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George Hooks

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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 today is Senator George Hooks of Georgia's 14th District.

Welcome, Senator Hooks.

GEORGE HOOKS: Thank you, Bob.

SHORT: We're delighted to have you.

HOOKS: Good to be with you.

SHORT: And we'd like to begin by asking you a little bit about your early life and growing up in Sumter County.

HOOKS: Well, it's no different than many other people that grew up in my era and my generation in Georgia. My family has lived in Sumter County for seven generations. I live on the same street that both of my grandmothers were born on. My mother was born one block away. My family has been in the same church for seven generations. And that's not an exception in that part of the world. You go to school, I grew up and went to school with the same children whose parents went to school with my parents and grandparents and so forth. So our roots go deep in that section of the state, and that is a prerequisite almost to politics. You don't move somewhere and run for another office. So that's our home and will be.

SHORT: So you attended Americus High School.

HOOKS: Yes, sir.

SHORT: And then went off to college.

HOOKS: Right.

SHORT: And I believe you went to Auburn?

HOOKS: My mother was on the Board of Education in Americus, and she just thought Auburn was the greatest academic institution in the South. And she told me that she wanted me to try it one year, and I stayed five. I was on a five-year plan; I loved it and enjoyed it very much. I graduated from Americus High School, and many of my friends both went to the University of Georgia and to Auburn. Those were the two big schools. A few went to Tech. Some of the girls went up to Virginia and things like that.

SHORT: So what happened after you finished college?

HOOKS: Bob, it's right interesting. I went up north to graduate school just for a couple weeks. It didn't last long...let me know that it was too cold up there and too bad. It's the coldest place I'd ever been, in New Jersey. And I had an offer from a group in Birmingham, Alabama, and I

decided to take it. They wanted to build a camp for under privileged youth and the Boy Scouts. And it was between Birmingham and Atlanta, and they needed some fundraising; and I was just young and foolhardy, and I took it on. We raised about \$2.5 million and built this nice wilderness camp for young people. And it gave me a great deal of experience. Birmingham was all together different than anything, being raised in the Cotton Belt and the Black Belt. It was an industrial city and I knew a lot of people from school, from Auburn there; but it was all social. And then I was thrown in that atmosphere. But it was good experience for a young fellow, and I learned to cope with it and live with it and moved and advanced very much.

SHORT: When did you first get interested in politics?

HOOKS: To tell you about that, just settle back. I was 16, maybe going on 17. My dad came home. I didn't have a summer job. School was getting out in 1962. And he said William Thykes [phonetic], who was a cousin of his that was an attorney there in Americus, is looking for you to help him with the Marvin Griffin campaign. And Marvin Griffin was running for his second attempt to governor against Carl Sanders. And Griffin had selected Americus as the kickoff spot. I didn't know much about politics, but it was a good job, and probably the best job, most fun job I've ever had in politics in my life. They put us in an old World War II surplus jeep, and it was great fun for a young kid. And they would give us a route. They paid us \$10 a day, and they filled the jeep up with gas, and we nailed his posts to the telephone poles. And they'd send us to Americus, and we'd go to Shellman and we'd go over to Cuthbert, and we'd

come back by Preston and we'd take our route. One of us would drive, and the other one would jump in the back with the staple gun, staple that thing out.

Well, we did that for several weeks, all during the end of May, June, and he kicked off his campaign right in July. And they put us all on the platform. We were on one side. They had the young people over there. And the platform was a tremendous flat-bed truck, and they had put sheets on the front, all around it and dressed it all up. And they fed 17,000 people barbecue plates that day. It was a July Saturday afternoon. And I had never seen anything like it in my life. I got up there on that rostrum, and old Griffin was the greatest orator you ever saw; whether you agreed with his politics or not, he was a charmer on the stump. And he would call out, you know, Habersham County, Rabun County, and all these far distant counties and people stood up like waves on a beach, you know, all over that big baseball stadium.

And I never will forget Arthur J. Moore, who was the Methodist bishop of Georgia, blessed the crowd. He gave the invocation, and the bands played and everything. And of course, we stayed late in the night. And then we resumed our activities. And later after that in the summer, they had us set up what was known as ice water stands on the highways. And we put a big banner down there that said "free ice water," and it was June...like August or so forth. And people would pull in. We'd put a bumper sticker on their car and give them a glass of ice water. It was a fun summer, it really was. I had never been out of Americus on my own without my family, and that was freedom in a jeep. And we'd go by the swimming pools where the girls were in those small towns, and it was great. And I thoroughly enjoyed it.

He lost that election, but I received my first taste of good politics. And I went back to school

that year and ran for president of the class, got elected president of my class and have been more or less in politics ever since.

SHORT: And when did you decide to run for public office?

