

**Eric Tanenblatt interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**DOCPROPERTY "reference" Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
**Eric Tanenblatt**

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by Young Harris College, the Richard B. Russell Library, and the University of Georgia. Our guest is Eric Tanenblatt, who has had a very enviable record as a political and campaign consultant

both nationally and in Georgia. Welcome, Eric.

ERIC TANENBLATT: Glad to be here.

SHORT: Before we get into your political activities, I'd like to take a moment with you, if you will, to have you talk a little bit about yourself.

TANENBLATT: Okay. All right. Well, I was born in eastern Long Island up in New York, and I was raised. I have a sister, and she's my only sibling. And I was very involved growing up in community activities in New York, very involved in student government when I was going to school, both going back to elementary school and was president of my high school. And when it came time to looking at schools, there was something about the South that attracted me, so I decided to look down South and found Emory University. And I attended Emory, graduated with a degree in economics, was very involved in student government throughout my college career.

Between my junior and senior year, I took the summer and spent it in Georgetown, at Georgetown University in Washington, and participated in a program called the Institute for Comparative Political and Economic Systems. And it was a six-week intensive program where you took classes in comparative economics and political science, and in the afternoons you interned, and in the evenings you went on site visits and you had lectures in the evening, and continued my passion for an interest in politics.

And when I came back to Emory that fall, it was the very start of the 1988 presidential election. This was in the fall of 1987. And so I looked at all the different candidates that were running that year, and the candidate that I saw myself being most compatible with, or that philosophically was most in line with where I was, was George Herbert Walker Bush, who at the time was the Vice President. And so I did all I could to figure out how I can get involved in his campaign for President and was very persistent, got in touch with the individuals that were running his campaign. And at the time they didn't have any positions available so I decided to volunteer and was put in charge of organizing college campuses throughout Georgia for George Bush. And we organized I think it was about 15 college campuses. And we had a very successful effort, and in January of that year, January of 1988, I had finished my classes at Emory. I got put on the payroll and was a fulltime campaign worker and then was sent out in the field. I was sent to, at the time, the Third Congressional District, which went all the way down to Columbus, and was doing grassroots politics at the young age of 21 years old. Got to meet a lot of interesting people and really see grassroots politics at its core.

And then, as you know, George Bush that year won the Super Tuesday primary here in Georgia. The campaign shut down the campaign office in Georgia until the general election, but I was one of the only ones kept on, and I moved over to the Georgia Republican Party. And during that process, I was fortunate to meet then State Senator Paul Coverdell. Paul Coverdell was the Senate Minority Leader at the time. He also was the Southeastern Steering Committee chair for the Bush campaign. He was George Bush's campaign chairman in Georgia in 1980 when he was in the primary against Ronald Reagan. And Senator Coverdell kept in contact with the Bush

family and the President, and when the Vice President decided to run for President, he played a leadership role in the campaign, and so I met him.

And then when the Vice President got elected President, I went up to Washington and was offered a position in the administration. At the time, Paul Coverdell was still the Senate Minority Leader, and he was offered the job of Peace Corps director, and he wanted to wait until after the Georgia legislature finished their session, which, as you know, is 40 days, and so he was not taking the position until May. And as a young guy living in Washington, I couldn't wait until May to get a job, and so I was offered a position working for Louis Sullivan, another Georgian, who came from the Morehouse School of Medicine to become the Secretary of HHS, Health and Human Services. And so I went and worked for him in his legislative affairs office. Did not really know that much about legislative affairs but was surrounded by some very talented and experienced individuals at the agency, learned a whole lot, and when Paul Coverdell moved to Washington in May to take on the helm at the Peace Corps, he asked me to come over from HHS. And I was given some good advice by some folks that had been in Washington for a while that you never leave a job without having been there at least one year. People in Washington tend to move from job to job. And so I was enjoying what I was doing, and I told then Senator Coverdell that I was very interested in coming to work with him at the Peace Corps, but I still needed to spend at least another nine months at HHS and continued to do so.

And right when I hit my one year anniversary at HHS - - I had kept in touch with him throughout the year - - I then shifted over to the Peace Corps and headed up their legislative affairs office and intergovernmental affairs office and was an assistant to the director. And stayed with Paul

until he decided to run for the U.S. Senate, and then came back to Georgia and ran his campaign for the Senate. And then once he got elected, he asked me if I wanted to go back up to Washington, and I told him that I was intrigued but that I really wanted to stay in Georgia, so I became his state director and continued to manage his political affairs while he was up in Washington. We ended up opening up seven offices around the state. We had about 30 individuals working on the staff down here.

