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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is "Reflections on Georgia Politics," sponsored by Young Harris College, the Richard B. Russell Library and the University of Georgia. Our guest is George T. Smith, the only Georgian in modern political history to be elected Speaker of the

House, Lieutenant Governor, Judge of the Georgia Court of Appeals and a Supreme Court Justice. What shall I call you: Mr. Speaker, Governor, or Judge Smith?

GEORGE SMITH: George T.

SHORT: George T. You know, before we get too far, let's explain George T. and George L. You probably would not have used your middle initial, would you, if there hadn't been a George L.?

SMITH: No, no.

SHORT: And both of you were Speakers.

SMITH: Yeah. He was Speaker and I was Speaker, and he was Speaker and I was Lieutenant Governor, and they never got us straight. The news media never did get us straight.

SHORT: Well ...

SMITH: It helped us because whenever they printed something in there bad about me, I told them that was George L. they was talking about. [Laughter] And whenever they started on George L., he said that was George T. you're talking about. [Laughter]

SHORT: Well, it all began for you in Mitchell County.

SMITH: Yep.

SHORT: Do you...

SMITH: No, no, no Cobb – Cobb? Grady County.

SHORT: Grady?

SMITH: I was born – oh, yeah, I was born and raised in Mitchell, you're right.

SHORT: Mitchell County. You were born there and what was it like growing up back then in Mitchell County?

SMITH: Well, I was born October 15, 1916. Of course, I was about 6 years old before I remember anything because I started school when I was 6 years old. We were all farmers, no automobiles, no trucks, all wagons, buggies and riding mules and horses. I don't remember an automobile. There were just scattered automobiles. I don't remember automobiles until 1924. I was 8 years old. There were scattered automobiles, but I didn't get to go to town, so I didn't see

any of them.

I was born at my grandmother's house. My mother was the baby girl, and I was born in the community of Greenwood – I mean, Hopeful. I was born in Hopeful at my grandmother's home and came back to the old log cabin house that my grandfather built when he came back from the War between the States. By the way, he went to the War between the States. He was at the first Battle of Manassas and he was at Appomattox. He went through the entire war and didn't get a crippling injury. It's amazing. I followed him several years later and I was just glad I got through without a crippling injury.

But I was born and raised there, and we went back to that small – little old small farm – 125 acres. And I lived there for a couple of years and then daddy moved to Flint to be an overseer. Then he came back home to the home farm, and he came back because cotton was just coming in big and was making so much money he decided he'd come back home and start back farming again with cotton because it was so – it made so much money than what he was.

He came back in 1920 or '21; I don't remember which year. But it was the first year that the boll weevil invaded the South. He had 48 acres of cotton and made one bale. Lost all of it to boll weevils. Well, he tried again the next year and made another bale of 40 acres and, ultimately, lost his place as a result of because the money he borrowed to farm on those two years, he paid interest on it until he lost his place in 1935. The interest was the only thing in the world that's higher than it is now. Interest was 8 percent. And he lost his place because he couldn't pay 8 percent interest on \$3,000.

SHORT: Hmm.

SMITH: Listen. You don't know what a hard time is if you didn't go through the 1929 to 19 – 'til the war started. You don't know a thing about it.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: Hogs, 2½ cents a pound. Cotton, 3 to 5 cents a pound. Peanuts, \$20 to \$22 a ton. Corn was about, I think it was 24 cents a bushel. And you don't know what hard times were. The difference is this. We never had known any better, so we didn't know any better. That's exactly the difference.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: What it is now? [Indiscernible] we'd have a revolution now if things were as cheap as they were back then. I went to – I didn't go to town but two times a year. That was when the bought the first load of guano in the spring and the first bale of cotton in the fall. Daddy gave me a nickel every time I went, and a nickel bought more than you might think. It's just usually change now, but back then you could buy something for a nickel.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: I stayed at that place and went to school at – I started school when I was 6 years old. Walked three miles each way every day, and I went to Pine Cliff. The reason I went to Pine Cliff, because the young lady that was teaching at Pine Cliff, her name was Ella McCoy and she was from Tennessee. She had a record of being a very fine teacher. And she was; she was absolutely a gem of a teacher. Daddy had something about not going to start school until you're 6 years old. Well, I was 6 years old in October, but I didn't start school until January 1st. Well, when I started January 1st, Ms. Ella had four classes. And it was a two-room – it was a one-room schoolhouse split in two, so we had two rooms – and the other teacher had from 5, 6 and 7. Ms. Ella, Ms. McCoy, had the first four. So I had seven months of school.

My class was the last one in the day, 4:00 in the afternoon. School opened at 8, by the way. I walked three miles. You imagine what time I left home walking three miles in December to school every day? Whenever she started with me, she took me the last class at 4:00. And she took me in her lap. So she taught me the first half of my school time sitting in her lap. So I passed the 1st grade the first year. Went there until I finished the 4th grade and went through the 5th and, when I got through the 5th, the teacher – the other teacher – 5th grade (by the way, she married a cousin of my daddy), she was horrible. So he switched me to Greenwood. It was about the same distance I walked to Greenwood.

Ms. Helen – I can't think of her last name – Helen, anyway, she taught me down there. She was a good teacher but she couldn't touch Ms. Ella McCoy. She was one of the best I ever had. I went there one year, and then they put on a bus route to Hopeful. I lived about three, four –

about five miles – from Hopeful, so they put a bus route on and I started riding the bus. That was a new adventure.

I went to school until Christmas of 7th grade and daddy took me out and put me to work at Christmas of the 8th grade. I finished the 7th grade, had all A's. Went to Christmas in 8th grade and had all D's. So my father said, "Son, are you tired of going to school?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Well, all right then." Said, "Monday morning," said, "you hitch up Rowdy and Roddy and start breaking that land back yonder next to the Pollocks." Well, it took me about two weeks to really realize what I had done. I'd made a terrible error. Five years later, I started back in the 8th grade at 18 years old. I had learned to appreciate it.

Whenever I first got to be Speaker of the House and I'd be talking to school people that particularly wanted to make a point, they'd say, "This is the young man who went to school and dropped out of school, and he realized that education was so good he went back in school to get an education." I always corrected, "That wasn't the reason. You plow a mule in south Georgia five years, and dog gone if you won't do anything to get back in a classroom or wherever it takes." [Laughter]

So I started school at Hopeful at Christmas when I was 18 years old. I finished school at Hopeful when I was 21. Went to Middle Georgia when I was 22 for one quarter. And going to Middle Georgia was a misguided place. Middle Georgia was a junior college society school. I was out of my class literally and figuratively, so at Christmas I went and switched to Abraham Baldwin. The main reason I switched to Abraham Baldwin, I'd run out of money and didn't take but one year. Tuition was only 69 dollars and a half. You had to buy your books, but tuition,

food and board were only 69 dollars and a half. So I went to ABAC, as we called it, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton. It's strictly a rural school. Most of the folks there were working their way through, and I went there because I could work my way through. I know the last year, I didn't spend but \$6. I worked my way totally through the last year because during the summer between my first and last year of college, I worked in tobacco there and they paid me to work in tobacco in the summertime. And then I did the rest of it after that.

One reason I got to work so like that, I was elected President of the student body at ABAC. The way I did that, I guess that's the first time. Well, I was elected President of my class at high school. But I reckon the reason I did that was because I wanted to keep working because that was the only way I could get through, and I tried to figure out the best way I could to get elected President of the student body. Didn't tell anybody. And I came up with the idea that if I would learn everybody's name on that campus, one way or the other, it would help. I could call everybody by one name – it may have been a nickname or something – whenever I ran for it and I won, and there's no doubt in my mind that's what did it. I was able to recognize those people on the street some.