HOOKS: I moved home. I had married in 1975, and I moved home. And my brother and I bought our family business, my father's business, in 1977. And the House seat, Georgia House of Representatives, came open in 1980. And I ran for that open seat and just ran like a scalded dog. I knew how to run. I'd take a map and – it was one county, and I would take a road and go that road and that road and that road by the day. And I'd fill up my ice jug, and I'd have water. And I'd go from house to house to house to house. We had a lot of forums, a lot of speeches in that election. And a pretty hot election, but I won and won big; and I've been here ever since. I served those ten years in the House of Representatives, then I left the House and came over to the Senate in 1990. My Senator, who was a close family friend, stepped down. He wanted me to run for it, came down there and talked me into it. I've enjoyed it and have been involved with it ever since.

SHORT: So you came to the House in 1980. What was it like being a freshman legislator?

HOOKS: Well, you just went to all the social functions and you spoke when you were spoken to. You couldn't do anything. The Speaker ran it with an iron hand, and for the betterment of

the state I'll have to say. And freshmen were seen and not heard, kind of like small children. And we studied the rules, and you slowly worked your way up. You learned right away that people that are rambunctious and arrive right on the scene didn't do that well. And that wasn't our style, so it worked out well.

SHORT: The old expression, keep quiet and go along?

HOOKS: That's right. That's the way it was.

SHORT: Well, we know that most of the work in the legislature is done in committees.

HOOKS: It is.

SHORT: And your first year, you got some pretty important committees.

HOOKS: He gave me good committee assignments, and I've enjoyed them very well through the years. They've served me very well.

SHORT: And that's added to your experience that makes you the effective legislator you are today.

HOOKS: Thank you.

SHORT: Now, do you remember your first committee chairmanship?

HOOKS: Yeah. When I came over to the – well, I was floor leader for Governor Harris, and that was a pretty important position. I was vice chairman in the House, but never was chairman. But I was, of course, Governor Harris's assistant floor leader, and we had some interesting times there.

Then I came over to the Senate. And during my second term, Lieutenant Governor Howard made me chairman of rules, and that was quite a challenge. And I served as rules committee chairman, and it was a powerful committee -- very, very powerful and I enjoyed it. We set the agenda for the legislature. We had some general bills that year that were interesting. So I liked it and enjoyed it. So '92, the year 1992 and part of '93, I served as chairman of the rules committee.

SHORT: George Busbee was Governor when you came to the legislature

HOOKS: That's right.

SHORT: And you had a very close relationship with Governor Busbee?

HOOKS: I did, I did.

SHORT: Tell us what you remember about his administration.

HOOKS: Governor Busbee's administration in my opinion focused on what is moving Georgia forward. He had a strong commitment to business-oriented issues; and he was now showy, but he was solid as an oak. And he had instituted some very strong -- in the areas of economic development and technical adult education, and he pushed us forward very strongly there. But the key to Governor Busbee's success was he had come out of the House of Representatives' leadership and he had such a close relationship with the legislative body. And I think that's what distinguishes our state from other states. If they've come out with a good working relationship in the legislature, they know how to get things done, and he had been able to get things done. The same was true for some of the later governors.

SHORT: Well, looking back over our governors -- and we've had some good ones -- most of our governors, have they not, have come from the legislature?

HOOKS: They have. They have.

SHORT: The only one I can remember was Lester Maddox.

HOOKS: Lester Maddox was the only one that did not come from the legislature while he was governor, and then he turned around as lieutenant governor and had that experience.

SHORT: Yeah. And he served as lieutenant governor under Governor Carter.

HOOKS: Right.

SHORT: And it was sort of a clash between two personalities that went on for those four years.

HOOKS: I hold the seat today that Jimmy Carter was first elected to in 1962. And of course he's a close personal friend and his family – all of his family are close personal friends of mine. But those, as they say, were interesting times. Both men were very strong-willed, and they created an interesting atmosphere.

SHORT: Well, let's talk a minute about Speaker Murphy. You served ten years with Speaker Murphy. Tell us about him.

HOOKS: Speaker Murphy. This state would not be what it is today without the leadership of two individuals. He's one of the two I think that were pivotal in the development of this state. Speaker Murphy was an interesting fellow. He wasn't pretty. He was rough as a cob. He could be rough as a...I don't know what. But he had a heart of gold, and he would – he could actually

take on the most unpopular issues I've ever seen and change those and maneuver those things through the legislature and make them very popular.

One thing that comes to mind, the most unpopular thing I ever had to vote on was the Atlanta World Congress Center. It was not popular in my part of the state, and the others took that issue and actually defeated people on that. They funded the Atlanta World Congress Center. Speaker Murphy took it on as a personal issue. He realized the economic value to the whole state, and he pushed it through. He was a rock-ribbed fiscal conservative and an old line more or less New Deal type democrat, but yet he was extremely fair to women and minorities. That was not necessarily as reflective of his legislative district as it was with him personally. And he gave them a very, very good shake. He could speak to you in kind of a gruff way if he wanted to. He wasn't a warm person, but yet he was very bright, very bright and had a great handle on the legislative process.