And I stayed with him through 1996, which was the time when my first son was born. And for anyone who has worked in a political job like I did, you know, I was working six days a week and sometimes seven, and given that I was his state director, you know, Monday through Friday I had to be in the office, but then he would come back on Friday night and work on the weekends. And so I was working long hours and I knew that, you know, being a new dad, I couldn't do that, so I switched into a volunteer role as he was gearing up for his reelection, and ended up going to start a public affairs division at a local PR firm and did that until 2000.

And then in between 1996 when I left and 2000, politically, I was very involved in a leadership capacity in Paul Coverdell's reelection to the Senate. And then after he was reelected to the Senate, then Governor Bush, governor of Texas, was getting ready to make a run for the presidency, and Paul Coverdell became one of ten members of his Presidential Exploratory Committee. And in that capacity, he asked me if I would consider chairing the President's campaign in Georgia in 2000, and I said, "Absolutely." So I did that. We had a very successful campaign.

And after President Bush got elected, I then left the firm that I was with and joined then Long

Aldridge & Norman, which is now McKenna Long & Aldridge. I left in 2003 when Sonny Perdue got elected governor and became his first Chief of Staff. I did that for a year and then came back to McKenna, Long, and Aldridge, where I now head our national government affairs practice.

SHORT: Let's go back to 1992.

TANENBLATT: Okay.

SHORT: When Senator Coverdell decided to run for United States Senate against an incumbent Democrat. And frankly, as I recall, few people gave him much of a chance to win, but he did.

And how did you do it?

TANENBLATT: Well, you know, Georgia, while it was controlled by the Democrats at the state level, and at the time we had two Democratic United States Senators, people would describe it as we have federal Republicans -- Georgia was becoming much more of a conservative state. Newt Gingrich was the only Republican congressman at the time. But because of the growth of the state, you had a people that were moving in, the growth of the suburbs, the state was becoming much more conservative and much more Republican, and we knew that. And in 1992, in a presidential race, you have a much higher voter turnout than you do in an off-year election, and that was a presidential race. The increase in voters tend to be new voters that moved into the

state. They may not know some of the local politics, but the national politics is what draws them out. And Georgia, as you know, in 1988 went for George Bush. And so the trends were showing that at the federal level, we were going to turn out a much greater vote for Republicans. Now in the presidential race in 1992, as you recall, Ross Perot was in the race. Had Ross Perot not been in the race, I think President Bush would have carried the state, but it did turn out a large number of conservative voters, and I think that is what helped get Paul Coverdell to where he got in the polls. He didn't win, as you remember, in 1992. He ended up actually getting less votes than Wyche Fowler did, but because there was a Libertarian in the race, Wyche Fowler wasn't able to get over 50 percent, and we had the runoff law which forced it in a runoff, and the Libertarian endorsed Paul Coverdell.

And in 1992, because George Bush lost to Bill Clinton, the whole country's attention was focused on Georgia. And you had a lot of disappointed Republicans, and they saw the Coverdell race as the opportunity to try and build the party back and get the party back on sound footing, and so there was a lot of money, a lot of resources. I think that Senator Fowler did not anticipate that he was going to lose that election, and I think we just ran a much better race in the general election runoff. But I will say that after Senator Coverdell won that election, he never stopped running. I think he knew that until he got reelected in 1998, he always needed to be focused on the fact that this was going to be a competitive state for Republicans. And I think the work he did his first term in office really positioned him well in 1998 to get reelected.

And if you recall, too, in 1992, in addition to Paul Coverdell getting elected, we elected Congressman Kingston. I think there were two other congressmen at the time that got elected.

Two years later in 1994, we elected, I think, three more Republican congressmen. So what you very quickly had happen was the federal Republican mentality that I described earlier was really set, and you now saw that the majority of the Georgia congressional delegation was Republican. And I think that really was -- the fact that Paul Coverdell got elected to the United States Senate was very appropriate, because I think Paul Coverdell really deserves a lot of the credit going back to the late '70s through the '80s in really building the second party in Georgia.