So I, the last year, I spent \$6. I worked the tobacco and I got 10 cents an hour. That's unbelievable, 10 cents an hour. And when the tobacco season got through – got up to the point you would pull the tobacco and cure it – I came to find out that, see, when we was curing tobacco at home, you had to use logs and a furnace. When I got over there, they had a thermostatic-controlled gas system for the tobacco farm. That was heaven, you know. So I just moved me a cot back there, set the thermostat whatever I wanted, get up every 30 minutes until I

just worked it all the way around. I charged 23 hours a day.

And the second school year when it started the first week, I got a message from the President he would like to see me in his office. I couldn't imagine what in the world the President wanted to see me about. That's Mr. – President – King. He was about 6'2" or 3", bald-headed as a cue ball. They called him Cue Ball, but not to his face. I walked in and sat down. He said, "Thornewell." See, that was the T in George T. That's Thornewell, and I've never been called that after I got out of ABAC. I said, "Yes, sir?" He said, "I was just perusing your record for work this summer, and I noticed that you charged 23 hours a day. Would you care to explain that?" I said, "Yes, sir." And I explained it to him. I said, "I wasn't getting but 10 cents an hour and I needed all that I could get and I figured out where I could use that thermostat and I did it for 23 hours a day. I took an hour out to go to lunch and supper. And I was just right out maybe a quarter of a mile where you went to eat. He folded up the paper and he says, "Well, that was a novel idea, wasn't it?" And shut the paper. But they made a rule right then you couldn't work more than 12 hours a day and get paid for it. [Laughter]

But that's the way I did it. I got out of that, ABAC, and got in the Navy. When I got in the Navy, I went to – I realized that I was going to get in the Army or the Navy or something because they were saying they were going to start conscripting everybody October 15th that year. So I decided I would get in the Navy because my granddaddy had told my daddy about all the times he had to sleep when it was cold and he'd wake up in the morning with icicles 12 and 15 inches long up around him where he'd slept all night. Clothes would freeze on him in 50 yards after they waded a creek or something during the war. So I got me a place. I said, "I may

not have it but one night, but at least I'll sleep dry 'til I get wet for good." [Laughter]

So I went up there and took the exam at Albany. When I got through, the guy that was giving the exam was a Navy – he had a lot of stripes on him; I don't remember what he was – and he said, "Why didn't you," he said, "I see you got a two-year college degree." I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, why didn't you make application to go to the V7 program?" I said, "I don't know what the V7 program is." He said, "Well, if you get in the Navy and you've got two years college, you can make application for an officer in the Navy. You can get in the V7 program. They send you to the state pier in New York and you get on a ship. You go to sea for a month. And after you get back, if they recommend you, you can go to Northwestern University and get a midship – an officer's – degree in the Navy." I said, "Give it to me then."

So I got that and went up in Macon and passed it. I went up to Macon and got the final and passed it, and, oh, a funny thing happened now. I tried to get in the Air Force before I did any of the rest of it. I came to Atlanta, stayed up here two days, one of 'em all day and all night in the bed. I passed everything but the blood pressure. My pressure was around 110 or 15 to about 170 or 80, and here I was 21 years old. And that was unbelievable. So they wouldn't take me. They tried to because, as somebody said, "They take anybody in the Army and the Air Corps that day if you could look through one ear and see out the other one," because they were looking for 'em. That was the best thing that ever happened to me though because, if I'd have got on a – the airplanes back in that day at that time was just a bunch of - - ramshackle things.

So I went to New York. Never been north of Albany but one time. And I got to New York and I was scared to death. You can imagine a farm boy from south Georgia never been any further

north than Albany but one time, in New York City. So I got there and I was, you know about getting your tonsils blistered by the sun? I was typical because I fit that. But I got up, got on this ship – the old USS Quincy; it was sunk at the Battle of Savo Island. I spent the month on it and they took me into the Navy. I made it.

A story needs telling that happened there. When I took the – see, I had only two years. I didn't have a single year of advanced math. Our little country school in Hopeful - wasn't but four hundred people there, not a – I had good grades in it, had all A's in everything I did, but I didn't have anything past half a term of geometry. So I went up there and the crowd I – my floor, I was in the 7th Division we called it. And it was tough. Navigation was what was really tough. I memorized navigation. I didn't have a background or basis of arithmetic, math, to really ever grasp it, so I memorized it.

So we had our final test and they gave us what they call a day's work. You start at 3:00 in the morning and go all the way at 24 hours. Well, I set out on my day's work and, by the time I got to noon the next day, I was off the paper. They just gave you the paper it was supposed to fit on. Well, by the time I got through traveling 'til noon of that day, from 3 to noon, I was off the paper. Well, to make a long story short, I got off the paper every time I returned. I said, "Well, nothing like going back to the farm." So I – it wasn't quite that much. I was devastated. Got on the – I got on the elevator, went down the elevator stuffed with the members of the class, and it was like a tomb. I noticed, I said, "My God, this is like a tomb! Everybody's just hang-dog look." So one fellow finally got courage enough to say something and he said, "How many of you didn't get past noon?" None of us did. They had given us an advanced problem in

navigation that they had not taught us about. We all flunked it! And so they just gave everybody 2.5 and let us go. Boy, I tell ya. Nice to have ignorant folks with you sometimes.

I went on and got in the Navy and got on the USS Quincy for a month. Got back. Then I was put on a naval submarine supply ship. We supplied the subs. We had a lot of them, but they weren't any good. And I stayed on that from October – well, from June when I got out of school – to February. Then they transferred me to Norfolk to go to midshipman school, to go to naval – I was an officer in charge of a naval gun crew on a supply ship. All of these supply ships, we were taking stuff to Murmansk, and they were sinking off the coast out there just like – well, they were just sinking 'em day and night. So I went there and we went to Battle Creek, Virginia. Went through training there for – we had the crowd with me that I was going to use, my group. There were 11 of us – 9 of us, 10 with me. And we got on the SS Yaquima[ph]. It was a civilian ship, merchant mariner, but it was run by merchant mariners. The only part that we did, we took care of the guns and we shot the guns and handled the guns if we were attacked.

And it's too long to go into detail there, but I learned – I got – well, I learned what labor unions were. Whew! don't get me on that one because I tell you it was – anyway. So I made a – I was in the first American convoy that went to Murmansk. And we had quite a time. We were shot at, torpedoed at, bombed, and they sunk only one ship going over; but coming back – and the reason only one going over is because we got into a fogbank three days out of Murmansk and the fog didn't lift. And the Germans never could get to us because the airplanes, they couldn't find us. Went on into Murmansk. I was bombed three times when they was in Kola River, and they finally sunk my ship. And, but it was in the river so when it settled on the mud flats, they went

in there and pumped it out and put it in drydock and prepared it – repaired it – because we were sunk by a bomb that did not explode. And the reason it didn't explode, I was on an old 1919 liberty ship which had what they call a fidley in it. That was when they used coal – nothing but coal – and there was a place about that wide all the way from the fore plates in the bottom of the ship out the top right in front of the boilers. And that was for a place to let the heat out from the use of coal. It'd get so hot down there and that's the only way it could come out. And that bomb, as it was coming down like bombs would come down, they'd be straight up and moving like that. That bomb was moving like that and it hit the side of my ship. It never did get to the water; it hit the side of it and it knocked a hole right out you could drive a freight train through and went all the way out the bottom before it exploded. And, well, it hit right where that fidley was and, going sideways like that, it didn't – the point didn't – hit anything. You had to hit the point of it to set the bomb off. It hit nothing, so it went all the way through and went out the bottom of the ship. That's when it contacted and when it contacted, it blew up and blew a hole in the bottom of the ship. So we had holes all over the place. And they pumped it out and we came back to America. I was standing so near that door to where the bomb went through the side of the ship, all I had to do was look over the side and there it was.