He was very protective of the House of Representatives. That was his House, and he looked on it that way. But he ruled it pretty strongly, but yet fairly. I mean, he realized you've got 180 people, 180 egos if you will, but nevertheless, he'd let you have your say. And then at the end of the thing, he'd pull them together. But he always had a vision out there for what was best for the state as a whole, which I've always appreciated. We've got too many I'm afraid that come in here looking at, "my way and nobody else's". But he had a broader vision.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about some of the other legislators with whom you served in the house. Denmark Groover.

HOOKS: Denmark Groover had the most – Denmark Groover is one of the most brilliant men I've ever worked with. He'd take a bill – he read every bill that came on the House floor, and he knew it. He'd get over here at 4:00 in the morning. He'd read every bill. So he was prepared in debate. He was a masterful orator and great courtroom lawyer, great trial lawyer. But his key also was reading and understanding the issues and digesting them. They called it "Grooverized," a bill had been Grooverized. It had been churned over by him. And he knew the process and knew it backward and forward. And he also could step forward on controversial issues, and I think that's the mark of a great man. He would be one of the better ones I'd ever served with. One of the great ones.

SHORT: Do you remember some of the others?

HOOKS: Great ones have served over there. There are many, many good ones. Al Burruss was another great effective House member from Cobb County that worked very well with the rural legislators, got crossed up with the Speaker and ran against him. And then they made up and came back, and he was – Roy Lambert from Madison was Governor Busbee's floor leader. He was a masterful man. There were many, many that served and were very, very good and effective leaders.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about Governor Harris...Joe Frank Harris. You served with

him. He was in the legislature also for many, many years before he became governor.

HOOKS: Joe Frank was the chairman of the appropriations committee, which I chaired in the Senate. But he was chairman of the appropriations committee when I first went on it in the House. And Joe Frank was low-key and quiet, and he was as smooth and polished as Murphy was rough. But they get along very well and knew each other very well. And again, he had a grasp of the legislative process, and that was so important. He knew when to hold them and when to fold them, and I think that was good. His big deal, of course, was education, Quality Basic Education Act. And he worked on it, worked on it. And it's not easy to get your hands around education. But he was rock solid. Not a showy person at all, but smooth, quiet, very much a Christian gentleman and a good man.

SHORT: Let's talk a minute about QBE, or Quality Basic Education. As I remember, there were questions at the time as to whether or not the state could really afford such an ambitious program. But he found ways to finance it. Do you think it's been a success?

HOOKS: For the times, yes, Bob, I think it was a success. It needs to change during the year. Talmadge had the minimum standard of education that he put in with the three-cent sales tax, and Joe Frank came along with quality basic education. And Joe Frank's key was he knew and understood the legislative process and the budget. And he knew where to find the money and how to do it. You know, he ran for office on the promise, "I won't raise your taxes; I know what

I'm doing". Well, economic times were good, and luckily it broke, you know, to his favor. And he found that. It was expensive, and it was a great challenge; but at the time, it was the right thing to do. His deal was we can't afford not to do it. Georgia puts more money in education than hardly any other southern state percentage wise. And that's where we need to continue to focus our attention, but it was the hallmark of his eight years as governor.

SHORT: So you would say he was a good governor?

HOOKS: He was a good governor.

SHORT: And you served as his floor...

HOOKS: Floor leader.

SHORT: Floor leader. Well, following Governor Harris in office was Zell Miller.

HOOKS: Zell Miller is the most courageous fellow I ever saw. He took on an issue -- I don't know a group in Georgia that was in favor of the lottery. It's easy for us today to sit back and say, well, the Hope Scholarship and the lottery is the greatest thing. We thought he was crazy at the time. We said that he's going to bring organized gambling to the state, which made all our denominations, major denominations lined up against him. And I never will forget a terrible

editorial in the Wesleyan Christian Advocate -- which he had taught at the Methodist school -- against him. And but yet he took it on and with a tenacity that I've never seen before and got that thing through. He had a vision of where he wanted us to go in that thing, and it has proven to be the greatest thing in the educational history of this state.

The second thing he did, which was equally as unpopular, was the pre-k program. He knew exactly if you got that four-year-old child involved in a learning concept and they could learn to basic read and write and colors and things like that at four years old, you could take that and their chances of dropout would be tremendous. It was a masterful thing. But don't kid yourself; it was very unpopular to advocate for that position. But he -- I think it's that old mountain tenacity in him. I mean, he got it done.

SHORT: While we're talking about Senator Miller, as we all know after the untimely death of Senator Paul Coverdell, he was appointed to the United States Senate by Governor Barnes.

Were you surprised at that appointment?

HOOKS: No. Governor Miller ended his career as governor as very popular. At the end of his first term, he barely got by and got elected, took on some issues that were very controversial. And they used it somewhat against him, but his election period -- his appointment by Governor Barnes to the United States Senate was not a surprise. It was -- as a matter of fact, it was a good move on Governor Barnes's part to put him there. He had run for the Senate and been denied that and I think went on to Congress. So it allowed him to finish his career in grace.

SHORT: I guess you'd have to say that Miller was somewhat of a maverick.