Georgia had a Republican party throughout the '60s and '70s, but I think it was Paul Coverdell who recognized that in order for the Republican party to really grow and eventually become the majority party in the state, it was going to require outreach to broader constituencies. And I think Paul Coverdell brought in people like Fred Cooper, who became the chairman of the Republican party in the early '80s, and brought in business leaders like Joe Rogers from Waffle House and others that - - Guy Millner got very engaged in the party. And Paul Coverdell working with other leaders like Newt Gingrich and Mack Mattingly and John Linder, they really helped architect, but I think Coverdell really gets the credit. And then him being the leader in the State Senate of really building this second party.

You know, one of the sad parts about Paul Coverdell dying in 2000 is that he wasn't able to see 2002, Sonny Perdue get elected governor. But I think Paul Coverdell probably had more to do with Sonny Perdue getting elected governor than anyone else because of all the work he had done going back three decades.

SHORT: I wanted to ask you this question. After his untimely death, Senator Barnes appointed

a Democrat to that Republican seat. Do you think he should have done that?

TANENBLATT: Well, I mean, you know, I think that that's really the way that our constitution is set up. It's really the right of the governor to appoint in that case. And so I don't think that that seat, while I'm a Republican and would have hoped a Republican was appointed, I think Governor Barnes appointed who he thought was going to be the best person to fill that seat. I actually think it was a wise appointment, and I didn't necessarily at the time. But I think Senator Miller, when he got up there, I think he very quickly recognized -- and I think he's written about this and talks about this -- that the national Democratic party from the Georgia Democratic party. And the conservative Democratic party that existed in Georgia in years past no longer exists. And so I think what you see now in Georgia is that the Democratic party has become much more of a left of center party as opposed to a center party. And I think that has just been an outgrowth of the growth of the Republican party. The Republican party has become more of the mainstream party in the state.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. In 2000, you co-chaired the President's campaign in Georgia with Sonny Perdue. How did you meet Sonny Perdue?

TANENBLATT: Well, it's interesting. Sonny, as you know, switched parties in 1998. And at the time, you know, I was very close with Paul Coverdell, and Coverdell, given the role that he was in, was very welcoming to Sonny Perdue. I actually kid Sonny. I met him in the early '90s.

This was probably right after he was elected to the State Senate. I was down in Houston County with Paul Coverdell, who was delivering the commencement address at a high school graduation. And local dignitaries come out for the graduation, and I, as the staffer, was sitting with then State Senator Sonny Perdue, and that's when we really first met. And then in '98 when he switched parties, because of my involvement in the party, I reached out to him to welcome him into the party. And then in 2000, when I was organizing the Bush campaign and was putting together our leadership team, I wanted to have a diverse group of leaders and asked Sonny if he would serve as one of our co-chairs.

And then following the Bush election, as Sonny started looking at whether or not to run for governor, he and I met and talked, and I actually gathered a lot of the folks that were very close to Paul Coverdell. We had a meeting one afternoon in Nancy Coverdell's home. She hosted it. And it was a lot of the people that had helped Paul Coverdell over the years, and it was to give them an opportunity to meet Sonny Perdue. And Sonny talked about, you know, his desire to run for governor and wanting the support of that group, and by the time the meeting ended, I think everyone in that group embraced Sonny, and he became the candidate of choice, at least among those people that were close to Paul. And so we all did all we can to help him get elected.

SHORT: Well, I was going to ask that question, whether or not the true Republicans in Georgia embraced him after he switched parties.

TANENBLATT: I think they did. I think that, you know, reason, if you think back to 1998, I

mean, Roy Barnes had been elected governor. The Democrats controlled the House and the Senate. The fact that Sonny Perdue switched parties at that time, he was the president pro tem of the state Senate. So if you're in a position of leadership and your party is in a position of leadership, if you're going to switch parties, you have to have a very good reason for doing that. And I think that says a lot about Sonny Perdue, because I think he switched parties based on principle, and he didn't like the direction the Democratic party was going in. And so when he did that, that was a very courageous move. I think it was important for those of us in the Republican party that admired his courage to very quickly surround him and welcome him in.

SHORT: There were rumors at the time that other State Senators had promised to change parties when he did, but they didn't. Is there any truth to that rumor?

