWELL: Without opposition.

SHORT: Okay. So now, you're elected for the second time to the General Assembly. Let's go back to your first term. Let's talk a little bit about your first term. You got down there and amazingly, you got on two of the most powerful committees on the House, Appropriations and Ways and Means. That doesn't usually happen. Please tell me how that happened.

COLWELL: Well, I don't know. I was told -- I was told, said put in for your committees, you put in for your committees. Well, about everybody put in, you know, for Appropriation and Ways and Means. And I contribute a lot of that to Mr. Jim Gillis who was a friend of mine, Mr. Brack Braylock was a good friend of mine. And, you know, that was when Governor Sanders was the governor. And evidently, I put in for it and was awarded it. I don't know. I was real fortunate to be on and I served the full 30 years on Appropriations. But I didn't like the Ways

and Means and George Bagby was Chairman of Ways and Means when I went in. So I loved old George but the things that Ways and Means just wasn't exactly what I thought it was, maybe, and that's when the Speaker -- George T. was Speaker then, George T. Smith. And I served one year on the Ways and Means and when I got reelected the first year, he asked me if I'd like to come off that and I said yeah. And he said, "What would you go on?" I said, "I'd like to be on State Institution and Property Committee," and which he put me on that and I served the rest of my term on that, later became chairman of that committee.

SHORT: Twenty-two years on that committee.

COLWELL: Yeah, twenty-two years in it.

SHORT: That's real longevity. You mention George -- the Smiths. There was George L. Smith and then he was succeeded by George T. Smith. Tell us what you remember about Speaker George L. Smith.

COLWELL: George L. was -- he was a real good friend of mine. He at the time, now George T. was first and then he came back in. I think he had been Speaker before George T. and then when Governor Sanders went in, George T. was Speaker. And then when Maddox, Governor Maddox was elected, George L. came in. And he was a very firm man. He was real firm, and he appointed me as Chairman for the first time. That's when that vacancy came open I asked to be

considered and he did -- he gave me the first chairman, George L. did.

SHORT: That was state properties.

COLWELL: State Institution and Properties Committee, yes.

SHORT: Well, you had that experience in 1967 of electing a governor. Do you remember that?

COLWELL: Very well. That's when Peter Zach Geer presided over the joint session and, you know, he made the national -- the national television on that, that they thought he was a great fellow. Peter Zach was a real smart man and he was Lieutenant Governor at the time and he presided. And we all, we had to go and vote at that and I'll never forget, I think there were seven of us that had supported Governor Maddox at the time at when he had the run-off. And he used to take us to a dinner every year, the seven of us and, you know, he was -- he was a great friend of mine. I loved Governor Maddox and I think he did a good job as governor. He really helped the education. You know, Sanders left. Governor Sanders was a great, he was a progressive. He was a real progressive governor and he had the left budget more in the -- left some surplus, which kind of hadn't been done before. And I never will forget that Governor Maddox, he put me on his Fiscal Affairs Committee and I was on the Appropriations Committee at the time. And we gave the teachers at that time a \$1,258 -- I believe it was -- raise that year, which made him very supportive of education.

SHORT: That was a period when there was no winner in the general election.

COLWELL: That's right.

SHORT: And so it went to the House. But let me ask you this question, how were you lobbied for your vote during that period? Did you talk to -- Congressman Callaway was the republican and Maddox was the democrat. How hard did they work for your vote?

COLWELL: It was one call after another when -- I had tremendous -- they were really working the telephones and they had a lot of people out, as you know at that time, and Carmichael got into that too. And so they was trying to vote Callaway in. Of course, he was from down in the LaGrange area and he had a pretty good lobbying effect going for him. But when it finally wound up, of course as you know it's -- he lost in the general Senate.

SHORT: Well, let's talk for a minute about some of the things that you were able to do for the State of Georgia. You were on the State Institution and Property Committee. You were Chairman. That's a very, very big responsibility.