HOOKS: He is a maverick, and I have tried to explain that to my people at home. I said he's a mountaineer; we're not that way down in our part of the state. But mountain people do what they think. They ask me from time to time, "Who is consulting with him?" I said, "He consults with himself." We have a nature down that way to ask everybody's opinion on everything and talk a lot. But, I mean, they're different. They're Georgians. It's one of the things that makes Georgia great I think, different people from different regions.

SHORT: Somebody once accused him of, I think it might have been Senator Nunn, who said that Zell Miller was like aim, fire...no...ready, fire, aim.

HOOKS: Fairly good description. But he's tenacious, I'll give him credit; but he's a true mountain man, product of the South.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about Roy Barnes. I think you served with him in the House.

HOOKS: Oh, yeah. I served – well, he was in the Senate when I served in the House, and then I was in the Senate when he served in the House. It was the reverse. But I served with him. He was one of Governor Harris's floor leaders also, and then of course was governor.

SHORT: He had a hard time the second time he ran. Were you surprised that he was defeated?

HOOKS: Really wasn't, Bob. I saw it coming. I had opposition in that race. And a lot of people were surprised, but I had seen a lot. He had alienated the people on the state flag, which is something I got involved with redesigning when I redesigned and passed the current flag we have into law. But he had alienated a tremendous amount of people, the way that was carried about. I think he did the right thing at the right time; it was carried out perhaps not the best political way. And then he had made some stubborn decisions with his education reform package, had alienated a lot of school teachers. And he had done some other things. He was as tenacious as Zell Miller was, but he tried to do it all at one time, and you've got to do in increments and he didn't believe in that. Roy Barnes is one of the most brilliant people I've ever dealt with. He's got the finest mind I've ever seen. But he made some mistakes. I think that some of the things he did were for the best...no question about the flag. And of course I came back later and passed into the law the current flag we have. But I don't think we could have gotten to that point had we not taken the brunt of that thing the first time. It was unfortunate, but that's the way of politics. We pick our fights, and he picked too many at one time, if you want to know the truth. He picked some good ones, but he had – he was like Gene Talmadge. He had about six rows going on at the same time and couldn't manage them.

SHORT: Tell us about Gene Talmadge. I know you remember Gene Talmadge.

HOOKS: Gene Talmadge probably left the strongest impression on Georgia of any one individual in political life. Elected governor four times, and that will never happen again. There were different things. Of course, he was a rock-ribbed fiscal conservative, and they'd bring him back in when the other governors would spend us out and things like that. He was Phi Beta Kappa, graduated at the University of Georgia. Highly educated, highly intelligent, but he knew how to play the crowd. And in those days, they would play to the crowd. And they'd make two or three speeches a day and travel the whole state. And he had a following that would just follow him to the gates of hell itself. And he had an equal number that hated him that bad. And when he was dying at Piedmont Hospital, you know, they told the story that half the state was praying one way and half the state was praying another. But he was masterful as a politician, but he didn't hold a candle to the progress that his son brought. He son probably paved the way more than any other Georgian, Herman Talmadge, during his second term as governor to make our state what it is today.

SHORT: Let's get back for a minute to the election of 2002, which was won by republican Sonny Perdue. Two years later, the Republican Party won the majority in the House and the Senate. Now, what has that done to Georgia politics?

HOOKS: A lot of that is due to the change in demographics of the state. The bedrock of the Republican Party rests in the suburban counties that surround our cities, and a lot of these people

are transplants and are not from Georgia. People have come to me, they've come to me and ask me if I was going to change parties; I told them I've never change wives, churches, or parties; I stick with the crowd that I'm closest to, and that's just the way I am. That's the way I'm made. But unfortunately, they don't – the republicans that came in office -- now, this will change as time goes by I assume, but most of them do not have the depth or what we call the institutional knowledge of knowing how to make it work. It's been a little chaotic, and they had a hard time – harder time, I'll put it that way – getting along with themselves than they do with the rest of the folks. There's too much of "my side". I don't like that; that's not good for Georgia.

SHORT: Partisanism.

HOOKS: Right. And even within their group, it's my neighborhood versus yours.

SHORT: Well, you served five terms in the House before moving to the Senate.

HOOKS: Right.

SHORT: Why did you give up your ten years of seniority to seek a Senate seat?

HOOKS: Well, I had always admired the Senate. It was a smaller body. I felt like I could move quicker over here. Murphy, he had his men in place, and they weren't that much older than I

was. And I didn't see much change in the House. There's 180 members of the House and 56 in the Senate. And I felt like it would be a good political move. My senator, Senator McKenzie, from Montezuma came down. He kind of laid into me, and I said, well, I'll think about it. And he came back, then he came back, and he wore me down and I agreed to run for it. But it was difficult to run from one county – that's all I had in the House, my home county – to run for 12 counties. So it was a lot larger territory.

SHORT: I believe your district is probably the largest geographically in the state.

HOOKS: It is.

SHORT: So how do you manage to keep so many local governments happy?

