

**Dubose Porter interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Dubose Porter**

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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 at the University of Georgia, and the University of Georgia. Our guest today is Democrat Dubose Porter, former majority leader of the Georgia House, now minority leader, and owner and publisher of the Dublin Courier Herald. Welcome, Dubose. We're delighted to have you with us.

DUBOSE PORTER: Well, good to be with you. Let me make one correction for history's sake. Well, I was Speaker pro tem --

SHORT: Speaker pro tem

PORTER: -- in the Georgia House after -- I was elected in 1982. Roy Rowland was in the legislature from Dublin and when he decided to run for Congress, the seat was open. Roy was my backyard neighbor and I had worked for Sam Nunn in Washington. My daddy had been mayor of Dublin and I'd just come back to practice law in Dublin when this opened up. And we saw that -- that there was a lot of opportunity or lost opportunity for the people I had grown up with. I thought this would be a great opportunity to give something back and it's been really a great journey as I finish up now almost 26 years in the Georgia House.

When I was first elected, education was always a priority and I asked to be on the

education committee and was appointed there by Speaker Murphy. And what I -- it was during the time that I thought something very unique happened. Under Joe Frank Harris, we formulated what was called quality basic education that for the first time took money in a formula and it went with a student. And it was weighted. Students with special needs were weighted heavier so that resources would go there. We've never funded it like we should and it got to a point, particularly under Zell Miller and Roy Barnes where we were heading that way. Unfortunately, in the last seven years that's been cut by almost \$2 billion. But that still needs to be a priority for Georgia. I later had the opportunity to chair the education committee, to chair the education subcommittee and appropriations and later probably, the best job at the Capitol is chair in Higher Ed, which is working with our universities and technical colleges. You work with smart people who want to do great things for this state and it was probably one of the most challenging and just stimulating positions here at the Capitol.

SHORT: I've often wondered how your home town of Dublin got its name.

PORTER: Well, it goes back to the early 1800s. You had a surveyor whose wife was Post Mistress. And they say that it was called Sandbar at the time, which was a sandbar on the Oconee River and the official name of the town was Sandbar. And of course, you just had farms up and down the river, the Oconee River. But when he had

the opportunity to survey the town and name it, his wife was homesick and she was from Dublin, so he named it Dublin in her honor and in honor of her homeland.

SHORT: So you grew up there.

PORTER: Right, my dad's family has lived there since before it was Dublin. They were there as farmers back in the early 1800s and later moved to Dublin. My mom's family is from Atlanta and moved here after the Civil War and they met at the University of Georgia actually in Eugene Odum's first ecology class is how they met and married and moved back to Dublin.

SHORT: That's interesting. Tell us a little bit about your early life in Dublin.

PORTER: Well, you know growing up there is just a real special place. My family had lived there forever, my dad's family. So everybody loved you just because of who you were. My grandfather, my dad's daddy died when he was young. He was 11. So my grandmother, you know, just had -- it was during the hard time of the '20s and '30s. Everybody just kind of took care of each other in a town like Dublin. My grandmother had gone to Agnes Scott. Her daddy had owned the riverboats that took the cotton down to the coast at Derry and brought back the fertilizer. So you had a really

rich life to -- of a lot of good history and folklore from the river.

So she lived right downtown. So there was always a child that was sent over to stay with grandma, and that was me. And it was just a great way to grow up. We made a pound cake every Saturday morning, sitting on an old stool that had been made on the farm, you know, 100 years ago. And, but it was right downtown. So downtown Dublin was my front yard and playground, and everybody just looked after us. They raised us and you just knew you were loved because of just being there. And it was a great way to grow up. It was a great way of caring about each other and when someone was sick, the community responded. When somebody did something great, the community celebrated.

But it was really a great place and a great time to grow up there. I think it's even great now, but I have great memories of growing up, and riding my bicycle around town, and spending Saturdays at the movies. And it really was a great way -- my daddy had grown up there almost like a Huckleberry Finn story. I mean he had a boat on the river and they played on the river, and the stories that he tells from that are very similar to that.

SHORT: So you went to school in Dublin.

PORTER: Right, I went to Dublin High School and when I graduated, I went to Davidson College, a Presbyterian school in North Carolina and had thought about

political science and thought about law school, but there I guess I started reading Irish and Southern writers, Flannery O'Connor, Faulkner and it just opened up that new world for me. Of course, I had grown up in the library. My first job was driving the bookmobile, which is the local -- that's how people, you got books from the library to the country. Blondell Snellgrove was the book mobile librarian and they always hired a young man to drive it and hold the books, and that was my job. So what a great way in the summers to grow up where everybody would run down to the book mobile and check out books and you really learned an early appreciation of reading and what it means to families and what the opportunity for education -- having access to it mattered. You see it now with technology. When you have access to it, it matters and we need to do more of that through a broader range of Georgia.

SHORT: You know, you probably won't remember this, but one time on the beach at St. Simons I ran into you and you told me that you had spent some time in Australia. Do you remember that?

PORTER: Right, after my sophomore year, back then you had student standby tickets for flights and it was really cheap if you would stand around and wait. And I went down and drove a pilot car to the Outback and it was a great adventure. And thankfully, my college wanted people to do that. They had a great program the next

summer at Oxford, England. You know, it just exposes you to a world that you're glad you could go as far away as you could because it made you really appreciate where you came from.