COLWELL: Well, it was and I really didn't -- I knew that when I first went on the State Institution and Property, I was not on the Penal Committee. And I was on the Ports Committee,

which I really enjoyed and in my line of work I had dealings with them and the ships coming in and with machinery. But after I became Chairman, it consumed me, just about -- the Penal. I guess you could say it was that all our prisons were in such disarray and it was -- we didn't have at that time, I think we had about 4,000 inmates in the prisons, which now I think we have 50,000.

But we started and worked on that, and it was a real challenge because as you know, Bob, it's not too popular to do a lot in corrections. Let's fact it, the people -- most people say, lock them up, throw away the key and, you know, we got to have a better situation than that because they're still human beings and some of them are that you can rehabilitate and had to be. So it cost the state a tremendous amount of money and I guess, you know, that Lester Maddox, Governor Maddox when he went in, he took an interest in it, and Governor Joe Frank Harris took a big interest. Governor Miller, I guess it was more bed space built during Governor Joe Frank Harris and Governor Miller than in any other two administrations.

SHORT: Did you deal at all, Carlton, with correctional legislation?

COLWELL: Oh, a tremendous amount, a tremendous amount. We visited other, I know we visited other states to see what they were doing and trying to come up with plans. And we really built our prisons -- our bed space was cheaper than in about any other state in the southeast and we built good prisons.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about your work on the constitutional revision commission.

COLWELL: Yes, that was something. I was out of state and Speaker Smith, Speaker Murphy called me and asked me if I'd serve on it, and I said, "Well, if you want me to you know I'm going to serve." And I wondered why he wanted me on that and I had passed, I had introduced a bill earlier on. There was a boy from Savannah that cosigned it with me and Jones, and we put that anybody that was sentenced to capital punishment would have to serve 30 years. And so it came up in the constitution and the Speaker called me in. And he said, "Carlton," he said, "I want to talk to you about this that we're going to be on that today, and I want to talk to you about this bill that you passed." It was a constitutional amendment passed by eight some percent. And he said, they have researched that and said we've been living in a county that if anything happened that somebody could have been -- where the laws would have said that, you know, they could have gotten a reprieve. It was so tightly written and said that we need to change it. And I said, "Well, I didn't intend for that." And he said, "Well, I know you didn't." He says, "We want to change that." He said, "I want you to help with it," and I said, "Well, I'll be glad to do it." So we put it, but you know, if you were declared innocent you could get out of that. But that I think is still on the books. I believe that hasn't been changed since I left that you have to serve 25 years under a capital offense.

SHORT: Speaker Murphy, you mentioned Speaker Murphy. I know that you were a very close friend of the speaker's.

COLWELL: He was great -- he was one of the greatest friends I've ever had. I loved him and he just -- he loved my family when he helped me with everything that I ever wanted to do. I don't know what I could accomplish without Speaker Murphy, really. He was just a great fellow and I think he has been misrepresented to a large extent. He, you know, a lot of people in Atlanta would get on him and write about him and he's done more for the City of Atlanta I think and I know you know him Bob. He -- and there was not a -- he didn't have a racial bone in his body. He did so much for everyone. He treated everyone with respect. Now, he was tough. Now he was tough, but you didn't want to lie to him. Just tell him the truth. You got along fine. I think I lost one of the greatest friends I ever had when he passed away.

SHORT: Speaking of Speaker Murphy, you and Speaker Murphy were in the House when the first African-Americans came to the legislature. What was the tenure of those times?

COLWELL: Well, it was -- well, tensions were running so high and it just -- it ran so high that we were in there. When he -- when that happened, you know, Julian Bond was elected to the House and that caused a big turmoil in the House and -- but it was real sad. It was real sad to see that we had that much tension in the House and the Senate at that time.

SHORT: Well, let's talk for a minute about the Bond situation. Representative Bond had made some statements that upset members of the House. So they refused to seat him under the rules of

the House, but there was a Supreme Court decision that required his seating and he was finally admitted.

COLWELL: That's right and then he served on my committee after he was seated, actually when I was Chairman. Of course, I was not Chairman at that time, but later on he was one of my committee members.

SHORT: And then he went over and was elected to the Georgia Senate.

COLWELL: That's right. He went to the Senate and that's right.