We were bombed a couple of more times before we left. Now we were in drydock three times from bombs. One time we was sunk. And when we finally got back, on the way back, at 9:00 on the 5th of July, 1942, we lost seven ships in 15 minutes. They always told us that we'd run into a German wolf pack, and that's what I believed until I got out of the Navy and years later read a book. "Wait a minute. We didn't run into a German wolf pack. The stupid pilot had led

us into our own minefield.”

SHORT: Hmm-hmm.

SMITH: We sunk seven of our own ships. And I'll never forget that one because the crowd that I went through midshipman's school – I mean armed guard school – with, the two officers that I knew, we were in a line of 18 ships, nine on each side, two, two, two. One of my friends was number one, I was number two, and the other was number three. His ship was sunk. I missed the mines. I don't know why, but I did. Mine was not sunk, but the one right behind me was sunk and the one on my left, the bow was blown off. So I was sitting there just – providence picked me out to live another day, and I don't ever know what happened to those boys.

I got back to America and my ship, by being bombed and drydocked for so long, I missed a lot of the – I missed all the – convoys that went to places where they were [indiscernible]. The one I really missed was North Africa. Went to North Africa and Sicily and Italy. I didn't make that trip, thank the Lord for that because that crowd, they were – they were gone a year and had a terrible time. And I just, there wasn't a real convoy for me to pick up on, but they had an Army transport that was going to go to Hawaii so they put me on the Army transport to Hawaii. And we went all the way down to the Panama Canal, came up to San Diego and then went on out to Hawaii.

I stayed on that ship for seven months going inner island. I've been to every one of the islands of Hawaii and didn't have to pay a thing but seven months of my time. And it was quite a place.

We never did have any problems out there. We'd get to talking about it and all like that. I saw what the Japanese did to us because they never had cleaned it up much, just to get in and out. And I stayed there for a while.

I spent two years in the Navy, and then I was put on Naval Land Force Equipment Depot in Albany, Alabama – Albany, California. And that's where all the equipment that was an invasion for forces in the South went through us. We were the – we dispensed it. They ordered it from us and picked it up from us in San Francisco Bay on the Albany side. And I stayed there for two years.

When I went there, they took me off the ship that I was on and transferred me to the Port Director's Officer with the directions that – and with the directions that whenever the ship I'd just got off of was decommissioned from a commercial ship to a Navy ship, that I was go back on it as Gunnery Officer. Two years later, I went back on it. What happened was they lost me. They lost my orders somewhere or another. I had three sets of orders sent to me. They sent them all back, "Lost." And I reckon we'd have never – they would never have found me, but one of the fellows, the ship he had been sent to the same time mine was sent somewhere was sunk. All – everybody – was lost, so his people were notified that he was unaccounted for, the ship and everything; he was sunk. And he went up there and said, "I ain't dead. I'm very much alive." Well, they found out that all our orders was in the corner of a warehouse over in San Francisco.

Well, they soon got the orders to send us to the South Pacific, but before we could get to the South Pacific, they dropped the atom bomb, you know, and it saved us as far as I'm concerned

because I had orders to the USS Harrison, which was a troop ship and I was supposed to report to some of the islands right there close to Hawaii – I mean, Japan. I don't know where it was. But I would've been – we were supposed to invade them on November 11, 1945, but it never did come around because they surrendered before that was over with.

So I came back home and went to the University of Georgia. I was 29 years old. Went to law school. They let me in because they let a lot of them in. There was 125 or 126 in my class. We didn't have enough seats for all of them. If you didn't there early, you sat in the window. And we went through law school like that and went through. We took a full course in law school and eight quarters. That's when you'd go on a quarter. And if you'd go straight through eight quarters, you'd get a law degree. I had only two hours – I mean, two years – I had 125 units but wouldn't but 84 of them count toward law school and it took 92. So I was eight short. And the registrar up there at the University, he pulled a lot of strings and he gave me eight points for being on a ship and shooting the [indiscernible] out and gave me trigonometry, I believe it was. I never – I had a minor in trigonometry. I mean, I had my minor in mathematics and never did go but four years down at -- only one year at Hopeful High School. [Laughter] That's how hard they wanted them.

I went through law school there and then went to Cairo, Georgia. Mr. Sam Caine had a son that was killed, and I went into law practice with him. And I went into practice on January 1, 1948, making \$60 a week, and I bought a house and a new car on \$60 a week. I'd like to see you do that now. Can't go – you can't go to a football game for \$60, much less.

But, anyway, I stayed there and practiced law with Mr. Caine in Cairo in 1948 – January 1, '48.

But while I was there, I was elected City Attorney, County Attorney, Solicitor of the State Court, represented the EMC and also the School Board attorney. That was a lot of work and mighty poor pay. I got \$50 a month for being County Attorney. Can you believe that? And \$50 a month to be City Attorney.

And when I went there, Mr. Caine took me because he said I wasn't interested in politics – and I wasn't. I really wasn't. I just wanted to get out and get me a job and I wanted one in south Georgia. I asked for south Georgia. I said, "I want a rural county in south Georgia." They said, "That'll be no problem. Everybody wants to go to Atlanta."

One story I'm going to tell you, it pays you to do right because you don't know who's looking at you. When I got back and was finished up at law school at the University, I went over to – all of us took a day out and went over to Atlanta looking for jobs, so I thought, "Well, I'm gonna start off with Hartford Insurance Company for a job for an appraisal, automobiles." And I went up to their place and they took me, and I went in and I sat down in the room to be interviewed by the fellow. And the room was about a big square from me to that door there; that was about as big as the office was in. And you could sit down and it had wood up to just about your eyes; the rest of it was glass. And I sat down and he sat down, and I noticed he kept looking. He kept looking and he didn't do anything, and I was wondering when he was gonna start something. And in a minute he got up and said, "Excuse me." And I watched him and he went about as far as from here to that wall over yonder to another cubicle and went in and stood up. He never did sit down. And they talked some little bit and when he came back, he sat down and he said, "Well, you've got the job." I said, "Got the job? You didn't even interview me." He said, "You see

that fellow I went to talk to?" I said, "Yes." He said, "He tells me that you were a security officer at the Naval Land Force Equipment Depot. That's the same as Chief of Police over 3,500 people. And a bunch of wild sailors, that wasn't easy. And he was in the fire Department and he said the Fire Department was under your jurisdiction." I said, "That's right." And he told me that he had worked under me and knew me well and to hire me. You don't know who's looking at you. Now we had switched places. I was his boss over there. He was the Vice President of an insurance company there and he was my boss there. I went to practice law. But it really pays; you don't know who's looking at you, and that old saying about be nice on the way up because you don't know who you'll meet coming back down?

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: That's really a test of it. So we got to – we had – Cairo, Grady County, had a terrible record for representatives getting in politics, and they had a fellow that got in politics and he weighed about 300 pounds, was elected, and he went two terms, four years, as a House Representative. And the people that know politics and all, they kept sending word back to the people in Cairo says, "Y'all better get you somebody else up here." Said, "This man sleeps all the time. He don't know what's going on." Said, "Get somebody up here." So they came to see me. This is the closest I ever got to being conscripted to go somewhere. And they came to me and I said, "I can't get in politics." They said, "Why?" I said, "I promised Mr. Sam Caine I'd stay out. And I'm just – he gave me a job and I'm gonna live up to it." So what they did then,

they got a committee of three and went to see Mr. Caine, not – I knew nothing about it. And he said, “Yeah, okay. He can go. It’s all right with me for him to go.” So I went to see him before I ever gave them the answer and he said, “No, it’s all right for you to go. It might do you good.” So that’s how I got in politics. I ran. The editor of the paper ran and then the incumbent ran and I ran. And I got more votes than both of them put together. So, I was in politics. Well, that was 1958. My first term in legislature was 1959. Vandiver had just been elected. And Frank Twitty[ph] was Floor Leader and George L. Smith was the Speaker and Vandiver was the Governor.