HOOKS: Well, I'm a pretty good politician. I know how to do it. I've got 39 incorporated towns, and I think somebody told me the other day there are 43 post offices scattered across my senate district. But I know them all, and they know me. And, you know, it's a full-time job. People up here don't understand that, but down there it's a full-time job. I'm on the road and somewhere every day.

SHORT: Let's get back to your service in the House. During those ten years, what stands out most in your memory?

HOOKS: That's difficult to answer. I think the – I'll go back to that way the Speaker ran the House. I think that stands out probably as the better way to do it. I hadn't seen that since that time. That's kind of a gone era, and Georgia is the loser for it. I mean, he would force people to the table with different ideas screaming and hollering -- black, white, rural, urban, male, female, and it took a lot of tenacity to do that. I think that's a general answer for what you're asking, but that stands out in my mind.

SHORT: What would you say was your biggest accomplishment?

HOOKS: Well, I had the privilege to serve ten years as chairman of the Appropriations Committee that wrote the budget. Of course, I was directly responsible against Speaker Murphy and Governor Miller's wishes of redoing this capital and preserving this capital. Neither one of them were opposed to it; they just didn't want to spend the money. They'd rather spend the money somewhere else, and I forced them to redo the capital. But the greatest accomplishment I'll have to admit at the time was my – the way I changed the state flag into the state flag we have today. And this state flag of course is one that I designed and passed into law.

Governor Barnes had given us a flag that was drawn by a committee. You've got a group of legislators from the House, not from the Senate, out to the Governor's mansion, and they came up with a flag that was a substitute for the '56 flag. It was not attractive. Most school children couldn't draw it, and there was a lot of moaning and groaning about it. And I ran in the year

2002, and I said – got reelected, and I had made up my mind by myself, I hadn't talked to anybody, and I said if I ever get back up there I'm going to give Georgia what I think of as a historic and attractive banner.

I came up, and I drafted the bill and had it resting in my legislative folder, to put the flag, which is generally the flag I have behind us. And Governor Perdue had gotten elected under the promise that he was going to give Georgians the right to choose between the '56 flag and some other alternative. He introduced – he waited, waited and waited, and in February finally introduced the bill after we'd been here about six weeks in the House. They passed it out of the House with a substitute bill that was a facsimile of the pre-56 bill, but they made a terrible mistake: They put the wrong dimensions on the flag, and the thing was as big as a beach towel. Got over here to the Senate, and I went before the rules committee and they would hear none of it. They were under marching orders from the governor to keep the flag the way it came out of the House. Now, bear in mind the American flag would have one dimension and the state flag would look like this tremendous thing. And it wasn't that well done anyway.

They passed it out of the rules committee, and it went on to the floor. And I offered an amendment. It was amendment number one to that bill. And it is the description I have behind us today. I even put in there the original colors; rather than red I put in crimson and chose – I put the Code of Arms on it and everything. It passed with 29 votes, the exact number that it takes to pass a bill. So amendment one passed. Senator Eric Johnson from Savannah was acting as the governor's floor leader, and he objected and called for a reconsideration of that vote. He got 30 votes on the reconsideration, which was enough to have it reconsidered and we battled it again,

my amendment, number one. And it got the same 29 votes. Couldn't do it again. It passed on the – and amended the bill and redrew the thing.

Sent it back to the House, and Terry Coleman, who was Speaker at the time, cast the deciding vote. There were 89 votes on this flag, and he cast the deciding vote. And it came back to the Senate on that final day, and the senator that was the governor's floor leader, the other floor leader, Stevens from up in North Georgia, and he objected; and I moved that we accept the House vote. And it went on to the governor from there. So for two reasons I'm proud of the historical marker that we have going closely back to what our forefathers drew, and it's attractive and it's put that issue behind us. It got that issue away from us. Our state was on the verge of terrible times if we hadn't put that issue behind us. So we put it behind us. So that ability to get that done -- I think I didn't want to talk about it much at the time because it's dangerous; but looking back on it, that's got to be one of the best things I've ever done.

SHORT: The Senate is often referred to as the upper house. Is it the upper house?

HOOKS: It certainly is. It is the upper house. The senate is smaller, and by being smaller it's clubbier. You get along better. There will be some you don't want to – you don't maybe get along with as well, but generally the Senate is a more congenial group. You have more independence, but you get along a lot better.

SHORT: It's been suggested over the years that Senate terms be increased to four years rather

than the two. What do you think about that?

HOOKS: I think that's a wise choice, but I don't think it will ever happen. The House and Senate are too meshed together. And you could pass it in the Senate, but you couldn't get it through the House. And it goes that way over and over. All our legislators receive the same per diem. Some sleep at home and eat at home, and the rest of us have to pay and stay in rental property and eat out when we're up here; it's a difficult thing to do. We're one of the few states who have had a two-year term, and it goes way, way back. It probably should be changed. Another consideration is the extreme expense that's incurred now by running for these offices. That was unheard of just a few years ago.