SHORT: There were other rather outstanding African-Americans in the legislature at that time. Of course, Leroy Johnson had been elected to the Georgia Senate, but you had for example Hosea Williams, who was a well-known civil rights leader. You knew Hosea.

COLWELL: Oh, I knew Hosea real well. He was -- he's a very colorful fellow, I'll tell you. I got along with him fine. But he was very colorful and I've got to tell you this story about him. They had incarcerated him out in DeKalb County and we had a special session during that time that he was incarcerated in DeKalb County at the jail. And so that was election year and they had two or three people running against him, but when we met in the special session they let him come to the special session every day. And one night we were -- the Speaker asked, said, "Do

you all want to work on later on tonight or do you want to adjourn and come back tomorrow?"

Hosea got up and held his hand up and says, "Mr. Speaker," he said, "If it's all the same to y'all, just work as late as you can." He said, "I'd like to stay here rather than go where I'm going."

But the end of that story is, he won that race with that run-off, him incarcerated. He was a very colorful fellow.

SHORT: Cynthia McKinney was a rather controversial member and she was on your committee.

COLWELL: She was on my committee. Yeah, she was -- she was very -- she was colorful too I guess.

SHORT: Do you remember, was she very cooperative with you as Chairman?

COLWELL: Well, to a degree. She had her own ideas a lot that were different to mine that she didn't approve of my chairmanship a lot of time.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute now, Carlton, if you will, about governors who served with you in the legislature. Lester Maddox was never in the legislature, but he was succeeded by Jimmy Carter who was in the Senate. I'm not sure he was there when you were in the House, but you remember Jimmy Carter, I'm sure.

COLWELL: Yeah, he was in the Senate. I served in the House. He was a senator and then he ran for governor. And yeah, I served with him in the Senate. I mean, I was in the House and he was in the Senate.

SHORT: What was your relationship with him while he was governor?

COLWELL: Well, I had a real good relationship with him. He -- I was on his, when he changed the constitution -- well, not the constitution as much as when he took a lot of the departments and reorganization, you know, state government. And I helped him with that because I -- and of course I was criticized some for helping him with that. A lot of people didn't think -- but I think it wound up to be the best thing to happen for Georgia and he was a very good friend. I still have contact with him from time to time, but he was a real good friend of mine.

SHORT: Then there was George Busby who you served with and he was, as I recall, your majority leader when he was in the House.

COLWELL: Governor Busby was I guess one of the hardest working men I've ever known. He was the majority leader. He worked tirelessly. He worked tirelessly when he was governor. He was a great governor. Good friend of mine and I just, I hated so bad to see his life cut short because he was such a great governor and a great friend of mine.

SHORT: Let's get back for a minute, to the Appropriations Committee. That's really where the action is.

COLWELL: Well, that's true and of course as you know, when Governor Maddox was elected we got -- that's when George L. Smith became Speaker and we got our independence back. And Sloppy Floyd was elected Chairman of Appropriations and he died while he was in office, as you well know. But that was -- it was -- he had a burr under his saddle about people buying these type writers. He just had it. So George Bagby and I one time took him up one of the old model carriage type and presented it to him at the Appropriations Committee. But he was a good chairman. He looked after the business of the state I thought real well.

SHORT: How do you go about getting appropriations in the bill as a representative from the North Georgia Mountains?

COLWELL: Well, you -- it takes a lot of work and you have to line up a lot of friends that will help you in it. And I was real fortunate. They were good to me. I don't know, but just like I said before, I had some awfully good friends that helped me in my tenure in the House and we, I think we accomplished just a lot. And like I say, Governor Miller and Congressman Jenkins were there and so -- but I really appreciated all the help that they gave me.

SHORT: Then there was your friend Joe Frank Harris who also had been chairman of the

Appropriations Committee. It doesn't hurt to have a friend that's chairman, does it?