And I was born and raised in Mitchell County. Frank Twitty had known my folks and we had known him. They voted for him and supported him always. And you're talking about some committee appointments? I got committee appointments that people lived and died in that place and never did get. I was on the Judicial – Judicial Committee – University of Georgia Committee and the Governor’s Committee and the State of the Republic Committee, those three. You could stay there a lifetime and never get a one of them.

Well, I stayed that way for two years and, at the end of two years, Frank came to me and said, “You want to be on the Appropriations Committee?” I said, “Yeah.” So he took me off the University Committee and put me on the Appropriations Committee. Can you imagine being there two years and on the Appropriations Committee?

SHORT: Uh-uh.

SMITH: It ain't what you know; it's who you know, friend. Don't ever forget that.

SHORT: Uh-uh.

SMITH: And I went over there and they made me Vice Chairman of it and, in one year, I was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee for the House of Representative in three years.

That's what a break is.

Carl Sanders ran then and, when Carl ran, he started off as Lieutenant Governor and I told him I'd help him. And then when he moved over against Marvin Griffin, see, Marvin's from Bainbridge and I was from Cairo; they're 24 miles apart. And I was supporting Carl because he and I were classmates. Well, I thought he could do it too. And people got so mad at me in my county, they'd walk across the street to keep from speaking to me. They just didn't like me because I wouldn't support old Marv. Well, Carl won. Whenever Carl won, everybody got in good humor with me – quick. [Laughter] I'd sworn I found out how fast people can quit hating you. And, by the way, Marvin didn't beat Carl but 264 votes in my county. I really went to bat for him.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: But then Carl was elected in '62, and then I had – I would leave Cairo Thursday night after work, drive to Atlanta, and work with Carl until Monday night. I'd go over and stayed over

the weekend and do speeches for him and telephone, and I really worked with him. And so whenever he won, I know the afternoon they finally said that he won – it was on Wednesday afternoon – we were all sitting around there in the big lobby of the headquarters, and, all at once, I really realized that I had noticed that everybody was gone and I was left alone. About that time, Bill Trotter – you remember Bill Trotter?

SHORT: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Little short fellow?

SHORT: Yeah.

SMITH: Bowl-legged as a – he went with a – he was a AAA ball at one time. Good player. He said, “The Governor wants to see you.” And so I walked in the room where they were and everybody was in there. They had silently gone in there, and Carl said, “Sit down, George T.” – or George. I still wasn’t George T. So I sat down and he said, “How’d you like to be Speaker?” I said, “I’d like it.” [Laughter] It didn’t take me no two days to figure it out, you know, to “I ain’t worthy!” To heck with that kind of crap! [Laughter] You don’t get anywhere saying, “I’m not worthy. I’m not worthy, but I’ll take it.” I said, “Yeah, I will do.” He said, “All right. Go get on the telephone.” And he had – what they had come to, they’d all sat down there and talked it out – they said that I was the only man they thought that could become qualified to be Speaker.

They didn't think I qualified to be it, but wasn't anybody qualified they'd trust because they'd all supported Marvin Griffin. So that's how I got to be Speaker. [Laughter]

And it was a – we had a rough time the first year or two. Boy, I tell you what. It was rugged.

But we made it.

And then I liked it so well, I decided I wanted to be Lieutenant Governor. I didn't want to stay in politics all my life, but I wasn't ready to get out. And so I ran against...

SHORT: Peter Zack Geer.

SMITH: ...Peter Zack Geer. Peter Zack was – no, I won't what I said. Peter Zack was smart as a whip, a great speaker, lazy as a foxhound and mule. And just he never did take it serious. He never did take me serious at all. The first time anybody ever asked him about it was on the street walking, and they asked him, said, "What do you think about the Speaker running for Lieutenant Governor against you?" He said, "Well, I never did go bear hunting with a rabbit gun." And that just made me mad. It just burned me up, you know it? I worked harder. It was easy to get up at 3:00 in the morning, but Zack didn't work any. He didn't work. He just – he just figured that he had the Talmadges behind him and the Vandivers behind him and Campbell behind him, and he knew it and he figured it would be all right. I can't remember the challenger, the County Commissioner from Clarke County, but he ran. There was three of us. And I – he was an odd man out. That was a man – also fixing to tell something I've never told before except on something like this.

SHORT: Randall Bedgood.

SMITH: Randall Bedgood, you're right. So I – when I was Speaker of the House, I said, “I ain't gonna stay here always. I might want to be Lieutenant Governor and I can't beat Peter Zack Geer Lieutenant Governor with a plurality.” So the second year I was Speaker of the House, I very quietly got a bill passed that you could not be elected to an office unless you had 50 percent plus one. Well, that paid off. [Laughter] Because first when I ran, the three of us, Zack was #1 with 49.2 percent of the votes. I had 44 percent. Well, we had a runoff and, in the runoff, I beat Zack 139,000 votes. That's the most amazing thing I ever – Zack, I mean, Peter Zack just would not – he wouldn't – he wouldn't work. He just simply wouldn't work. He always was talking ugly about me, but he never would work.

One of the biggest mistakes he made was they asked him – back then, if you was a Democrat (and the Republicans were making noises), if you was a Democrat, you did, in 1966, you had to sign a pledge to support the nominees, the Democratic nominees. But, you didn't have to swear to it. So he and I, in a speech I gave to the Junior Chamber of Commerce over at DeKalb County one night, and they asked him if he was going to support the nominees. He said, “I don't know.” They said, “Why don't you know?” He said, “I don't know who's gonna be elected.” They said, “Well, you signed an agreement, didn't you?” He said, “Yeah, but I wasn't under oath.” And I was next up. He got off and left. He wasn't there to defend himself, and that was a stupid thing to do. That's always – if he was the first one to speak, he'd go; he wouldn't stay around. I

always stayed around. They talk about you if you left, you know. You wanted – you needed – to be there to defend yourself.

So he left, and I knew they was gonna ask me about that question as sure as I knew my name.

And I went to racking my brain on what kind of answer I'd give. And, as I was walking up to the platform to answer it – to hazard, to say what I'd say to that question – it came to me, the answer did. So they asked me about that. They said, "What do you think about that?" I said, "Well, ...". And they said, "Now, the Lieutenant Governor said he wasn't under oath, so..." I wasn't there when he made his talk, so they highlighted and said he wasn't under oath. "What have you got to say?" I said, "I've got only one thing to say. I don't believe the people of the state of Georgia would elect a man Lieutenant Governor that's got to be under oath before you can believe what he says." It killed him. You just – I just had all those papers all over the state with little, short editorials just reporting what he said and what I said. It just killed him. He was careless that way. He never planned anything. The first thing up was out.

And that, plus another very involved thing complying -- dealing with the House and the Senate was the liquor because he lost every newspaper in the state except *Albany Herald* when he put that boner about the liquor deal. They – he had promised them he would not put a bill on the floor without letting them – giving them – a chance to appear before the committee. He not only put it out of committee, he passed it, and they never did know about it until they read it in the paper. He lost them all because they just – he thought he was in so deep.

SHORT: He was a County Unit politician.

SMITH: That's right. That's right.

SHORT: Let's talk about that for a minute.

SMITH: All right.

SHORT: Going back to the Sanders-Griffin election...

SMITH: Uh-huh?