SHORT: How long did you stay there?

PORTER: Just a summer.

SHORT: Just a summer.

PORTER: Yeah.

SHORT: And then when you finished Davidson, you went to law school.

PORTER: Yeah. I took a year out and worked for Sam Nunn and worked on Wash Larsen's congressional campaign and then went to law school. And when I went -- after I graduated from law school, my -- who became my law partner, I had a job in Savannah, but his father just died and my grandfather, my dad's daddy had been an attorney who had died as I said early, and he had been his law partner, his father. And when his father died, Jim called me about that next week and said, "Have you thought



about coming to Dublin?" And I said, "Well, I wasn't sure." He said, "Well, your grandfather's law books are in our library. Why don't you come, sit down, let's talk about it."

So I did. I came home and just glad I did, but it was great to have that opportunity to come back and be a part of the next phase of growth for your community. In 1987, we had the chance to buy the local newspaper there with Griffin Lovett whose family had owned and bought it together. So I've had that unique, wonderful life of owning the daily newspaper, and serving the legislature, and just being able to work on projects to try to challenge and improve our life in middle Georgia.

**SHORT:** Let's talk for a minute about your newspaper experience. When and why did you decide to go into the newspaper business?

**PORTER:** Well, one is I've always loved reading. I've always loved newspapers and I love what newspapers can do for a local community. People want to know what's going on in their own community. They can see what's happening around the world on television and the internet, but there needs to be a challenge of where we are at home and there's nothing better than a good, strong community newspaper to communicate that. And I've always just loved reading them and when I had that opportunity I thought this was a chance of a lifetime and it's been a great, great

experience and I've been there since '87.

SHORT: Tell us about the Lovett Family. I remember Mr. Herschel Lovett was in the legislature back in my day.

PORTER: Yeah, Griffin's grandfather was Herschel Lovett. Every small town during the '30s had a kingpin and that was Mr. Herschel Lovett. And he had farming interests, and hardware, and tractor, and implement business and was always a really forward thinking person too -- transportation education. And he inspired his son, Bill Lovett, who spent his life as kind of our quite benefactor in Dublin and, you know, you would see a park that would come up and it was done because Bill Lovett quietly had the resources to make sure something good happened there. And so his family's always been very much like mine, which loved their community and always gave a lot back.

So Griffin and I've had a great partnership. His brother was Billy Lovett who served on the public service commission, county commission, local. He was on the city council for a while. So there's always that sense of giving back and taking part of the responsibility, kind of taking your turn to do good things for your community.

SHORT: I know that being a legislator is almost a full-time job. How do you balance your duties between your responsibilities as a state representative and as a

newspaper publisher?

PORTER: Well, one is we've had great people to help you and a great family who understands and supports you. You've got to have both of those. I've got a great wife who loves both the newspaper business and appreciates what government can do. So you can't do that without that. We've had four boys and we've raised them the way I was raised, to understand that politics is important, that it's part of what makes things happen or not happen. So it really hasn't been a conflict. It's really been a compatible vision of helping good things happen. You know, I look back on community. I was able to get the technical college there. The college. When I came back, my secretary was smarter than I was in high school but didn't have that chance to go to college. Well, I was able to go to college then go to law school at Mercer, on law review, came back, and practiced law. It's just a matter of coming back and seeing those needs and using the resources of this in our job to get those there. We love to hunt and fish down there. I've been able to get two wildlife management areas and a public fishing lake that I had named for Hugh Gillis who has been my mentor through the years and someone who loves the outdoors as well.

So when you look downtown, we've been able to get grants to renovate downtown so you have that sense of place that Faulkner talks about in the South. And we need to know that's important for communities because that's what makes -- that's what gives you

depth of your history. And you're always challenged by your time in history and what you can do while you're here. And those are the kinds of things that I sought out to get accomplished and because of the support of my family and community, we've been able to be a part, to put together some things that have been good for a lot of people.

SHORT: Let me ask this question about newspapers. What effect has the internet had on newspapers?

PORTER: Well, on big papers it's probably had a more challenging effect than on our size. Our size are doing fine. Now, a lot more people look at it on the internet, but people want to know what's going on in the community. I mean, we've actually grown over the last year, which is against all the trends of the big metro papers, but small papers like ours, people look forward to. I have women who cannot cook supper until they get their newspaper and you just want to mean that much to their life. It's -- what that means is we are responsible for making sure it's worthwhile. So it's not like it's our newspaper. It's the community's newspaper and you've got to always remember that. And as long as we do that, newspapers are going to be there for a long time whether it's in the digital form or in its print form.

SHORT: Well, let's get back to politics. Tell us what you remember about your

first race.

PORTER: Well, there were four people in that race, one a former mayor, one a county attorney, one a local businessman, and what we did is just outworked everybody. Everybody knew that I was young, I was just home and we just got out and outworked everybody. And we talked about what we thought was important in education and job training being most of that. The first race we were all within 100 votes because really good men and good friends who were running. So it was never really a negative race like you see today. We all just ran, worked hard, knocked on doors, but you've got to enjoy it and growing up as I did, I just loved it because I actually gained weight politicking. Because I remember Old River Road in East Dublin, you know every house you go in the summer they were putting up peas or made a cake for church, and made an extra one for their family and they want you to sit down and visit.