COLWELL: No, sir. Joe Frank -- Governor Harris and I went the same year to the General Assembly. We were especially close and they told us -- he came to me and said he was going to run and I told him, I said, "Well, I'll be for you or against you, whichever one you think will help you the most." He told that a lot over the state, but Governor Harris was a great friend of mine. I think he did a great job as governor of this state and he and Elizabeth were just a fine couple. And he, you know, when he started to work, he's the one that started no taxes and he ran on a no tax platform and that's, I think, probably what elected Governor Harris. And he succeeded the Appropriations when Sloppy Floyd died. He took over then. I believe he served about eight years on Appropriation.

SHORT: Let me tell you what Governor Harris said about you. "Your early support and encouragement and was instrumental in my decision to run for governor and your hard work and advice enabled us to win."

COLWELL: Well, I appreciate that. I did support him. I went all over the state for him. I did what little I could. I don't know how much good I did for him, but I really appreciated his friendship. Still appreciate his friendship. I talked to him not long ago.

SHORT: Then Zell Miller came along and you became the representative of a governor. You

lived in his district.

COLWELL: That's right.

SHORT: Did he lobby you much?

COLWELL: Well, not -- not too awfully much. We had, you know, growing up here I guess their minds were pretty much the same and of course he would lobby you, you know, on some of the issues. And I tried to -- I tried to support him and especially in all his endeavors on the corrections and pardon approval that pertained to my committee. And we worked tremendously close together on all those issues.

SHORT: Well, actually you and he served together in state government from the time you were first elected and from the time that he was elected Lieutenant Governor.

COLWELL: That's right.

SHORT: Let me tell you what Zell Miller said about you. "I got to know a lot of folks in my many years in politics and I can honestly say, I never have known a more effective public servant than Carlton Colwell."

COLWELL: Well, that's -- that's very complimentary of me and I hope I could live up to that because I really appreciate his friendship, him and Shirley's both. They've been my friends over the years and I appreciate that. I appreciate him and of course, you know, he was a great educational governor. He did so much for education as well as all the other agencies.

SHORT: He sponsored the lottery. What was your position on the lottery?

COLWELL: Well, at the time I had told him, that came up in the year before and I made a statement that I would not vote for the lottery. And he called me and told me, and he asked me to vote and I said, "Well," I said, "I can't vote for that." And I was just wondering, I said, "Can that be passed?" He said, "Well, I think it can." And he said, "I'd like --," but he did not pressure me. He said, "I understand if you're committed," and so I did not vote for it on the first go round but it was, of course that's been the best thing that ever happened to the State of Georgia as far as education.

SHORT: I think you also served with Roy Barnes who was Georgia's next governor following Miller.

COLWELL: Well, now I didn't serve under him while he was Governor. I served with him when he was in the House and in the Senate. He sat on the same row with me. Roy Barnes, one of the smartest individuals, one of the finest men I've known. I cherish his friendship. I think

he's just super bright and I really like Roy Barnes.

SHORT: Let me tell you what Roy Barnes had to say about you. "The years we served together, Carlton Colwell was one of the finest and best I've ever known. He was personally above reproach, always honest, and to a young legislator like me he was there and his door was always open." You were one of his mentors.

COLWELL: Well, that's very flattering coming from him. He was -- I used him more, I think, than he used me. I'd go to him for advice on legislation and he was -- he reminded me kindly of a fellow that served from South Georgia, Mr. Emory Roland, who was a lawyer and when I first went there. And he'd say, "Now, I'm going to tell you what I think about it, but now you make up your own mind in the end." And so he was -- he was great to give it, but, you know, he was just a great individual in my book.

SHORT: Well, speaking of mentors, is there anyone special you looked up to when you first went to the legislature?

COLWELL: Well, there were, you know, there were a lot but Denmark Groover I think was one of the best legal minds that I've ever seen. He was a great friend of mine. Wash Larsen, he was a legal mind. Elliot Levitas he was just, all these people were just super bright. But you know, I guess Speaker Murphy was who I looked to, I guess, more than anybody in the House because he

was always fair to me and we became friends early on when they had the railroad fight. I was for them and he was, and we -- we just created a bond that lasted all the time that I served him in the House.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute now. You mentioned Denmark Groover. There was an expression they used in the legislature when Denmark was a member called "Grooverizing". Tell us what Grooverizing means.