SHORT: ...where everybody thought Marvin Griffin would win.

SMITH: He would if it hadn't have been for the County Unit System being thrown out.

SHORT: So they threw out the County Unit System...

SMITH: Yeah.

SHORT: ...and that just completely changed politics...

SMITH: That's right.

SHORT: ...in Georgia forever.

SMITH: And forever and Marvin Griffin didn't know what to do with it. There wasn't nothing he could do with it. Now that was another reason I was so positive in helping Carl Sanders. Don't tell me how I knew this, but I knew this. We knew that the court was going to throw out the County Unit System before the election.

SHORT: Uh-huh

SMITH: But time enough to know that we could run in that direction, so we just – Carl just hit the high spots. He worked on the cities...

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: ...and didn't fool with little rural areas much.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And that's what happened. It was a plurality – I mean, it was a majority vote thing

rather than a County Unit System, and Carl won.

SHORT: And he would've won either way.

SMITH: Yeah, he would have won either way, as it turned out, but we didn't know that then.

SHORT: Right, true.

SMITH: And it's never been – but I changed, got it changed – way back there...

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: ...so I could win. I didn't know it. I didn't. And I needed it. I'd have lost; I'd have lost if it hadn't been for that. Zack, like I said, must have been sick when he lost it by 8/10 of a percent.

Well, I got out of the legislature and was elected Lieutenant Governor. I got beat for Lieutenant Governor and I then started practicing law up here. And I was going back to Cairo. I had interest in a bank down there and all that, and my secretary at that time said, "I thought you wanted to get on the Appellate Courts." I said, "I do." And she said – there she sits right over there; she's been working with me 42 years – she said, "Well, how?" She said, "You go back down to Cairo. That's almost out of the state." Said, "You get down there and you gonna never

get your name in the front where you can get on the Courts. Now if you leave up here, you can just forget about that.” Well, I thought about it a little bit and I got – I agreed with her. So I went to work with – what was that guy’s name? It’ll come to me in a minute.

SHORT: Here in Marietta?

SMITH: Yeah, in Marietta. He was a very prominent lawyer in Marietta.

SPEAKER: Harold Willingham.

SHORT: Yeah.

SMITH: Harold Willingham.

SHORT: Yeah.

SMITH: Harold Willingham. And while I was with Harold Willingham, I also ran for Governor and lost that. And then I ran for Court of Appeals in 1976. Now I’m the only person that has ever been elected to all three positions with opposition. Now there’s only two or three other people – and I don’t know who they were; one of them was Brown – and they all served in all three of them in the 1800s. Nobody’s ever served since the 1800s in all three of them in any

capacity.

SHORT: You were elected to all of them?

SMITH: I was elected with opposition.

SHORT: Right.

SMITH: And I told them I was such a poor politician – such a poor politician – I couldn't get anybody to appoint me to anything, but I was elected to all three of them. And so when I served out as-- the Supreme Court, I was on there 11 years and the Court of Appeals four years and four months. And I got out of that and then I started to see if they'd – I came back to Cairo – came back to Marietta practicing law. And I've enjoyed practicing law up here, and I tried my best; I had two governors tell me a tale. (I'll put it nice.) Two governors told me if I'd get the House and the Senate to pass a bill doing away with the cap on the age that judges could serve, they'd sign it, both of them.

SHORT: Didn't sign it.

SMITH: Neither one of them signed it. Never would. Never talked to them. [Gap]

SHORT: If you don't mind, let's go back to 1966 when you were elected Lieutenant Governor and Lester Maddox was elected Governor. How did you and Governor Maddox get along?

SMITH: We got along all right because he didn't fool with me and I didn't fool with him. But, see, he called me a liar in public on four different times, and I never did lie to Mr. Maddox. He just – you just couldn't depend on – you couldn't tell him anything. I got to where I would not go in his office without I had a witness because he'd deny what he said to you. You couldn't agree with him; he wouldn't make an agreement with you. And when he called, I got tired of being called a liar, so I just never would go in there. [Overlapping conversation]

SHORT: So you didn't have a day-to-day relationship...

SMITH: Oh, no.

SHORT: ...about issues that affected the state?

SMITH: Issues? He didn't know what an issue was. No, we never -- no issues.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: Never were discussed. And that's when I got – when I got to be Speaker of the House,

in fact, before I got to be Speaker – that’s when I got tagged with George T. and George L. George L. was Speaker of the House then under Vandiver...

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: ...but he was Speaker of the House before that too with Talmadge.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And Twitty was – Frank Twitty was – Floor Leader to Talmadge and what’s his name?

SHORT: Vandiver.

SMITH: Vandiver. And whenever he was the Speaker of the House and I was in there on committees and all, they got to calling me George and him Good George. And, finally, he told me, he said, “I’m tired of being called Bad George.” They called me George and him Bad George. That’s the way he put it. He said, “You’re going to get another name.” And so they said, “Well, we’ll call you George L. and him George T.,” and that’s how we got the names George L. and George T.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And we would, sure, we'd both get accused sometimes of what the other one said. We stuck to our guns. If it was about me, I said, "He did it." If it was about him, he'd say, "He did it." And you know what? We never did anybody that followed up on it. [Laughter] That just shows you how much interested folks are in politics, generally speaking.

SHORT: Yeah.

SMITH: They never did.

SHORT: You know, in some states, they require the lieutenant governor to run on a ticket...

SMITH: Yeah.

SHORT: ...with the governor. Do you think that's a good idea?

SMITH: Well, for party unity, it is; but I – you just about have to, Bob, because you couldn't have everybody running for lieutenant governor. You just have to have a ticket with them.

SHORT: Well, you've been Speaker and you've been Lieutenant Governor. Which did you enjoy the most?

SMITH: Speaker.

SHORT: Why? Why is that?

SMITH: The Speaker had power. The Speaker was the most powerful man in state government next to the Governor and, if you had a weak Governor, he was the most powerful.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: George L. ran the legislative part of it when I was speaker; and when I was Lieutenant Governor, he was Speaker because all the money bills started in the House, you know, as you know. And by the fact that they all started in the House, he ignored the Governor. He ran that House like he wanted to.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I joined with him.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: We'd do things – well, he didn't care, Bob.

SHORT: Are you speaking of the Governor?

SMITH: Yeah, the Governor didn't care. The first day of the legislature, that I was Speaker of the House the first term, the last day of the session, the Conference Committees were out trying to figure out the Appropriations Bill and the Governor had had a pork barrel with somebody over in Columbus, Georgia, \$200,000. He wanted it appropriated for \$200,000 so he could do a little politicking. Well, George L. and I discussed it [coughing] – excuse me – George L. wouldn't agree to it, and I said, "Oh, he only wants \$200,000." He said, "I ain't gonna agree to it." He would not agree to it. At 5:00 on Friday afternoon, everybody's sitting around waiting for the Conference Committee and that's all they were stuck on. I told my board, I said, "Don't. We promised together and we've got to stay with it." By 5:00, I saw that George L. was heck bent; he wasn't gonna move. So – and I wasn't gonna move unless the Governor released me, because I'd promised him I'd do it and I was gonna do it. I went down to his office and I told him, I said, "I'd like to see Governor Maddox." He says, "He ain't here." I said, "Not here?" I said, "Doesn't he know this is the last day of the session and the Appropriations Committee is still out? Where is he?" "Oh," he said, "he's down in Macon, Georgia riding his bicycle backwards for the entertainment of the school children down there."

SHORT: Hmm.

SMITH: Shoo, I walked back up and I didn't even knock. I opened the door. I said, "You know that \$200,000 y'all are tied up on?" They said, "Yes." I said, "Throw it out the door, pass that Appropriations Bill, and let's go home." They did it. He never mentioned it. Never mentioned it. He didn't know. He forgot about it.