TANENBLATT: You know, I'm not certain of that. I do know in 2002, when he got elected, there were a number of state senators that did switch parties. But, you know, anytime you take someone who is in a leadership role like the president pro tem of the Senate and he switches parties, I'm sure that came as somewhat of a surprise to the Democratic leaders, and I'm sure that they very quickly mobilized to make sure that there wouldn't be any hemorrhaging and there wouldn't be any other switchers.

SHORT: Well, in 2002, he faced an incumbent Democratic governor, who I think you will agree had a good record, and he defeated him. How did you do that?

TANENBLATT: Well, I think - - I think, again, I go back to the Democratic shift in the state. I think the state was solidifying itself as a Republican state. I think the Democrats held onto power as long as they possibly could by tinkering with the system. I think, you know, if you look at the redistricting that took place and the gerrymandering and taking counties and cities and dividing them up, they did all of that because they wanted to hold onto power, and they knew that if they didn't do stuff like that while they had power, it was going to crumble.

And there were some things that Governor Barnes did. He really took some very -- made some really bold moves in some policy areas, and in doing so, I think he really developed some opposition from some constituency groups. And I'm referring to things such as the teachers' groups, you know, the advocating the changing of the flag, things like the Northern Arc. I mean, each of those issues had different constituencies that were upset with him. So when you already have a fragile coalition and you've tinkered with the system as much as you possibly could, you need to hold onto as much as you can of your power base. And because of some of his positions on some of the big issues, I think it started to crumble.

And that, coupled with the fact that you had conservative Democrats really held onto rural Georgia. That was sort of their last stronghold. I think suburban Atlanta and the Atlanta region was much more Republican. And having a candidate in Sonny Perdue who came from middle Georgia, rural Georgia, who was running as a Republican, running against a suburban Democrat, I think all of that really helped him. And, you know, he built a very strong grassroots organization, and I think that had a lot to do with it.

You know, I was one of the few people that really believed that Sonny Perdue probably had a better chance of beating Roy Barnes than Saxby Chambliss, who won that year as well, beating Max Cleland. Only because Max Cleland had been on the stage in Georgia for 30-something years statewide. People knew him and he had a brand. Roy Barnes had only been in office statewide for four years, and in that four-year period, he had taken some of these positions that really turned off some voters.

And so it's difficult to - - it's just like any product. If you have a Coca-Cola and you've been drinking Coke for 30 years, it's going to be hard to change your opinion of Coke. And so I always thought it was going to be harder to change people's opinion of Max Cleland, but it was going to be a lot easier to change people's opinion of Roy Barnes. And so I think the combination of having two strong rural Republicans running for the U.S. Senate and governor really complemented each other well, and I think that's how Sonny Perdue won.

SHORT: And you were Chief of Staff.

TANENBLATT: Yes.

SHORT: May I ask this question? How difficult was the transition from the Democrats to a new Republican who defeated the Democratic candidate?

TANENBLATT: Well, I had a head of dark hair when I started and a head of white hair when I

left. No, just kidding. It was very difficult. You know, I think because it was really the only time in our history, or in at least 135 years, so in recent history, where you had to transition all of government, and that was not going to happen overnight. You know, Sonny Perdue, when he became governor, while there were some state senators who flipped and the control of the Senate went to Republican, you still had a Democratic lieutenant governor, though most of his power was taken away. But you also had, at the same time, Speaker Murphy got defeated, yet the Democrats still controlled the House, so we had a Democratic House. So not only were we having to deal with new leadership in the Senate that had never led before, but we also were dealing with new leadership in the House that had to deal with a Republican Senate and a Republican governor. Plus we had a state government that had been run by one party for so long, and so we really had to do a lot of work, changing agency heads, department heads, and, I mean that took a while.

I think it really - - it took one full term, probably, and in some areas probably even longer to fully transition government. I think government is now fully transitioned, and with the House flipping, you know, two years later, I think that helped in terms of the legislature. But it was a very difficult job. Plus, you know, at the time when Sonny Perdue got elected, not only did we have to transition government, but we also were experiencing the recession after September 11th. And so we had a \$1.65 billion budget deficit, so we had to deal with that. We also had, as you recall, to deal with the flag issue. And so, you know, we had all the changes in government; we had to deal with the budget issues; and we had to deal with the flag issues. So, you know, even though it was a year, I sort of equate it to dog years, because it really felt more like seven by the

time I left.