And it was just a great experience, and as long as you take the time. You've got to remember, politics is about people and listening and knowing what their concerns are. And I just enjoyed -- you never forget that first race and you never forget those who helped you, and you never forget those stops along the way. But it was really a great -- nobody expected me to win, but we outworked everybody.

SHORT: And you got to Atlanta in 1983.

PORTER: That's right.

SHORT: Joe Frank Harris had been elected governor and Tom Murphy was Speaker of the House.

PORTER: Right.

SHORT: What was your impression of the legislature when you first arrived?

PORTER: Well, you know, you're always excited by this new process. There were things that I thought could be done better, but you kind of accepted things as they were. But you realize that everybody here is a good cross section of Georgia and that everybody here wanted to do the right thing. You had some that were here for different reasons, but really everybody's intent was really to try to do something good and collectively and you didn't have the partisan fights that you have now that have evolved, I guess, through the '90s with the different parties like they did. But it was always kind of a collegiate group. I mean, it was kind of like going to the courthouse back home. You would come here. You'd fight about issues. You'd work hard about things and afterwards everybody would go back to the hotel and tell stories, and get together, and

you'd get back up the next day and go back in it.

But the Joe Frank Harris years were ones of great growth in Georgia. I remember of course the education bill, growth strategies, how to plan growth right, how to not just have random growth, but let's start planning water and sewer and clean water, and be thoughtful of how to grow communities. And he did a real great job in making that a priority for the state. And then of course, when Zell Miller ran for governor he called me one morning to be his floor leader. And I really thought that it was a friend of mine playing a joke. Zell has a very distinctive accent. A lot of people would mock the accent and I really thought when the phone rang at 7:30 in the morning, somebody was playing a joke on me.

But I realized it was really Zell and he asked me to be his floor leader. And I had not been a big supporter of the lottery, which was a key part of his administration. And he said, "Well, come up and let's sit down," and he asked me is there anything that -- he said, "All I want you to help me do is let the voters have a chance to vote on it. That's why I was elected. Can you help me do that?" And he asked me if there was anything I would like. And I asked him that as part of his -- I had, let me just take a step back. I had chaired a committee, co-chaired it with Hugh Gillis on where the state should be on natural resources, on special places in Georgia and how to set those special places aside, on historic preservation and natural areas. And I had introduced the River Corridor Protection, because you had the mountains, you had the beach, but my area of the state

had the river corridors, which is what's special about the ecology there. And he had mountain protection and I told him that river corridor was a protection, and he offered to make that as a joint bill as part of the administrative package and that he wanted to do something that had come out of our study committee about setting aside the acreage in Georgia.

And it's a program that we named Preservation 2000 where we set aside 100,000 of Georgia's most ecologically sensitive lands, some along the coast, some in middle Georgia, some in the mountains and it's a great legacy, I think, as much as the Hope Scholarship, Preservation 2000 and River Corridor Protection were really a great part of the Miller administration. And that's something, looking back, that I was just proud to be, to look back and realize that the good things we do from that.

**SHORT:** Most freshmen always look for friends and mentors. Who were your friends and who were your mentors?

**PORTER:** Well, I had two great mentors that I was really fortunate to have. One, Hugh Gillis who was our State Senator, ended up being the longest serving, you know, legislator in the country. Just wise. His family had been involved in politics and he just took me under his arm. He was my State Senator. And the other one was Pete Phillips. Pete chaired Natural Resources. He was from Soperton, Georgia. He and his



wife, Mary Ida, were my neighbors, were my parent's friends and maybe they just felt obligated to look after me, but Pete always took care of projects in the budget for me, helped guide me through legislation. Things that I wanted to do important in natural resources, he was always there as a mentor. So between those two, I think I just had some of the best in Georgia's history.

SHORT: Well, back then, Dubose, I think you'll agree that the issues that the state faced were education, transportation, taxes, industrial development. You've been here 26 years. It seems that those issues still are paramount to this state. Are we really doing what we should?

PORTER: I don't think we are now. I think we're heading that way, but we're behind in transportation. Georgia's growing. It's not whether we're going to grow, it's going to be how we're going to grow. We need mass transit. Every major city, urban area in the country has a way for mass transit with rail to move people. We don't have that in Georgia other than in the metro area and that's why you have gridlock in the traffic around Atlanta. We're not planning for that well. It's not a priority for this governor. That was for Roy Barnes and we were heading that way. He created GRETA, which was the rail authority thinking that we would have these outer corridors, one down to Macon, one over to Athens, later to Chattanooga, one over to Columbus as the backbone

of this, having a multimodal center that it all connect with MARTA in downtown Atlanta.

That's still needed. It's kind of been on the shelf now for seven years. That needs to be dusted off. In education, this administration has cut education while we have fought to try to restore it. In taxing, you know, Bob, when you cut the state you force local governments to do more. Under Zell and under Roy Barnes, we were getting where we were paying 60% of education. Locals were paying 40% because the cuts are 55%, 45%, we pushed more on the local community than the state's taking its obligation. And I think those are areas we can pick back up. Healthcare is another one as well. We were doing things that balanced public health in rural communities and urban areas and we've abandoned a lot of that, and that needs to be restored too.