SHORT: Well, now let's talk about state appropriations. You're known as Mr. Budget. Tell us a little bit about serving as chairman of the Appropriations Committee and how the process really works. I'm not really sure that most Georgians understand how the state arrives at this budget.

HOOKS: I'm not sure we've even got the time or the place to go through all that. Georgia is a unique state in that the governor, whoever the governor may be, merely recommends in this document. And the state enacts what they do. A key ingredient in my opinion of being budget chairman is you've got to have a vision for the whole state. It can't just be rural Georgia or urban Georgia or the coast or the mountains or the black belt or whatever; you've got to have a

vision for the whole state and work for what's best for the whole state. And you approach it from the idea that you are conservative with the taxpayers' money, but yet you want to meet the needs of a growing state. Now, all that's lofty and sounds good; but you've got to be flexible enough to work with every type group because every group is not going to be satisfied. I've told them over and over again from the well of the Senate, there's no Santa Claus for grown folks. I mean, we've got X number of dollars and we put those in there and make it work.

The Senate works somewhat to the disadvantage of the House. The House would get the Governor's budget, and they'd just tear it all apart and rewrite it and do whatever they wanted to. And whoever the governors may be – and I've served under several – they'll come crying over here...well, put this back and that back and we'll help you do this, that, and the other. And I kind of struggled to make the Senate independent. So we'd start working on our budgets long before the House ever got through with working on their version. So when it got over here, we'd just make small changes to what the House had done and we would have our own. And it worked very, very well doing that. But it's got to be inclusive, but yet at the end of the day you've got to pull down and have a small group. You can't have 56 senators in there writing the budget. So we had the Appropriations Committee. Then we had a smaller group that would meet on Sundays generally, Saturdays or Sundays when nobody is much around and we would make the tough decisions.

The subcommittees would come in there and recommend everything under the sun, and then you'd start cutting back and that's where the tough part is. And you've got to cut and figure and cut and add and figure and figure. Then you had to add some things that some people may not

exactly want; corrections is one of them. Everybody wants people locked up, but nobody wants to pay for them. So we've got an enormous number of people in prison, yet you've got to pay the correctional officers their wages and so forth. We don't spend a lot of – people think they're in there for a country club, but they're not. And yet you've got to take on those kinds of issues. My arms are a lot longer than they were when I started this job years ago, but it was a great experience. I wouldn't trade it for anything. I wrote 20 budgets. We'd do two a year in the ten years I was chairman, at least the Senate version. Then you come together. You've got three members of the House and three members of the Senate; and, you know, the budget is passed in the Governor's form, the House form, and the Senate form. And then you all come together at a conference table, but you don't come together at first. It takes you a while to get there. You agree on this, agree on that, disagree on this, and some things – the smallest things you'd think...well, just dig in.

I never will forget we had a big joke about it. The Department of Natural Resources wanted I think it was \$50,000 to eradicate the flathead catfish in the Okmulgee River. And that had got to be a joke, and that got to be a Senate position. We locked down on it. We thought it was a good thing. And these are tremendous catfish that eat up the brim, the sport fish in the river. And our sportsmen were for it. It seemed like – it may seem crazy, but that was one of our positions. There were a lot of other positions. But at the end of the day, you'd come together. You've got to. And you're working against that clock. And you're working night and day in that conference committee, six people. Of course, the governor is involved in it, too. He has to get involved in it at the end of the session.

SHORT: Speaking of working against the clock, you hear criticism from time to time that the legislature puts off the budget until the last day.

HOOKS: They do.

SHORT: Is there any way that that process could be streamlined?

HOOKS: I think that's just kind of part of the way it's done. No, I don't think you can. They're working on the supplemental or midyear adjusted budget as we speak in the House, and of course we're just in the second week. And budgets when they're tight as they are this year, 2009, when we don't have any money to work with, much easier to write; when you've got more money, they're harder to write. But, no, I don't think you can come together any quicker. You're working against the clock, and that kind of forces you, like studying for final exams, to get things done.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about some of the other things you've done in the Senate. As you said, you were on the Rules Committee. Very important committee. Tell us a little bit about the Rules Committee really works.

HOOKS: The Rules Committee sets the bills and the agenda of the bills that are to be voted on.

You know, you can get a bill all the way through the House, all the way through the committees, all the way through all the processes; it gets right ready to go to the floor of the Senate, and that rules committee sets the calendar the day before -- the night, the afternoon the way we meet now, the afternoon before the next day, and we set the calendar. So it is the all-powerful door on legislation. Senate bills or House bills, towards the end you just take up House bills, but early on you just take up Senate bills. And we decide what goes to the floor and what doesn't go to the floor.

Then occasionally you'll get a very controversial bill that the lieutenant governor, or in the case of the House, the Speaker wants to Grooverize, hold back a little bit, generally for whatever reasons. And they are sent to the Rules Committee. The Rules Committee is a pretty deliberatively pot. It doesn't get a lot of notoriety and attention, but it's equally as important as appropriations, and I chaired that for one year and appropriations for ten. That one year was enough. They beat on your pretty good. Everybody thinks their bill is more important than the other person's, but, you know, as I often say, the fleas come with the dog.