SHORT: Let's look back for a minute, if you will, at the emergence of the Republican party. You had Bo Callaway in '66. You had Mack Mattingly in '80. You had Perdue winning in 2002. But it seems to me the gigantic victory was in 2004 when the Republican party won control of the House of Representatives.

TANENBLATT: Absolutely. I think all of those things are very significant, and they all were laying the foundation for what ultimately happened when the Republicans took control of the House. I mean, that was really probably the last thing that we had to do. And once that happened, I think you can say without a shadow of a doubt that Georgia flipped to a completely Republican state. Our whole federal delegation is Republican, and now the entire state leadership, and the legislature and the executive branches of government are controlled by the Republicans. And you started seeing that down to the local level. I mean, I remember when I first got involved in the late '80s. You know, all the sheriffs were so important and powerful, and they were all Democratic sheriffs. Now you go around the state, you've got Republican sheriffs. And so there's been a significant shift, not only at the federal level, state level, but also down to the local level.

SHORT: Mm-hmm. So the Republican party now is in control.

TANENBLATT: That's correct.

SHORT: Are they doing a good job?

TANENBLATT: Well, I think anytime you, you know, you have someone new in power, they go through a transition. I think Sonny Perdue, you know, after the first few years, he was obviously much more comfortable in his role. The state Senate got much more comfortable the second year than the first year. I think the Speaker has grown over the last several years. So I think that, you know, there's been a transition period for Republicans. I think they've made mistakes, and I think they would readily admit that there were certain things that they did along the way. But I think by and large, if you're talking about a wholesale change after 135 years of one party dominance, I'm pretty proud of the Republican party over the last five years as to how they've transitioned.

And I think we've got - - I think politics in Georgia has transitioned. I think anytime you have one party that dominates everything for so long, you create what some refer to as the "good ol' boy" network. But I think what's happened now is that you have new people in office that come from different walks of life around the state that are much more attuned to what their constituents want. And I think the people, their constituents, have much more of a voice in what is happening in terms of policy down at the state capitol. Now, that being said, Republicans can fall into the same traps that the Democrats did. And so it's important that Republicans look at some of the mistakes the Democrats made in years past to make sure that they don't make those same

mistakes.

SHORT: I didn't mention 1994 when Newt Gingrich went the Congress and his Contract for America. Would you comment on that for us?

TANENBLATT: Well, I mean, that was obviously after the 1992 defeat. I think Newt, who had been someone actively involved in changing the shape in Washington and the political landscape in Washington, his Contract for America was what the party needed nationally at the time. Republicans needed to stand for something. We had just lost our President, and that Contract for America sort of laid out some key core positions that really delineated where the Republicans stood from the Democrats, and so that effort was so important. We elected historic numbers of Republicans, and having a Republican Speaker of the House in Newt was just tremendous, not only for our country but for our state, having, you know, been someone who had been engaged in the party in Georgia for so many years.

SHORT: Tell me how Georgia has benefitted from a two party system.

TANENBLATT: Well, look, I would probably say that a two party system allows for -- you know, Paul Coverdell used to say this, and it made a lot of sense: It sort of allows for a competition of ideas. And when you have two parties that have very different views on issues, as long as you can debate those issues, what will typically happen is, when you have a

competition of ideas, the final policy that will get enacted will be the best policy, because you've incorporated in the ideas from both parties. You know, lawmakers in Georgia - - Republican lawmakers like Paul Coverdell, like Johnny Isakson who was the House Minority Leader when Paul Coverdell was the Senate Minority Leader in the Georgia Legislature - - they were very effective lawmakers. They were effective because they were able to work with the majority party.

And I think that that is so critical that, you know, I think there is a national mood that's been set by our new President that, you know, we need to get beyond "red" America and "blue" America, and we need to be working together. And I think if, you know, if we can continue to allow people to debate ideas - - Democratic ideas, Republican ideas - - you'll come up with the best ideas. So it really shouldn't matter, necessarily, who's in charge as long as the two parties are communicating. Now, at the end of the day, one party will ultimately be in charge and have the final say, but in doing so, you would hope that they would incorporate the best ideas that are coming from the other party.

**SHORT:** If you were asked to make a prediction, how long do you think the Republican party will remain in power in Georgia?