SHORT: You've had a lot of experience in education, sponsored a lot of bills in both primary and secondary education. Do you think we're putting our money in the right places?

PORTER: I think we can do more in higher-ed, especially. As we talked about earlier, I introduced the Hope Scholarship. A lot of people claim it, but I'm the one that had the signature on it. We had to pass it in the House first and that has been just one of the greatest programs ever where you had, you know, 60% of those those who made over 1300 in SAT went out of state prior to Hope. Now, 60% stay here. You know, what is

done on keeping the brain talent of native Georgians here in Georgia and I don't -- people have moved to Georgia and made it their home qualify for it. It's just been one of the greatest things we could have done.

This administration changed the criteria that cut a lot of people from having that opportunity. The result is you have a lot of money that's built in the reserves. We ought to be using that to educate people. You know, when we look at where we rank and look at our capital wealth, for every college degree over a person's lifetime they'll make an additional on an average \$1 million. So in a large county, 100 college graduates over a lifetime of 100 people is \$100 million in capital built because of the intellectual investment, and I think we can do a little bit more.

SHORT: You mentioned the lottery. Very controversial issue for several years. Tell us about how the lottery was passed against the opposition of so many potent politicians.

PORTER: Well, the Speaker was not for it.

SHORT: The Speaker being Mr. Tom Murphy.

PORTER: Tom Murphy at the time, and Zell Miller, after that election Murphy

understood that he needed to put this to the ballot. And we had to work hard for Zell. We worked day in and out. We knew we had -- we had to get 120 votes and we knew we had about 126 or 127 and it passed by 126 votes. I still remember it today because it was that important. That put it on the ballot. Now, on the ballot it barely passed. It was defeated 2-1 in my district, but what it's done in education, what it's done in pre-K, what it did in putting technology in schools, what it did in investing in technical training for jobs for people, we were able to put a technical college now within 45 miles of every Georgian. So when the economy changes, we can retrain as well and much less what it's done on the research alliance and bringing bright people into our university system. It is really the thing that made the turn in education for Georgia, but we've leveled out. We need to take it to that next level now.

SHORT: Incidentally, how did you meet Zell Miller?

PORTER: Well, through a local judge who had served in the senate with him, Malcolm Townsend. He was a superior court judge. He came out of the class that had Carl Sanders and Zell Miller, Roy Lambert, and Zell Miller.

SHORT: And Jimmy Carter.

PORTER: Yeah, and Jimmy Carter were all in the same class in the U.S. Senate, in the State Senate I mean and they were just always good friends. And when Zell ran, Bill Townsend called me and said -- I didn't really know Zell because I was in the House, but I got to know him better through Judge Townsend and that's how we got to be good friends.

SHORT: Getting back to education, let me ask you this question. What effect has the No Child Left Behind program had on education in Georgia?

PORTER: In Georgia, it changed things to go by testing and the federal government never really gave the resources to ramp it to where it should be, rather than achievement. What we have tried to do, we tried to get -- there is a level of third-grade reading and the emphasis was how do we put it in reading, in math, and get them to the level they should be, where No Child Left Behind, which was part of the federal, put standards for testing. So you tested whether you were at certain criteria in high school and if you didn't meet that test then you weren't -- you had not improved according to their standards. So I think you had teachers teaching to the test rather than teaching to achievement, and level, and enrichment, and knowledge.

And I hope we can shift it back now. It took the emphasis off reading. It was like this was the core of knowledge you had to have to pass the test and that's what you

taught rather than having an education. Rather reading broadly, rather having a more advanced challenge in math, in looking at science in a way that we've got to inspire again or we're going to be left behind by other countries.

SHORT: How do you feel about federal aid to education?

PORTER: It's been helpful, but it -- of course, the stimulus package that President Obama passed this time is going to save us this year because of the cuts that we would had to do because of the economy. But the federal help in education has helped in a lot of the technology and a lot of the special needs. Title One, which is your lower income to get your classrooms smaller so you can work more and more one-on-one with students. So in those ways it's helped. But the teaching to the test, I'm not sure if that's the best thing.

SHORT: We often hear about local school boards and local school superintendents. Do you think superintendents should be elected or appointed by the boards?

PORTER: Well, that was one of Zell Miller's big, big, big tasks and I had to carry that too. He felt -- he wanted to standardize. You had some appointed by the

grand jury. You had some elected locally. You had some appointed, but we wanted to -- what the thought was let's elect your local policymakers or your school board and then let's hire the best professional in education to run the school, and I think that's been a good turn for the state. Very controversial. Of course, everybody liked it the way they had it, but I did think it helped hire and up the -- up the quality of people who were hired to run the school system.

Took a lot of their local politics out, even though there's politics in everything, especially school systems. But the superintendent's main mission was to do the best thing academically for the kids there without having to worry about the politics and letting the school board be the policymakers and I think that's been a good balance, but that was one of the things we did early in Zell Miller's administration to standardize that.