COLWELL: Well, that's what when you'd have a bill and it would be in legal terms, and you would always hear this. Someone would get up and say, "Has this bill been Grooverized?" So that was the ultimate fact when that was done, that was it.

SHORT: In other words, has Denmark Groover looked this bill over. Somebody once said that Denmark Groover could change the complete meaning of a bill by changing one word.

COLWELL: He could critique a bill better than anybody I've ever seen. He was amazing. He was amazing to me. I just -- and he was so calm about it that when he -- but he was super bright.

SHORT: Do you think that Representative Groover's participation in the flag issue when Governor Barnes had the flag changed made a difference in the House?

COLWELL: Oh, definitely. That's no doubt.

SHORT: Let's talk about some more of your friends in the legislature. Bill Lee.

COLWELL: Bill Lee. He was the Dean of the House and he was quite a fellow. He was comical. He was -- everybody I reckon loved Bill. I've seen times when tensions would get so thick, you know, you could just nearly cut it with a knife and he'd get up there and say something to the Speaker, get his microphone and he and the Speaker, that would break the tension. He was great at that. Bill Lee was a great friend of mine. I cherish his friendship. He was a great legislator.

SHORT: Chairman of the Rules Committee.

COLWELL: Chairman of the Rules. Everybody would -- he had congregation every morning when the Rules set in that they wanted to go hear Bill Lee.

SHORT: Marcus Collins.

COLWELL: Marcus, he was -- Marcus Collins was one of the tax people that wanted to help rural Georgia and he was tough. He was Chairman of Ways and Means. He was a great legislator. He later became, you know, Commissioner of Revenue and Marcus came to see me.

He was in a wheelchair about two years ago and I don't think Marcus is doing too well now, but he was a great friend of mine and he was a great legislator. He knew a lot -- he was a good taxman.

SHORT: How about Bubba McDonald?

COLWELL: Bubba McDonald was Chairman of Appropriations and Bubba McDonald, I think was really smart in the tax area. And I remember one time when we were in double-digit inflation that we could've paid off all bonds within about four years. I cosigned the bill with him and he -- but he didn't get it, it didn't go. But Bubba's been a special friend of mine over the years.

SHORT: Let me ask you this question, Carlton. In 1990, Bubba was a candidate for governor at the time that Zell Miller won. Now, Bubba was a great friend of yours and Miller was a great friend of yours. How did you decide what to do?

COLWELL: Well, I told them at the time that it really put me on the spot. That's the worst spot I've ever been in, in politics and so what happened was he helped me get a school up here, Bubba did, and the speaker put a little pressure on me too. So I went with Bubba in the primary and we went as soon as it was over and met Governor Miller over in Gainesville and told him we had sinned and we'd like to join up with him. So that was in the early primary and we, I believe he

was a runoff in that, wasn't he?

SHORT: Yes, Miller and Andrew Young.

COLWELL: Yeah, and so Bubba and I both went and supported him in that.

SHORT: When you look around these mountains, Carlton, up here there are many monuments that -- well, to Carlton Colwell. You've got Highway 515. You've got schools. You've got prison facilities. You've got -- you've got the technical schools. How were you able to accomplish all that?

COLWELL: Well, Bob, like I said I had a lot of good help. You know, that may be overstating for a lot of that, that I did, but I worked real hard on the Appalachian Road. That was one of my -- the hardest work that I did because these mountains -- we needed it so bad, I thought, and I got a lot of criticisms on it. And it caused me to get opposition a time or two. But I thought that we needed it and I think it's -- I think it's been a savior for this area here.

The schools, I always tried to support education and we got the technical school, they had awarded that to Dawson County and they got into a political fight over there about it. And I told Ralph and we went to see Governor Miller and he -- so I told him that we had a place for it in Union County I'd like to see, and he said, "Well, you all work it out." And he supported us in that. And that's how that came there. After that, he was a big participant in that.

SHORT: Ralph, of course, was a state representative also from this area. You served many years with Ralph. How long were you all together?

COLWELL: Well, we sat side-by-side for years. I believe for about 22 years and then I think he served about 30 or 32 years even then, but I've been out a good while. And so we served together over 20 years.