SHORT: Hmm-hmm-hmm. So in 1976, you ran for the Court of Appeals.

SMITH: Yeah. And that was a little deal made there. The Court of Appeals was Charlie Pannell. He was on the Court of Appeals.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And he wanted to run; he was gonna quit. He tried to get the then present governor to appoint Charlie, Jr., as a State Court judge in Seminole or something up there, and the governor wouldn't do it.

SHORT: That was Busbee.

SMITH: Right. He wouldn't do it. Well, Charlie and I were very close because we both worked in Carl's headquarters. We got to know each other real well. So he came to me and said, "I tried

to get Busbee to appoint my boy, and he won't do it." He said, "It's just a little old state – state court." And he said, "You want to be Court of Appeals?" I said, "I dang sure do." He said, "All right. Stand ready. I ain't gonna tell them I'm not gonna run for the Court of Appeals until Wednesday before deadline on Monday for doing it." So he called me and says, "I'm gonna do it this morning – this afternoon." And so the next morning, I already had it arranged. I had my people lined up and all, and I announced for Court of Appeals. And nobody that could beat me would run because several of them tried it and Charlie helped me a little bit. He said, "Now you remember he ran two years ago for Governor." He said, "He's got an organization out there." And said, "The time you get yours put together, he'd be elected because you can't do it." And that did keep anybody from, well, being a real threat because of that, so I was elected to the Court of Appeals.

And I wasn't satisfied with the Court of Appeals. I always wanted to be on the Supreme Court, and I wouldn't – I knew Busbee wouldn't appoint me – but I wanted to clear it to keep him from saying, "Well, if he'd asked," so I went and asked him. His answer was a slick political answer, a smile behind the hat. He said, "I never make those decisions 'til I find out the opening's there." I thought, I said, "George, don't tell me that. I've been around here and you know that better than that."

SHORT: Hmm.

SMITH: And I announced for it. I'll say this. He didn't get involved in it.

SHORT: Uh-huh. We elect our judges – the people elect our judges; some are appointed. Do you think that politics and judges' races mix?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Don't let anybody kid you. See, Charlie Pannell elected me because he just didn't resign until it was too late for anybody else to do anything.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: No, there was no money – nobody trying to buy anybody like a famous case going on now – but it was just politics. Friends. Good 'ol boys.

SHORT: Well, you served on the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court.

SMITH: Yeah.

SHORT: Which one did you like the best?

SMITH: I liked the Supreme Court better than any elected position I've ever had, Speaker of the House or anything else.

SHORT: Tell us about being a Supreme Court Justice.

SMITH: Well, there's a lot of responsibility there really because that's the last, and you need to take that seriously because that's the last – that's the last place that a man's got a chance to get any help, so you ought to be real careful about that. I wrote a lot of dissents – a lot of dissents. I just thought that before any man had the final judgment passed on him, the evidence ought to be unassailed against him. And there was one thing – there were two things – that I did when I got on the Court of Appeals before I ever got on the Supreme Court.

When I got on the Court of Appeals, all opinions were written like this. Take in the evidence. Whenever they affirmed – if a man lost a case, they had to affirm it. That'd be civil or criminal. They'd always say, "Taking the evidence as being in favor of – the words to this – in favor of the state as found by the lower court, we find thus," and then went on and approved the lower court. I didn't start my opinions that way. I didn't think it ought to be that way. I just started off from scratch. I thought, by golly, that just because the lower court found the man guilty, that ought not to cause you to run it that way. Why do you have Appellate Court?

SHORT: Hmm.

SMITH: And I didn't write them that way.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I always – there’s another thing I did that nobody else did. The first paragraph, I’d say what the case was about and all like that, and then when I finished that paragraph, I’d add a new paragraph of one sentence that I’d either affirm or deny the other court and then write my opinion. My reason for that, I thought that being – having been – a trial lawyer and on the Court of Appeals for the first time, what the trial lawyer taught me most, I thought I ought to let the judge know in the first paragraph, after I put out the facts, what I had done. So then he could read the whole brief from the court below knowing why I had – how I had – held the case. Otherwise, if you didn’t do that, he had to read the whole case before you could find at the end what it was all about. And that, you see some judges doing that; not many. They quit both of those things.

I’ll tell you another thing that we tried, that we changed in the Supreme Court. The first day I was on the Supreme Court – the first day – they assigned my cases. And there was a case dealing with the county commissioners, and I want to say it was from Augusta, but I’m not sure. And I caught it and I wrote an opinion and reversed it, and the other guys of the court went 6 to 1 against me. Then I said, “Alright now, Mr. Chief Justice, who are you going to assign this case to?” He says, “To you.” I said, “What do you mean, to me?” I said, “I’ve just found against them and you all are for it.” He said, “That’s the rule of this Court. The man that has the case, if he writes an opinion reversing it and the rest of the Court goes against him, then he has to write the opinion affirming it.” I said, “How do you write upstream?” I said, “I can’t write it.” he said, “Well, that’s the rule.” I said, “All right.”

We had a Rule 36 and a Rule 59, and the Rule 59 of the Supreme Court was – and I got that rule changed too; that’s the way I – I was the one that got that rule in – if the evidence and the judges charge there was no error in that, we would affirm the trial court without an opinion. So I just took that case and I said, “The trial court, blah-blah-blah,” like that, “affirmed this opinion by Rule 59.” And then I wrote one of the dog-gonedest decisions you’ve ever seen in your life. That’s the last time that ever happened. They changed that rule immediately. It didn’t make no sense, Bob! How you gonna write a for it and against it all in the same time?

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: It didn’t make no sense.

SHORT: Let me ask you this question about evidence: DNA.

SMITH: That had not come about when I was – it was just coming into – I never had to deal with an opinion with that. That shows you how – it just wasn’t there.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I haven’t gone to the trouble to try to learn about it in private practice because I don’t do that much criminal work.

SHORT: Uh-huh. It seems, Judge Smith, that modern juries seem to prefer a sentence of life without parole over the death penalty.

SMITH: Uh-huh.

SHORT: Do you think that that will do away with the death penalty?

SMITH: No. Oh, if they keep doing that, oh, sooner or later, they're gonna quit.

SHORT: Uh-huh. The Supreme Court handles quite a few death penalty cases.

SMITH: Yes.

SHORT: Uh-huh. Another question, modern jurisprudence: What effect has the internet had on appellate courts? Now you can file over the computer and without oral arguments. Is that a good idea?

SMITH: Not for me. I like for a lawyer, stand him there and argue the case, and let me look at him and have the opportunity to ask him questions. Sometimes you change your mind; not often, but sometimes you do. I had a little trick. Sometimes lawyers you didn't believe that they'd

read the case good or something like that, and I had a trick I'd pull on them. I'd pick out some little obscure point in his case that nobody with good sense would ask about and I'd ask him about it.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I did that for one thing. I wanted to make him shoot straight with me the whole case because he – I know what was running through his brain. “That stupid jerk knew about that little old unimportant thing, he has read this thing.”

SHORT: [Chuckling]

SMITH: It worked. It worked every time.

SHORT: Well, you decided many cases as an Appellate Court Judge with the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. Are there any that stand out in your memory?

SMITH: Oh, yeah, several of them. I – the Williams case. Remember the Williams case?

SHORT: The child [overlapping conversation]...

SMITH: Yeah. I dissented in that case, and there was a lot of furor. I was called a lot of names. And I told them, I said, “What y’all don’t understand is I’m not saying he’s innocent or guilty. I’m just saying there was not evidence enough – the preponderance of the evidence – to point to him being, I mean, evidence beyond a reasonable doubt to point to him as being guilty. I just think that the evidence didn’t support the verdict.”