**SHORT:** What are we doing to reduce the number of high school dropouts?

**PORTER:** We need to do more. I had finally worked on a program called, well it's called Joint Enrollment now, post-secondary options. We need to have it where you just don't drop out at 16, that if you get to a point let's jointly enroll at technical colleges, or if bright students are getting bored, let's jointly enroll them in college, your community colleges. You have AP courses but a lot of your smaller systems don't have the resources for that and I think to not just have the option of dropping out and going to

work, but let's get better trained so that what you make would be a better wage and a better life. And I think we need to do more in channeling into technical colleges and into higher-ed from colleges.

We've done a lot in the early grades to get third graders to read at a third grade level, but we've got to take it from there. That's kind of where Roy Barnes had taken it and then it hasn't really been an emphasis in the last seven years and we need to put that back.

SHORT: What's the status of our teacher training programs? Are we getting enough qualified teachers?

PORTER: No, and we need to expand that as well.

SHORT: How can we do that?

PORTER: Well, we need to make the opportunities more friendly in our colleges. We need it to match more of the calendar of what the school system is and we need to reward teachers as professionals. We really need to have -- Georgia ought to be the leader in what we pay our teachers. It ought to be the place that bright, energetic people want to work. Now, it's tough what they have to do with so many of the social



issues that students bring into the classroom, but I think we need to be able to attract the best and the brightest, and to do that we've got to do something with the salaries.

SHORT: What do you think about charter schools?

PORTER: As long as they're public schools, it's a good way for innovation. You know, in other words if we have a demographics here that we can have some exemptions because we want to get these goals accomplished, whether it's reading, or math, or science, can we have the chance to do that if we meet these goals. And that's -- those are okay. Charter schools have been a good innovation. Now, I don't think the vouchers are where the challenge is to take them out of public schools, but we've got to make this work. I mean, one of the greatest things of America and Georgia is the opportunity for education and we've got to make it work better. And if that's what -- if innovation that would show new ways of doing that and new ways of learning, charter schools have been very successful in doing that and they've been a good, a good addition to the school system.

SHORT: So you don't support school vouchers?

PORTER: No. All that does is takes resources that are already limited out of

your public schools, not that there's not a place for private schools and my children have been in them at times because of the way reading was done or for other reasons. But vouchers within public schools, so if it's not working for you that you can go to another one, I think should be available. But otherwise, you're taking away already limited resources.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute again about transportation. You have sponsored, as I recall, legislation to free up money for rapid transit projects. Do you think that that will ever happen?

PORTER: I'm optimistic. It might take another governor to make it work, but we have a fourth penny of sales tax that goes to the general fund, and what my bill did, and we passed it in the House and it fell in the Senate by four votes last session, would be to dedicate that to any transportation purpose, not just roads and bridges. What that will do is allow you to commit to the operation of mass transit, which you've got to dedicate certain money for operations to leverage 90% of the construction money from the federal government. So we need a place to be able to make that commitment. Now, it'll also help rural areas because you can do state aid and LARP, which is painting projects where you need it in rural areas.

So it was a great way to meet the urban needs and the rural, but we've got to have

that commitment of being able to operate the trains to get the federal money to move forward and it won't happen without it.

SHORT: There's an effort underway today to change the structure of the Georgia Department of Transportation. How do you feel about that?

PORTER: It'd be the biggest mistake we could ever make. It was taken out of the governor's office back in about 1960 because of all the corruption and it made it independent. It made it responsive to individual legislators and to districts, and for the last 40, almost 50 years, it's -- we have one of the best road systems in the country. Now, this governor with the what's called Garvey Bonds, what he calls Fast Forward that obligated a lot of the money and getting involved again politically in DOT and not letting it run itself, it's had some problems in the last year. But I think we can recover from that.

We need to keep DOT independent. It needs to be on whether the project is right for that time, whether congestion, whether it's unsafe and that's where resources ought to go. Now, we have what's called congressional balancing so that everywhere in the state gets some money to improve transportation, but it would be big mistake to take it under one committee beholden to the governor with no accountability. And that's what this change would do. We'd be going back 50 years.

SHORT: Well let's get back to Dubose Porter. I believe it was 1992 you ran for Speaker.

PORTER: Right.

SHORT: Against Tom Murphy who became a legend. Why did you do that?

PORTER: Well, really because of the slush fund that he had. You know, every now and then you're part of something that's just in your gut when something happens you know it's not right. And nobody else is trying to straighten it out. You just feel like, well somebody needs to. Well, I appreciate the Speaker, but he was out of a mindset that the world was changing around. I admire Speaker Murphy. I admire him for what he's done for the state but he did think that he was entitled to have a fund over here to do anything out of and that's just not right.

So out of that challenge, even though I didn't win, several great things came out of it. It was always embarrassing to come over here and be voting on bills you'd never heard of. So we change major -- two things. One, we changed the calendar from the day before so you had time as a legislator. It really, it opened up the power of the rank and file legislator. The other thing was called Fair and Open Grants Act and it took that

fund that he had set aside where everybody had access to it, and it was done on the merits of the project not on just -- well, it was a slush fund and it was wrong, and it was illegal, and somebody needed to straighten that out. Now, we didn't win but the objective of changing the procedure did win, and long-term we survived that, and came through that, and did it for the right reasons.