**TANENBLATT:** You know, that's hard to say. I think it really depends on what our Republican leaders do in the coming years. I think in the short term, I think it's going to be a while before there's a shift. You know, we're about to go into reapportionment after the 2010

election. I think that there will be - - Republicans will still control the legislative seats, the majority of the congressional seats in the state. So I think it's going to take a dramatic shift before something really significant happens.

Now I will say that we have a growing Latino population, you know, a growing African-American population, and I think it's going to be important that Republicans don't just look like a white party, and they're going to have to reach out beyond just white constituency if they want to continue to stay in the majority role. If they don't, then I think that over time there will be a rise among Democrats. But I think our Republican party leaders recognize that, and I'm optimistic that they'll do the right thing and they'll maintain the majority status for a while.

SHORT: You campaigned for outgoing President Bush and you know him very well. How do you think history should treat him?

TANENBLATT: I think history will treat him a lot better than what has been said by many pundits and the public as he was leaving office. You know, you can look at President Truman is probably the best example that I've heard cited. He's much more popular today than he was when he left office.

You know, the thing about George W. Bush that I think he could feel very good about his presidency is that he is a very principled person. And, you know, I think I've even heard him state this, that when looks in the mirror at night, you know, he's not disappointed in anything that he did, and I think he held firm to what he truly believed was the right thing to do. And, you

know, we've never experienced what we did on September 11, 2001, and I think it's very easy to criticize some of the things that the President either did or didn't do, but, you know, we can't forget the fact that there has not been another domestic terrorist attack on our homeland since September 11, 2001. And I think you have to give George Bush credit, and his administration credit, for that.

You know, it's interesting, having been involved in his campaign in 2000, it's interesting how the things he campaigned that he wanted to do, he really didn't get to do a whole lot of that, because once September 11th happened, his whole agenda changed, and he became a wartime President and he really had to focus on the whole issue of terrorism.

Now, all that being said, were there some things that he probably wished he did differently? I'm sure. But I don't think he made any decision not based on what he thought was the right thing to do at the time. And so I think, to answer your question, history will be a lot better to George Bush than some people think.

SHORT: Well, it's 2009, and a new Democrat President and Congress were inaugurated just yesterday. What do you expect from President Barack Obama and the new Democratic majority in Washington?

TANENBLATT: Well, I think that President-Elect Obama has done everything -- or has exceeded, I should say -- has exceeded my expectations since he was elected. You know, it's one thing to say something during a campaign, but then there's another thing to actually do it, do

what you say. And, you know, I remember in 2004 when he gave his speech at the Democratic Convention, and he was talking about, you know, "We shouldn't have a 'red' America, a 'blue' America; there's one United States of America." I remember saying to my wife that, you know, if he really believes that, this man, at some point, is going to be a national figure. I didn't think it was going to be this quickly. But he has continued to demonstrate that he really does think we need to get beyond the partisanship that I think people are tired of. And if he can lead by example and continue that, I think he can really be a historic -- you know, a transitional figure in American history.

I mean, just yesterday, watching his inauguration, I thought his speech was well done, hit the mark. I think the way that both President Bush and then President-Elect Obama handled their transition really set the right tone for the country. I was disappointed in some of the crowd when they were booing President Bush as he was introduced. I think it's going to be important for the new President to really reach out to those people and say - - and he did some of this in his speech yesterday, "We've got to stop that." Because as long as people are partisan and they don't even want to listen -- I think that's the most important thing, and he has demonstrated thus far that he wants to listen. The way, you know, we're facing some tough crises in our country right now with the economy. We still have international crises we're dealing with, and the fact that he's willing to listen to people who have views that are different than his, I think that says something about him and his character. Now only time will tell; he's been in office one day.

And so, you know, if he continues down that path, I do think he has the potential of being a transitional figure in history. He's already going to be an historical figure because he's the first

African American President, but he's got a lot of pressure on him. But I'm one of those people that even though I'm a Republican, I want him to succeed. I want him to succeed for the country. I think it is so important. And so right now, I want to be supportive of my President. Now that doesn't mean that if he does something I don't agree with, I'm not going to speak up and let my feelings be known to our elected leaders that can do something about it. But for now, you know, I wish him the very best of luck.

SHORT: Well, in addition to being an exceptional political thinker, you're also an economist. What do you think about the bailout proposals that are being considered now in Washington?