SHORT: I can remember working down in the governor's office, when people would come down to the governor's office requesting some favor and we'd say, go see Carlton.

COLWELL: Well, they --

SHORT: Because you could do it better than we could.

COLWELL: Now, I wouldn't say that, but they used me on corrections and a few things like that. But I tried to support -- but when I became Chairman of State Institution and Property, I really didn't realize how much pressure I was under until I retired and it's -- that committee does cover a lot of the state facilities. And you're involved in about everything that goes on.

SHORT: Does that include the state ports?

COLWELL: The states ports were one of my subcommittees and that was -- that's, you know, ports are a big thing for Georgia. I mean they -- Georgia ports are tremendous in the economy of this state.

SHORT: Well, tell us a little bit about the difference classifications of state property and how you deal with it.

COLWELL: Well, of course we handled the -- of course, there's two agencies that can buy and sell property in the state and that's the Department of Transportation and Board of Regents. But the rest of it, we handled it there and in the legislature. And, you know, we own a tremendous amount of property in Georgia and we own some in Tennessee. The state owns the regular load from Atlanta into Chattanooga. They own property up there and we sold part of it while I was Chairman up there and to the city, and it's -- it creates a lot. When I became Chairman, I just didn't realize the impact that the property that we had in Atlanta where the Old Henry Grady was. That was a lease to Mr. Portman for I think 100 years and they built that there. We, down where the -- well, the arats [ph], the arats in, where the -- down at the end of the where the railroad starts was zero, one and that was a tremendous thing that I never thought about.

SHORT: That was the World Congress Center.

COLWELL: The World Congress Center and all of them.

SHORT: The Omni Complex.

COLWELL: And the Omni and --

SHORT: In Atlanta

COLWELL: In Atlanta. So they own a lot of property, a tremendous amount of property.

SHORT: Well, you also were responsible for building a lot of prisons as we mentioned earlier.

How do you decide where to locate those prisons?

COLWELL: Well, we tried to locate them where people wanted them and where the counties were, you know, that needed employment. And they would give us land. A lot of them would give us land to put the prison on. And so that -- that was a big thing in what we did. We tried to put them in counties that needed employment and they're a pretty good -- they got a good payroll, you know.

SHORT: What is your assessment of our prison system from the time that you were first elected

until present day?

COLWELL: Well, there's no comparison. It was -- it was really chain gang when I went there. That's about the way that everything was determined then and we had so much, so much to do that it was just inhumane, really, at that time. And I think Georgia has come a long way in the prison system.

SHORT: Governor Maddox took a great interest in it.

COLWELL: A great interest, a great interest.

SHORT: Yeah, he visited some. I went with him to visit some.

COLWELL: Yeah, I was -- I visited with him. He really took an interest in that. He -- and I think he started ball to rolling the interest to get going on the prisons.

SHORT: What was the sawmill gang?

COLWELL: Well, we were in the back left hand corner from the Speaker and there was me and Ralph Twigs, Bill Dover, and Walter Cox, several of us back there and we'd get I guess a little ruly, unruly at times and I was standing up and so Mr. Speaker, he said, he called me and he said,

"Where'd you learn to whisper, working at a sawmill?" I said, "Well, yes sir, I was working there when I first came down here" And so he named us the sawmill gang and that's how -- it lasted all this time, we were the sawmill gang back in the back corner.

SHORT: You have attended many of the famous breakfasts that Marcus Collins and the Speaker used to have. What went on during that period?

COLWELL: Well, I wouldn't want to talk too much about that. That was quite the thing. Marcus would fix breakfast for the Speaker and they'd invite a few of us over. We'd go by and eat breakfast with them.

SHORT: Did you pass many bills?

COLWELL: Well, they were discussed. You would know pretty well when you left there who was -- if they had a chance, I would say.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about party politics in Georgia. We've seen a great decline in the strength of the Democratic Party over the past several years. What's caused that?