It wasn't a personal thing against Tom Murphy. It was against the process that had become wrong.

SHORT: The green door.

PORTER: Right, and we opened that up.

SHORT: Tell us about the green door.

PORTER: Well, there used to be a green door where the budget committee would shut the door, go in and make decisions out of the public's view and I guess maybe 'cause I'm in the newspaper business I really do believe in open government. That really is something I think people, it's their government, ought to be a part of. They ought to have access to information and decisions that are made and why they're made on their behalf. So you had the old green door still called that, but it doesn't operate like that

anymore, but it allowed projects to be dispersed equally based on need throughout the state and the process of how we ran the House. And to Speaker Murphy's credit, he understood that change needed to be made and did it after that race.

SHORT: It's very difficult to get a budget passed in Georgia before the last hours. Can anything be done to change that?

PORTER: Just, you have to have a deadline. We have a 40-day session. If it was 60-days, it'd be on the 59th day. Right now, it's always on the 39th day. But I think you just have to have a deadline for that. Money drives policy and this was what I found in education. I wanted to be on the education committee and then I realized maybe I need to be in higher Ed. Maybe I need to be on -- but it's appropriations that sets policy in government. Where you put the emphasis, is your emphasis if you fund education, that's your priority. If you fund healthcare, that's your priority, transportation, natural resources and conservation, but that's really -- or economic development. That's where priorities are set and that's really the main mission of what we do here as policymakers.

SHORT: But it is true that the budget is finalized by the committees and presented to the House and the Senate the last, well the waning moments of the session.

If you disagree with the committee decision, what options do you have?

PORTER: Well, that's why when Terry Comb was Speaker and I was Speaker pro tem, we always made sure we passed the budget before the last day of the session, so you had a day in case it did happen because it could. Now, because of the fights between the current leadership, it's down to the last wire and it's a very dangerous way to run it.

SHORT: Yeah. Well, let's get down to party politics. In 2002, the Republican Party won the governor's office for the first time in many, many, many years when Sonny Perdue defeated Roy Barnes. What happened?

PORTER: Well, a couple of things. Roy, one of the brightest people you'd ever know, but he had a -- explaining what he wanted to do was always a challenge. The things he did in education were really great. How he explained it had a way that teachers felt like they were blamed for the poor performance in Georgia and identified that with him. He -- even though Zell had tried to change the state flag, Roy changed it to something that had nothing to do with the history of Georgia and there were a lot who felt a lot of resentment towards that, and just not necessarily what was done, but how it was done.

So everybody was really surprised when Roy was beat, an incumbent governor, but it changed Georgia or maybe we were a reflection of a lot of the trends in the country. But it wasn't so much as republican and democrat as people who disagreed on some of the things, not necessarily that Roy's done, but how he had gone about doing them.

But Roy was bright and we needed, you know, when Zell had tried to do the -- changed the flag, the idea was to go back to the pre-'56 flag and that's really where we've ended up. And people accept that. It incorporates their history and tradition without the other things of what the other symbol had become. And so there was a lot of kind of reparations to that, but I think out of -- you've got to constantly remember you've got to explain and engage the public in why you do things, and there's a great lesson in that. But Roy is so smart and his heart was right in what he tried to do, but I think it was in communicating that with the people that cost him that election.

SHORT: Shortly after that election, Dubose, some of the Democratic Senators in the State Senate switched parties, which gave the Republican Party for the first time control of the Georgia Senate. What was your reaction to that?

PORTER: Well, it was surprising and there was a hard edge to that. You know, it wasn't like, oh let's have a different bunch of ideas. They wanted to exclude the lieutenant governor and it really drove wedges like I've never seen it along partisanship



that we had not really had in Georgia before. Two years later, when the House became majority Republican pretty much the same happened there. It's like the Republicans didn't want to admit that there was any history prior to them and, you know, we're Democrats even though the Republican's a minority, you always respected seniority. And people's background in certain areas so they could use them here. But it was kind of like everything was along party lines and it still exists a lot to that, and I think Washington had become a lot more like that too, unfortunately.

But I hope, I think people are tired of that. I think they want us to get the job done than fight about partisan things. They want education better. They want transportation fixed and gridlock in Atlanta. They want healthcare. They want to be able to know that if they catch the fish in the local stream that it's safe enough to eat and I think we've got to get back to things that people really care about than partisan ideal issues. And I think you've got the radicals on both sides have been too much of a voice for that, and moderates like myself in the middle, I think more people are ready to get back to those.

SHORT: Well, you were in the democratic leadership for many years. How did the transition from a democratic general assembly to a republican general assembly affect you personally?

PORTER: Well, it's something you have to kind of work through. A lot of people couldn't believe that it happened, but it did and where you're used to making the final decisions on a lot of things you realize that you have to find a different way to get things that your community needed. And we've been able to do that, but you just have to adapt to a different method. And like I said, they wanted to act like nothing had happened before they became in power, but -- and didn't recognize seniority or a lot of the talents of people.