TANENBLATT: Well, I don't know that I'd call myself, because I was an economics major, an economist. But, you know, I have some, you know, concerns as to how the money is being spent, and I think that a lot of Americans are, you know, concerned about that, and I think that our political leaders are going to be held accountable. And so whether you're talking about the TARP funds that have been used to go to the banks, or a portion to the automobile manufacturers, or to Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, I think that the American people have already let it be known that they have some concern, because they haven't felt like that money has really made it into the system. I think people have found that it's still very difficult to get credit. This new \$350 billion, the second tranche of the TARP funds, you know, the indications are that that's really going to be used to buy up some of these toxic mortgages, and so let's see if that happens. If it happens and credit becomes regularly available, then I think that will be good for

the economy and the system.

With regards to the stimulus package that's being talked about, you know, \$850 billion is a lot of money. I was startled at a figure I saw yesterday that when President Clinton got elected in 1992, he had a stimulus package right after he got elected, and it was \$18 billion. And we're now talking about \$850 billion, and that's only 16 years ago, so that's a lot of money. And really, it's going to be how that money is sent back to the states or sent back to taxpayers or how that money is actually used that's going to be critically important that there's accountability, there's transparency. But we do need to do something to get our economy out of the rut that we're in right now.

SHORT: Did you ever consider running for public office?

TANENBLATT: I never have. I never have. I've been very fortunate throughout my career so far in that I have been exposed to a great number of real leaders in our state and in our country. But probably the person that I would - - that I'm probably most fortunate to have met at a very young age, right out of college, was Paul Coverdell. And, you know, he was my mentor up until the day he died in 2000. And he taught me a whole lot about politics, about government, about people, about how important it is to listen to people, how you can bring people together. And so, you know, I think that I can be just as effective behind the scenes, helping our political leaders, than actually being out there on the stage.

SHORT: The governor's election in 2010: Do you have a crystal ball?

TANENBLATT: Well, you know, I think it's going to be a spirited contest. I think the contest is going to be decided in the Republican primary. Right now, there's three candidates that are out there talking about running - - the Insurance Commissioner, John Oxendine; the Lieutenant Governor, Casey Cagle; and the Secretary of State, Karen Handel. I know all three of them. They're all three dedicated public servants. I think that they all love our state, and I think that they have a vision for Georgia.

I guess it's really hard to say, at this point, what will happen, because I'm not necessarily sure that we know who all the candidates are. There may be more than just those three. Qualifying is 14 months or 15 months away, so there's still plenty of time for someone else to get in the race. And as I've learned over my political career, too, in politics, things can change overnight. And so, I mean, I've seen Presidents with, you know, 70, 80 percent approval rating one day, and two months later, you know, they've got, you know, a 40 percent approval rating. So things can really change overnight, and so I think it's too early to tell what's going to happen, so I'm not going to predict.

SHORT: Okay. In addition to your political activities and your political career, you're also engaged in other matters. Would you tell us about some of those?

TANENBLATT: Yeah, I have had a passion since a young age of volunteerism and service. I

think that it is important for people to give back to their community and serve others. And so I have, throughout my life, have been involved in volunteer activities. I served on the Hands On Atlanta board in 2000, and when I was in the governor's office, worked with the governor, Michelle Nunn, who was the first executive director of Hands On Atlanta to form something called Hands On Georgia, which is a statewide organization to encourage communities across the state to form programs similar to Hands On Atlanta to engage individuals in various communities in volunteer service within their community. And there's now 14 affiliate chapters throughout the state of Georgia. Hands On Georgia is the first state in the country to have such a program. They're affiliated with the Hands On Network, which is now part of the Points of Light Institute that was actually started by George Bush, the 41st President.

I chaired Hands On Georgia for the first four years and then had to step down because I was appointed by President Bush and confirmed by the Senate to serve on the board of directors for the Corporation for National and Community Service, which is the federal agency that runs the AmeriCorps program, the VISTA program, the Senior Corps, the Foster Grandparent program, and really sets the policy agenda for national service throughout our country. And with the new President having just been sworn in and even alluded to this in his activities on Monday, on Martin Luther King Day, that national service is going to be a key piece of what he is going to promote. So I envision the corporation to be very active and involved.

So in addition to my political activity, I'm also going to serve. I guess my term is for another four years, so I'm going to serve, I guess, in the Obama administration. It's a bipartisan board. Half of the board members are appointed by then it was the President and the Senate Majority

Leader, and now I guess it would be the President and the Senate Minority Leader, so it's half Republican and half Democrat, but it's really a bipartisan board. And so that's my other passion.