COLWELL: You know, Bob, I really -- I don't know. We woke up -- I remember Governor Miller telling me when the ninth district, you know, in the mountain area went, he said, he asked

me, he said, "Carl, what do you think happened for it to go like that?" And looking back, Bob, I really don't know. I really don't. It was kind of a mystery to me when it happened. It happened really overnight.

SHORT: Well, a lot of Georgia democrats think the state party is too dependent on minorities and labor unions and doesn't pay enough attention to areas, districts like yours. Do you think that's true?

COLWELL: I think that's true and not only that, of course you know the national, I think, had a big part in that, the national democrats at the time and that they were a lot more liberal than these mountain candidates.

SHORT: What do you think is ahead for the Democratic Party? Do you think that -- you're a good, sound democrat. Do you think that the democrats can swing the pendulum?

COLWELL: Bob, I don't know. It's going to take a lot of work and I think one thing, you know, if a party gets kind of asleep at the wheel, so to speak, that they could -- they could, the republicans might could swing it back to the democrats as much as the democrats could go in and take it back over. So I don't know. I've tried to think about it to a degree, but I've stayed pretty well out of politics since I came out. I mean as far as going down there and getting involved in the -- I hardly ever go to the Capitol anymore. And so I don't really know as much

going on as I did at one time.

SHORT: Carlton, looking back over the years you served in the legislature, do you have any regrets?

COLWELL: Well, the biggest regret, like I said before, was putting so much the burden on my wife and my family. That's the biggest regret that I have. You know, it was real hard on them and you don't know -- and of course when you're serving in politics, your kids take the brunt of a lot that you do, and your family. And I guess the only regrets, I'm real appreciative of the people that helped me and what I was able to accomplish. But that's the biggest regrets that I have on serving in the House.

SHORT: Is there anything you'd have done differently?

COLWELL: I doubt it. I don't know. I just -- I tried to work hard and to try to get accomplished back from my district and that was my main objective. And I tried to do that, and of course I -- you fail a lot of times and you win some, and you lose some. But that was -- that was my goal from the time I went 'til the time I left to try to make Georgia a better place to live.

SHORT: What do you think has been your biggest accomplishment?

COLWELL: Well, I guess I -- I think the Appalachian Road was one thing. I worked hard on that. A lot of people helped there. The corrections, I feel like that I did have some degree of help in that, that I got credit for. And education, I always tried to -- we built a lot of new schools and I worked real hard in that. So I guess those three things would be the biggest, what I would think would be my greatest accomplishments.

SHORT: Did you have any disappointments?

COLWELL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I mean you do. It's -- I think that one of the greatest disappointments I had was I introduced the gas tax bill to increase the gas tax for the Department of Transportation and at that time they were selling bonds. And I'm not a great friend of bonds. I never did like bonds too much and I was on the budget subcommittee and I hardly ever voted for a bond, up to 20-year bond for a highway because, it's just, roads won't last 20 years. And every state around us is a lot higher than Georgia. And that was one thing that I was disappointed in that I couldn't get the gas tax raised to take care of the transportation needs in this state.

SHORT: If one of your grandsons decided they would like to run for public office, what advice would you give them?

COLWELL: Well, I'd tell them not while they're raising a family, to wait. I just, I don't know.

It's real hard. I love my grandsons tremendously, but it's awfully hard to raise a family and be in the General Assembly.

SHORT: You at one time represented seven counties. That's a pretty good chunk of a congressional district. Did you ever think of running for a higher office?

COLWELL: No, I never did. I was approached a time or two on Congress, but I just never -- I just didn't want to leave these mountains, I guess, Bob and of course that would have been a hard race for me to run. And I was content to be at the Georgia House of Representatives as long as I was.

SHORT: Thirty years.

COLWELL: Thirty years.

SHORT: Thirty good years. Carlton, I want to thank you on behalf of the Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia, and myself, for being with us on this program.

COLWELL: Well, thank you, Bob. I appreciate your help and I've always appreciated your friendship over the years and I just want you to know I appreciate you coming to my home for this and you're welcome back at any time.

SHORT: I'll come back.

COLWELL: Thank you, sir.

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**University of Georgia  
Carlton Colwell**

**Page PAGE 28**

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