But it's been different, but over a couple of years, we're finally realizing that. Democrats are more unified. They realize that we thought everybody knew the great things we did for Georgia in education and all those. They've portrayed us like something different. We didn't go out and explain to the public who we really were and I think we're finally back doing that again, that stability in state government for local government is now protected by the Democratic Caucus on a lot of these crazy tax bills that are attempted to be passed this year and last year. The priority for us is education. Even though it's been cut, we don't agree with it. Somebody's got to speak up for that. And healthcare for kids has been cut. Somebody's got to speak up for that. In conservation and taking care of clean water and air and our great forest and wildlife, somebody's got to speak up for that. And that's who democrats are and I think we've recaptured our heart again by maybe being in this position.

SHORT: With such a sizeable majority, it should be easy for the republicans to push their agenda in the House and the Senate. Do you think they're taking Georgia in the right direction?

PORTER: Well, of course I don't because I -- well, some of the things they've done, they have -- they wanted to cut eligibility for a lot of the retirement. It's changed the nature of state employees. You know, it's changed the state patrol from being the greatest law enforcement agency in the state and the GBI. It's kind of like all -- it's like they want -- people are finally figuring out what they mean by smaller government. That means that we're now having fewer resources for education. Our public safety's not what it should be. Our air and water are not being protected like it should be and I think maybe what they've tried to do with their agenda, the public is finally waking up to say this is not what I thought it would be, not by these leaders. And I think that's why we can offer an alternative better.

SHORT: How would you characterize the relationship between the House Republican leadership and you as minority leader and your party?

PORTER: Well, you've got to find those areas where you have some leverage. There are times when they need our votes and you've got to be ready to make, when that

happens, to trade something important. I remember two years ago we were down to the last part of the session. We were trying to pass part of the transportation bill, but we wanted to make sure that Jekyll Island got protected and there was a lot of move for private developers to come in that. And in that room, what it took to get our votes was it wasn't anything for us, it was protect Jekyll Island, protect some other things that we thought were important in education and to Glenn Richardson's credit, once he made that political deal with us, he stuck with it and we've been able to save Jekyll from being overbuilt and it's now still the people's island.

So we've had to pick out those areas where we could win and that may seem small, but to us those were real big because we feel like we were there to protect the people's interest when narrow interests were being sought after. So we've had to be more selective than on the battles where we could win, but we wanted to make sure they were in areas that we felt like were that important.

SHORT: You've been working hard to elect more democrats to the legislature. Are you having any success?

PORTER: We finally did this year. Last time, we broke even, two years ago. This time we picked up four seats but lost two incumbents and then the four seats were four that we're very proud of, one in the urban areas, one in Cobb County. One in the

rural area, Twiggs County. One in the suburban area, Rockdale County. One in a fast growing, Gwinnett County. So by seeing the trends, what are we running on? It's doing the right things in education, doing the right things for economic development, not just narrow interest of certain companies. Of let's broaden healthcare and put people back in doctor's offices rather than their only access through emergency rooms and let's do something for conservation.

And I think people of this state want those things and if we're identified as the ones to do that for them, we'll pick up even more seats. But that's what we ran on before and this year we turned the tide.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the state Democratic party. Some disenchanted Democrats seem to think that the state party is too urban, too dependent on minorities and labor. Do you think that's true?

PORTER: Well, no I don't. I think that that's how a lot of the national Democrats are portrayed and Republicans want to portray us the same way. You know, Jane Kidd from Lithonia, no Lavonia, Georgia is Chairman. We're sitting in Athens now. Her dad was Ernie Vandiver. Mother was one of Dick Russell's relatives. What we hope to do is talk about the great things the Democrats have been a part of throughout history and when you look at, you know, more sheriffs are Democrats than Republicans.

So I think what you're hearing is more of the Republican hype of trying to portray us like the national party, but democrats in Georgia when you look at county commissioners, sheriffs, the courthouse crowd, they're still Democrats because we care about people.

SHORT: And yet votes in those areas have been voting nationally for Republicans.

PORTER: Well, we've had candidates nationally that haven't identified with our people here and that we've got to do that again. You know, I think Sam Nunn was a great example of what people--they're moderate, they're thoughtful, they're forward thinking. I think if we can get back to running more candidates like that, we'll get back to winning. But look at the -- we may have lost the governor's race, but look at Thurbert Baker who's attorney general, Mike Thurmond, labor commissioner. We've got some really good-hearted people, Tommy Irvin who's be ag commissioner forever. And I really think people identify not so much as Democrats as good people holding those offices, and that's what we need to do better and offer candidates that can identify that same way.

SHORT: Dubose, some states require registration by party. Do you think we should do that in Georgia?

PORTER: Well, you have to declare when you go vote, but we don't have prior registration and I think a lot of people quite frankly like to vote without party affiliation at all, but I think you've got to have some way to show a distinction of ideas. And what's worked in Georgia has worked pretty well.

SHORT: So you don't believe in nonpartisan elections?

PORTER: Well, I do in judicial races and I really would not mind that statewide, but at least by being different parties is you are able to debate ideas, but quite frankly I've been a part of having my local courthouse, your judges need to be nonpartisan. That doesn't have to be identified with one way or another and I think the public, parties were a big deal at one time. I think they still are and there's still a role for them today.