SHORT: Well, you've had an illustrious career.

TANENBLATT: Thank you.

SHORT: And we thank you for what you've done for our state of Georgia.

TANENBLATT: Well, thank you.

SHORT: And I would like to thank you on behalf of Young Harris College and the Richard Russell Library and the University of Georgia, for being our guest.

[Brief audio gap and restart.]

SHORT: ...you know, Paul Coverdell.

TANENBLATT: Well, Paul was a unique individual. He was born in Iowa, spent time in Missouri before coming to Atlanta. He served in the military in Korea. When he came back, he

joined his father in an insurance marketing business and built it up to a very successful business.

And while he did that, ran for the state Senate in '68, finally got elected in 1970, served 19 years in the State Senate.

He used to talk about how when he first got elected, the Republicans can all hold a caucus meeting in a phone booth. And the interesting thing is that when he left in 1989, the Republicans were on the rise. I don't think they had reached 20 yet, but they were approaching 20 in terms of members of the Georgia State Senate.

He served as Minority Leader in the Senate for 15 years. He became engaged with George Herbert Walker Bush in the late '80s when George Bush was contemplating running for president in the primary against Ronald Reagan, and he ended up chairing George Bush's campaign. He also recognized early on that if Georgia was really going to be a two party state, the party really needed to broaden its base, and worked with leaders like John Linder and Newt Gingrich, and Mack Mattingly to really broaden the state Republican party.

He served as chairman of the Georgia Republican Party from 1985-87, so he did that while he was Senate Minority Leader and while he was running his insurance business. In the 1988 presidential election, he was the Southeastern Steering Committee chair for George Bush, then was selected to become the director of the Peace Corps, and that was a very exciting time. I was fortunate to be there at the time. Peace Corps had entered more countries during his tenure than it had in its whole history. That was also the time when the Wall came down, and Paul Coverdell was responsible for sending the first Peace Corps volunteers into Eastern Europe. He also sent Peace Corps volunteers into Mongolia and into Russia, and so it was a very exciting

time at the Peace Corps.

Then he got elected to the Senate in 1992 and very quickly rose through the ranks - - the leadership ranks. He was elected the Republican Conference secretary, which I believe is the fourth post in leadership in the U.S. Senate, and then head of the Republican Conference, which is, I guess, the number three leadership post.

One thing, if you talk to his Senate colleagues, they will tell you that he was one of the most effective senators in the United States Senate when he was there, because he had a very thoughtful, quiet way about him but was very organized and was very strategic in the way he would think. Senator Lott was very dependent upon him when Senator Lott was the Majority Leader, because he always knew if there was a difficult task or project that needed to be done, Paul Coverdell was going to be the one that he was going to turn to that would do that.

And it was interesting, upon his passing, the comments that were made, not just in Georgia, in Washington, but really across the country by people that knew him. I think it was the Wall Street Journal that referred to him as “the most effective senator that no one knew,” and that really summed it up. I mean, he was very effective in anything that he set his mind to and anything that he was engaged in, and he just had a very quiet demeanor. He was not one of these individuals that wanted to go on the Sunday morning talk shows. That just wasn't his thing. He was much more of a strategic thinker, thinking through very complex problems, and he really made his mark not just in Georgia, but I believe in our country.

He was very passionate about education. I think you still today get a Coverdell education savings account. So it's nice to see his legacy there. When he was at the Peace Corps, he

created a program called Worldwide Schools. At the time, it was identified that geography was really an issue within our country, and so because we have these Peace Corps volunteers serving throughout the world, he created this program that linked every Peace Corps volunteer up with elementary schools in the country. And it was almost like a pen pal relationship, but then they produced information, media information on each of the countries so that the students back here in elementary school could learn about what these Peace Corps volunteers were seeing overseas. That program has now been institutionalized, written into statute, and there is now the Coverdell Worldwide Schools program. And not only is every Peace Corps volunteer connected to an elementary school, but now they have return Peace Corps volunteers hooked - - connected to elementary schools. And you can actually go to the website and there's a whole library of videos, and it's really been a very effective program.

So he made his mark on our country, around the world through his efforts in the Peace Corps, and, of course, here in the state of Georgia.

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