SHORT: So you've served as I recall on both the House and the Senate reapportionment committees. Now, that's a can of worms.

HOOKS: Nothing could be more trying than the Reapportionment Committee. The state of Georgia and every state in the nation is required to reapportion themselves every ten years according to the population. The only thing that doesn't go by the population of course is the

United States Senate. But the rest of it, all congressional seats, house and senate seats, even your county commission, you're required to do that. So how do you draw those things is life and death, and people have a difficult time. It's gotten more difficult over the last decade or so with the extreme population of Atlanta, the growth in the Metropolitan Atlanta area.

And Georgia still enjoys the county identity and a senator from a given county or given region, and that's very important down in our area up and away from the metropolitan Atlanta area. The county unit system kind of had that tradition, and we were all raised in that tradition of holding these counties. So it's going to be a lot more difficult in the future with this extreme growth, dividing the state up by population. Very trying, very trying times.

SHORT: How do the deliberations go during a meeting of the appropriations – I mean the Reapportionment Committee?

HOOKS: Inside when it's finally decided behind closed doors, there behind closed doors is the way it's decided. I've seen them smooth, and I've seen the bloodiest things I've ever seen in my life. The committee itself generally will have to have something worked out, and you'll have to count your votes before you get your plan or their plan or this district or your district or things like that. It button-holed. It's pretty brutal, pretty brutal.

SHORT: There is criticism of gerrymandering by both parties. I guess that the party in control of the majority would probably win out in the end, but I'd like to ask you this: Is this the best

way for the state to reapportion its legislative districts and the congressional districts or would a reapportionment commission be a better idea?

HOOKS: A reapportionment commission would be a better idea. And this current plan that we're operating under now was drawn by a federal judge, which is an independent area, if you will. And I think that might be the better way. But getting everybody to agree on it and do it is not going to be easy. I think a reapportionment commission could serve well, but I don't see that in practical terms happening.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about party politics in Georgia. What do you attribute to being the reason for the takeover by the Republican Party?

HOOKS: Well, first of all, I think the National Democratic Party hurt the Democratic Party in the state of Georgia. I think people out there viewed the National Democratic Party as becoming out of touch with the values of the average citizen of this state. And I think the people had voted traditionally since the '60s particularly, nationally they felt more aligned with the Republican Party on the national level than on the state level. They did a much more effective job. They're attack dogs, and they did a much more effective job. They had – all these years the republicans had very little to do but attack. And all they did is attack, attack, vote no, and continue with their attack. And after a while, the leadership of the Democratic Party was busy governing the states. You know, it's the easiest thing in the world to do, is criticize; it's harder to govern. And they

didn't have the ability to govern. You know, they weren't in the governorship; they weren't in the leadership. So it's been very difficult for them.

I'm not a great fan of rabid party politics. I just don't think that serves people well. If you went out here and across this state and you were going to go around with a group of folks and said we're going to get up old Bob Short and we're going to run him from the House, you wouldn't go through a local party to do that; you'd go through the community. You'd be around the courthouse. You'd ask people at the Rotary Club and the Kiwanis Club and the Chamber of Commerce, the Development Authority, a leader in his church, and things like that. But what you find today with a lot of these folks that are coming up, they've grown up in party politics, which is something that I've never been terribly involved with.

So I don't think it's served our state or nation that well to do that because you might have a third of the state that are die hard republicans, a third of the state that's die hard democrats, but you've got most people out there that don't really fall in either category that are going to look for the better person in there...man, woman, black, white, whatever. So I think we do a disservice to our state. I think it has not served our state well to become so partisan politically. And it's really happened over the last 15, 20 years. It didn't exist before that. You had two parties in the Democratic Party I understand, Talmadges and anti-Talmadges, but it wasn't to the degree I see today.

SHORT: So you would not support registration by party?

HOOKS: No, I will not support registration by party. I don't think that serves our state well at all.

SHORT: Do you think there will ever be an opportunity for independents to organize and become a party?

HOOKS: No, perhaps in certain cases. And in my lifetime, you've seen the Dixiecrats raise up in the aftermath of the Truman era. And then you've seen the Wallace crowd that actually carried Georgia when George Wallace ran for governor. But these people are a conglomeration of more or less independents, republicans, and democrats; but I don't see in practical terms – as a matter of fact, the trend would be the other way. I think the independents would just be independents. I don't think they'd organized into a political party. In my opinion, that is where most people today kind of settle. They don't necessarily settle. You know, you can be Baptist like I am, but you don't necessarily agree with some of the Baptist preachers all the time. And that's kind of the way it works.

SHORT: I guess you know that you're one of three senators in America who have a former President in your district. There'd be one in Maine, one in Florida, and one in Georgia. Do you ever hear or see President Carter very often?