SHORT: That was the Atlanta child murder case...

SMITH: That’s right.

SHORT: ...decided basically on fiber evidence?

SMITH: That’s right. And the thing – they called it child murders. The two people they tried him for were both grown men; wasn’t no child or no children involved. It was grown men.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I won’t go into this, but I think I know how they got the evidence, the fiber evidence. See, the fiber evidence never had been proven beyond a scientific – to a scientific verification in the state at that time, and that certainly was no case to determine on whether or not there was a scientific verification from the fiber evidence.

SHORT: Well, there was a feeling among some that that case was hustled to a conclusion; that they wanted to stop it, so they, you know, the guy was convicted. I don't know whether that holds any water or not, but there was a feeling among some people at that time that that fiber evidence was a weak...

SMITH: Weak tool.

SHORT: Right.

SMITH: Yeah.

SHORT: Any other cases you remember?

SMITH: Well, I don't know why this one sticks in my brain, but it does. When I was on the Supreme Court, the law in Georgia – the case law in Georgia; well, the law in Georgia – said that a married man could not rape his wife. And one of those came up, came to our court, and I caught it. I did a lot of background work and I wrote an opinion that said not only can a man rape his wife, this one raped this one. See, they'd separated and so...

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: ...he came back. And then I went into some detail, the background of how women – how that ever became law where a wife couldn't be raped by her husband. And it came from the old rule, an old law like that that women when they married, they were chattels. They were treated as property by their husband and the offspring from that was that the husband – that they were treated like cattle or chattel – it'd be just like he owned a cow or horse or something and he took the position that he could do whatever he wanted to, from beating her on up or down because she was just a chattel. She wasn't a person. She just was his property totally and he could do as he pleased. I got a lot of comment on that one. Most of it wasn't favorable.

SHORT: Uh-uh.

SMITH: But, I mean, I got comments on that from men that wouldn't dare touch their wives and I knew it, but they couldn't – didn't – like the idea of the way it went through.

SHORT: Well, you've certainly had an outstanding career. If you had all those years to go over again, is there anything you might have done differently?

SMITH: Yeah. I'd have run for Governor in 1966.

SHORT: I meant to ask you that question. Why didn't you decide to run for Governor in 1966?

SMITH: Well, my supporters had already agreed to that, and Mills Lane was my big supporter and he had already given a 100 percent assurance of supporting me as Lieutenant Governor. But whenever Vandiver – you remember Vandiver got out?

SHORT: Uh-huh. And Talmadge almost got in.

SMITH: Yeah, almost. But what held me up, Mills Lane was on an extended European trip. I wasn't about to call him in Europe to ask him to switch his allegiance to me for Governor without being able to talk to him. I knew him too well for that. And I was not going to switch from a sure support to a didn't know whether I was gonna get support or not.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I just told them flat out. They – I was called about it. I said, "No." And I said, "Don't go telling it that I'm thinking about it because I'm not," because that's all you have to do is say a person was thinking about it and they've got you running and half a dozen other people are now for lieutenant governor and you're out in the woods.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: And I just wouldn't do it on that very reason.

SHORT: Looking back, what do you think was your greatest accomplishment?

SMITH: Holding all three of those positions. That's just about impossible to do. You're talking about having to be in the right place at the right time a lot of times; you had to be.

SHORT: How about your biggest disappointment?

SMITH: Not ever being Supreme Court Justice –I mean, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

SHORT: Time ran out?

SMITH: That's right. I got old. I reached 75 years old before I could make it.

SHORT: Uh-huh. How would you like to be remembered?

SMITH: As an honest, hard-working, truthful politician.

SHORT: Well, you're that.

SMITH: I hope so.

SHORT: And I want to thank you for Young Harris College and the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia and myself for being our guest.

SMITH: Thank you. Appreciate being asked.

* * * * *

SMITH: In 1966, when I was running for Lieutenant Governor, the last Saturday before the election the following Tuesday, Bainbridge, Georgia, which is right next to Mitchell County where I was born and raised and right next to Grady County where I practiced law, had a shindig and they invited everybody down, all the candidates, to speak on Saturday. You know, they held them back in there. Television got rid of all that now.

SHORT: Yeah.

SMITH: So I knew what they was aiming at. Marvin was supporting Zack. Zack was born and raised in Colquitt, 24 miles up the road, and his wife was born and raised in Bainbridge. And it was plain as the nose on your face what they was gonna do. So Friday afternoon, I found out – I was told about it and they said, “We’re gonna have one person to introduce all of you.” Said,

“You and Zack down here are so close, it’d be hard and fair and all that kind of stuff.” And I told them, [indiscernible] Eloise, I said, “That’s a crock. They’re gonna wind up selecting somebody to introduce them, which will be Marvin Griffin, and they’re gonna start at the bottom end of the alphabet for the first one to speak, not the top like usual.” I said, “This is a setup. now don’t give me any...” It worked out just exactly like I – at 5:00, 5:00 Friday afternoon, got a call. “Well, they’ve changed the rules on you.” I said, “I’m supposed to speak first, right?” They said, “That’s right.” I said, “That ain’t no surprise to me. I’ve been knowing they was gonna do that all the time.”

Got down there the next morning and they had a big old long flatbed trailer that everybody got on where we was gonna speak. We got up there. Peter Zack’s wife was sitting on the platform right behind him. They put Eloise at the other end of the trailer – the last person at the other end in the second row. You couldn’t even tell she was back there. She’s small, you know, anyway; you couldn’t even tell she was back there. If she was to hiccup, she’d have fallen off.

And we were up front. Maddox had his few little words to say and sat down. Only reason they was few, you had a limit. [Laughter] Then the next one was me, three minutes. Well, I had – I had racked my brain, “What in the world am I gonna say? What am I gonna say?” I don’t want to make it sound – no use in jumping on. I couldn’t match either one of them oratorically speaking. I knew better. Each one of them was better on the stump than I was, so don’t challenge that. You just got to do something else.

Next morning, Saturday morning, we was gonna fly down. I was shaving. I came out of the bathroom and I said, “Eloise, I made up my mind.” She said, “What you gonna do?” I said,

“I’m gonna brag on Marvin Griffin for the whole three minutes and never mention Zack Geer.”

They called me up there and got me up there, and Zack and Peter Zack was sitting down there. I mean, Zack and Marvin was sitting down there. And Marvin had a piece of paper in his hand, and I couldn’t imagine that. I didn’t think anything about it when I saw it, but, looking back on it, that was unreal for him. He didn’t use anything to introduce anybody, particularly in a situation like that.

They put me up there and the only time I mentioned Zack’s name was when I recognized him, and I spent three minutes. I tell you what I did the greatest job of lathering a man that’s ever been on the former Governor: How great he was for our community. How he had -- I’m just 24 miles away, you see. How much we appreciated him being that close to Cairo. How much he’d done for us. And how much he’d done for that part of the country. And what a great Governor he was. I got six interferences clapping, and I noticed he looked at Zack about halfway through that thing and held that paper like that. It turned out he had written his introduction of Zack down and had released to the news media! Now that was an insult to me. Now he just took that he didn’t have anything in his hands to worry about, so to heck with it.

But you could tell that he was bothered. Whenever I’d finished and just feel so full of syrup ‘til you never could get it out of him. He didn’t have anything to say about me, but he did. He used it – he had to use it – he turned me every way but loose. He called me – what was his favorite expression for McGill?

SHORT: Rastus. Ralph McGill?