SHORT: But as they say where I come from, there's always been two parties in Georgia, although we only had one, the Democratic Party. That was the Talmadges and the anti-Talmadages.

PORTER: Right.

SHORT: In those days.

PORTER: It was a time for that. And then we made a decision in the '60s with Carl Sanders, I mean were we going to move forward or not and Georgia made the right decision to move forward. We didn't become dominated by the problems of race and race is still an issue and an undercurrent and we're still trying to get over that. I think Georgia has done some remarkable, I mean with the Atlanta we've been one of the real international centers on what can be done in moving forward and being progressive in race. But we didn't let that destroy Georgia like some of the other states and hang over them like a cloud.

But I see things now that need to be changed there too, but we're still trying to move forward from that.

SHORT: That was Governor Vandiver who made the decision to obey the law and not have the trouble that most of these other southern states had. Jimmy, President Carter has said that was the most courageous decision of that century.

PORTER: Yeah, and I agree with him and what that has done for Georgia today is still significant.



SHORT: You've had a great career.

PORTER: Well, we've had a lot of help from a lot of people.

SHORT: As you look back over your years in public service, is there anything you might have done differently?

PORTER: You know, in looking back, no. We've all worked hard. We've had great people who have helped us. Like I said, a great family, a great community and are there more things we'd liked to have gotten done? Yes. Have we got them as quick as we'd like to get them done? No. But that's part of it and we've learned that that's just part of the nature of the beast. Sometime it takes you a while to get that idea to where it's accepted anywhere, or that project, or that school, or that road, or that special thing you want to do for your community.

SHORT: What has been your greatest accomplishment?

PORTER: Well, when I look back, of course when I ride around Dublin only the paper, I really haven't put a lot of it in the newspaper. We've just been able to get a lot of things done by getting the colleges, and the technical training, and the infrastructure

done in Dublin. But when you look at the state, to be a part of passing the Hope Scholarship was such a great change here. To be part of Preservation 2000 that set aside little Tybee Island, great places throughout the state that need to be set aside for all of Georgians forever. The public defender system I was the architect for and working with some great lawyers like Emmitt Bondurant and others who just cared that everybody had equal access to justice.

When you look back, there are those issues that you're proud that you were a part of getting accomplished and you see the changes it's made in this state in a positive way for people. But you always go back home and see what you did for so many people. If I'm ever down, and I say this a lot in my civic club speeches, if I ever get spiritually down, I ride out to the heart of Georgia Technical College and there you have over 1,500 people old and young changing their lives and their family's lives by being retrained to do something else that will support them financially and raise the standard of living for their families. If I ever get down, I go there or the local -- the branch campus of the college where you see lives being changed by enlightened minds. And when I see that, my house in town is right across the street from the campus and when I sit in my study and look over there, I just know that the time I've spent was worth it and the support that I've had from my family and friends that you appreciate more and more.

**SHORT:** What's your biggest disappointment?

PORTER: You know, looking back I don't have a big one. There's some things I would have liked to have done earlier. There's some things I'd like to do now, but in looking back, I really feel, I feel more strong about the successes than disappointments. Isn't that great that no disappointment comes to mind?

SHORT: Wonderful. Well, you're still a young man. A lot of years ahead of you. What is ahead for Dubose Porter?

PORTER: Well, I'm 55. My youngest children, twins, I've got Stephen, Guyton, Asa and Inman. My wife's Carol. The twins are now freshman at the University of Georgia and Carol and I have made the commitment to not do any other office but something local until my kids are grown, our kids are grown. So we're looking, after this session, of announcing running for governor in 2010. I've been here for 26 years. I'm 55. There are those things that you'd like to get finished in education, in public libraries, in conservation, in healthcare for kids, in transportation. There's some things that I would really love to get done in the same way I look back at my local community and feel like I've gotten so many of those, I'd like to take that and make a lot of that opportunity available to the state.

So we're looking at running for governor in 2010 and trying to finish out some of

those things that we'd love to get accomplished. So after this session, life will change again, but hopefully we can explain to people why this is important and why we need to go to this next level, and let's do it together too.

SHORT: Well, if asked for your advice, what would you tell a young, aspiring politician today?

PORTER: To run. Don't wait. Run. You know, the energy that you had when you were young is great and it balances out with the energy that you see and inspire from your children now. But get involved, run, be there, make that difference in your local community. There're so many areas that we still need help in. They can make every community a little bit better and do it. Don't hesitate. Don't think about tomorrow. Do it now. We only have really a short time on this earth and you want to go ahead and let's get it done while we can because you never know what will happen.

SHORT: Dubose, I want to thank you very much on behalf of Young Harris College, and the Richard Russell Library, and the University of Georgia, and myself for being with us today, and ask you if there's anything finally you would like to say.

PORTER: Well, that we have a great state because of our great people and it's

just been a real honor to serve and that I want to encourage everyone to do it too. It takes a collective effort to make this state better and we're going to add another two million people in the next ten years, so there will be a lot of great challenges and we need a lot of good-hearted, smart people to help do it. So I just want to encourage more to be involved in whatever way they're comfortable.

SHORT: Thank you.

PORTER: So thank you for taking the time with us. Enjoyed it.

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