HOOKS: Hear from him all the time. He's full of calls. I had breakfast with him Christmas

Eve. He gets his hair cut at a barber shop right next door to my office. I'd say I see him every, oh, several weeks; we've got some issues that affect the city of Plains in his hometown right now. I mean, he was in contact with me yesterday. Jimmy Carter is an unusual fellow from the standpoint that he went right back home, right back in his home, right back in his hometown. He cares nothing about traveling the lecture circuit, nothing about serving on some corporate board or some golf resort, like some of these other presidents had done. And he's just right back there. He's totally focused on what is best for his hometown of Plains and his family. And then his other love, of course, is to work for the Carter Center, which is largely carried on here in Atlanta. But I've known the Carter family for generations. Some of his cousin, Hugh Carter's children, and I are very, very close to this day. And I was very close to all the members of the Carter family. I know them all, his family and his wife's family. So, you know, I don't know who the others are, but they don't hear from their President like I hear from mine.

SHORT: Good, good. Let's talk now a little bit about George Hooks again. Have you ever considered running for a higher office?

HOOKS: No, Bob, I hadn't. I like what I'm doing. I've enjoyed it. My idea was when I got in the legislature I was going to stay here and work hard and learn the process and try to do that. Everybody, when they're up here for a while, and many are here for a while, they're going to have people come to them and say, oh, we want you to be governor or lieutenant governor, congressman of the United States Senate. Certainly, that little whisp runs through your mind, but

it hasn't been the passion. I looked on this as life's calling, and that's what it's been, and it's served me very well. I have the decisions I make of what I view as best for Georgia and best for my district. It's not to run for some higher office. It's a pretty high office anyway, being in the Senate.

SHORT: That's right. You've been here, this will be your 29th year --

HOOKS: 29th.

SHORT: -- in the State Capitol, which brings to mind Hugh Gillis, with whom you served.

Hugh was here for 55 years and seven months, as he likes to remind you.

HOOKS: Hugh Gillis is a true gentleman of Georgia. And I've known many. Terrel Star is a true gentleman of Georgia, and Hugh Gillis is, the late Paul Brown of Athens, Sr., was a true gentleman of Georgia. Hugh Gillis is always just a prince of a gentleman. Senator Gillis, if I'm not wrong, holds the record nationally in his tenure. He was just in his 20s. He had been elected to the Georgia House a year before they bombed Pearl Harbor. And he was a member of the House that elected the governor in the middle of the night. I mean, he had a tremendous record. And his family founded the county he lives in, and he's a third generation of his family to serve in the Georgia legislature. And the last time he ran, there were three Gillises on the ballot: his brother, his son, and himself. So Senator Gillis is by far the senator's senator. And that's part of

our tradition in Georgia that I'm afraid to some degree we're losing. He looked after his people, but he also had a heart that he viewed all of Georgia.

Jimmy Carter, when he was governor and reorganized state government, he was going to abolish the forestry commission. Senator Gillis just sat down on that, and we have the forestry commission today, thanks to Senator Gillis. So President Carter will disagree with some of that, but that was Senator Gillis believing in what he did. He believed in his home. He knew where he was from, knew where he was going back to; and he's a true gentleman and a great leader.

SHORT: Well, after 29 years here serving the people of Georgia, as you look back on your career is there anything that you might have done differently?

HOOKS: I've learned this all my life, and so has anybody when you get a little experience or age on you: hindsight is 20/20, and we don't enjoy that benefit. There are probably some things. I don't think anything major that I was involved in. It would have been easy for me to vote against that flag change when Barnes proposed it the first time. Griffin Bell called me and encouraged me to vote in favor of the Barnes bill. Jimmy Carter called and the mayor of Americus called. And frankly, we were under a lot of pressure then. But I'm proud. I think I did the right thing. Politically it would have been easier not to do it, and of course you see what it did to Governor Barnes. On the major things, I think there probably could have been -- no, I wouldn't have changed anything I've done. I stand by them. But like I say, hindsight is 20/20; we don't enjoy that luxury.

SHORT: Fourteen times you faced the electorate.

HOOKS: Fifteen.

SHORT: Fifteen times. Would you do it the 16th?

HOOKS: We'll see. I'm not going to say. Probably so.

SHORT: Well, good, because if you didn't Georgia would suffer a great, great loss. One final question: If you were asked to give advice to young people who are interested in running for public office today, what would you tell them?

HOOKS: I would tell them to broaden their outlook on this state and to focus on doing what is best for Georgia. I would tell them to learn about the other areas of this state and not just me, my area. You can serve your area better and get your things done by working with people. The key to politics is the key to anything. You work with people. Don't lie to people. Don't come up here with some self-serving agenda, whether it's business or anything else. But to broaden your perspective, number one; be honest, be friendly, and keep your skirts clean and you'll be all right.

SHORT: Well, you're a good teacher.

HOOKS: Thank you.

SHORT: Senator George Hooks, I want to thank you on behalf of Young Harris College, the Richard Russell Library, and the University of Georgia and particularly myself.

HOOKS: Thank you, Bob. You're a great friend.

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