SMITH: Yeah. He said I was – he called – he referred to me all the way through as Rastus McGill's something-or-other. It wasn't very nice. And he just ate me up. He didn't get a single, solitary interruption with applause the whole time. I got six. He didn't get a one. And you could tell the crowd was getting a little restless because here was a local boy bragged on him and he was trying to take advantage of him, and you could see it was just – it was coming out. Well, some people left before he finished. Then Zack got up there and not only did Zack eat me up alive, he used five minutes to do it. By the time he got through, wasn't anybody left except my folks. Not a single interruption did he get. Not a one.

The only time in my life I ever outsmarted two smart politicians, but that just absolutely – I left them, by them putting me first.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: Of course, Zack treated me the whole way through like I was an accident. So that was a, you know, that's a good way to have somebody run against you that thinks you're a damn fool because you can – they don't ever expect anything out of you.

SHORT: Well, you sure turned that election around in a hurry in that runoff.

SMITH: Yeah, sure did.

SHORT: You were Speaker of the House, Judge Smith, during the period when Julian Bond was denied his seat.

SMITH: Yes.

SHORT: Do you remember that?

SMITH: Yeah, it was 1965. I remember where I was when I got the call. I was speaking to an FFA group down at Sylvester, Georgia, got a telephone call from my secretary. Yvonne Redding was my secretary at that – that was number one. Deenie, I don't know whether she's two or three or four, but anyway she was in the office also. I got a call in Sylvester and Yvonne said, "I think you'd better come to Atlanta." I said, "What's important for me? Can't the Governor take care of it?" She said, "Yes, but I think you need to be here to answer some questions too because they're gonna be talking to you." I said, "Well, what happened?" She said, "Well, Julian Bond burned his registration card and the (for want of a better word) segregationist group is really up in arms up here." Said, "They're preparing a complaint to not seat him." And, see, this was before it started. And I said, "Who's leading it?" And I was not surprised. What was the representative from Statesboro's name?

SHORT: Jones Lane.

SMITH: Jones Lane. Golly, Jones Lane; that's right. And said, "Denmark Gruber is coaching him on his legal part." I said, "Oh, God, Denmark." Denmark Gruber was smart, a smart legislator. He was really smart and he'd been Speaker of the House – had been the Floor Leader in the House – so he knew what he was doing. And here I was Speaker the first time and I'm thrown in a ring with him. So I went back up there and she said that he had burned it and then a big hullabaloo and they was against it and wanting to know what I was gonna do. And I said, "Well, I'm gonna preside over it if it comes around to that."

So they – the Senate – passed it and refused to seat him, voted on the bill that would refuse to seat him. So whenever they voted to not seat him, I treated it like a bill. I referred it to the Judiciary Committee for y'all to decide. You're gonna be the jury. The Judiciary Committee is going to decide whether or not the evidence put up here for the House by the two parties in the argument and all like that, whether or not it's sufficient enough to sustain what they say.

Now, see, whenever they asked for everybody to stand to take the oath, the challenge had already been thrown out for Julian, and I hadn't been sworn in as Lieutenant Governor. I hadn't even been sworn into the House. So I – they voted on me to be in the legislature and Julian Bond all at the same time, and Julian was in a seat that was right behind mine. And they told him to have a seat because he'd been challenged. And I've got a picture of me standing up taking the oath and Julian sitting down in there right behind me. And so they did that and then they gave me the oath, and then I took over from there on out.

SHORT: As Speaker?

SMITH: As Speaker, and I tried the case like a judge – just like a judge. And we had a fellow named Brown, Ben Brown. Do you remember Ben Brown?

SHORT: Ben Brown, yeah.

SMITH: He was my very close friend and he kept me – I took him into my confidence. I said, “Ben, I’ve gotta have some help.” I said, “I’ve got to know what’s fixing to take place to keep this thing on an even keel.” So we talked at length and we agreed – he agreed with me – and some things he suggested. His first suggestion was, he says, “Do not have any uniformed policemen in sight.” He said, “The people that are opposing what’s taking place here and supporting Julian,” said, “you won’t have any trouble out of ‘em if there’s no policemen around because there won’t be anybody they can jump on; they’ll get notoriety nationwide because they’ll pick out a policeman to get in trouble.” He said, “If there’s no policemen, nothing’ll take place.” I said, “That makes sense to me.”

So I put – I had patrolmen there, but I brought them in before daylight, put them in the bottom of the Capitol. Nobody knew they were there except the Governor and me. And one or two other people had to know about it and Brown knew about it. I said, “All right, I’ve already got that solved. I’m gonna put them in the basement.” He said, “That’ll save you more problems than you know.”

He said, "Now what you're gonna do about the balcony?" I said, "Well, you know, we've already opened up the balcony and there's no – you don't have to – you're not seated in any particular place in the balcony; anybody can sit anywhere they want to. Everybody knows that. It's been announced." He said, "Well, let me make one other suggestion." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Don't have anybody at the door up there passing out passes. Don't make them have to sign in for a pass." He said, "If you'll do that, you'll take the sting and the whole – you'll just destroy their whole plan." I said, "All right, that's done." Well, I didn't tell him that I was gonna have GBI men all through the place in regular clothes. I had about six or seven of them and one or two hanging around close.

And so I told that we just took all of the doorkeepers off upstairs that allowed people to go in. Just opened the doors and nobody was there. So whenever that crowd got there, Brown told me, he says, "They're on the way." I said, "All right. We're ready for 'em." Everybody scattered. When they walked in there, they all came in a big van like, drove up right in here.

SHORT: These are Bond supporters?

SMITH: The Bond supporters, yeah. And they were out-of-town most of them. And they come marching through there and right upstairs and, when they got to the door, the door's wide open, ain't nobody there, and they started milling around like a bunch of cattle trying to cross a firewall – a fire line. They didn't know what to do.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: They didn't know what to do. So we had the hearing and they came in and sat down. No policemen to attack. And we just went through everything just like it was a Sunday school picnic. Got through and put 'em in the – and then the crew went out. We were all day trying that thing. I was, I remember some prominent lawyer downtown called me up later and told me that he wanted to congratulate me on how well I handled that thing. Well, any time that nothing happens, it's handled well, you know, whether it was handled well or not.

I think if I hadn't have had Brown, I might have done what I did but I don't know. That guy is – he's a – never did get much, any credit because you couldn't give it to him. He didn't want no credit. He said, "Don't tell folks what I told." He said, "Good Lord, they'll be hanging me." So they didn't.

And they came back, the committee, and the committee voted – I don't – I remember it was five voted to seat him, most of them DeKalb County. And five of them; I'm sure it was five to seat. So when he came back and they read it, I read that out and I said, you know, "Just don't show back up under," and he told me he was gonna appeal it. And Bond came to me after it was over with and said, "Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. I don't think anybody could have been any fairer than you were." Said, "I have no complaints about the way you've handled that thing and I have no animosity towards you at all." And he told me more times than that down the line. And, boy, that was a rough time. There was a lot of tension.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: It's just – it was just a wrong word away from a riot.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: But we'd already set one thing up. Whenever Carl and I got together before the session started and we decided that we were gonna issue a statement to the press – not hold any press conference, nothing about it – that the balconies to the House and the Senate (we cleared it with Zack, he said all right) that the balconies on the House and the Senate were open to all people. You did not have to get any permission; all people, it was open to them. Now that, that was the first one. That didn't make like – that didn't make it look like we were being forced into it because if we'd have waited until we heard the -- it'd look like – and we had a lot of folks mad at us.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: Folks never did know it, but the first day of the legislature one black man showed up. That's the only black person that showed up the first day, and he came five days in a row, sat in five different places in the balcony. I don't know what happened over at the Senate, but he was testing to see whether or not we meant it. We meant it. It was a – it wasn't so – oh, by the way,

I worked with Senator Leroy Johnson, and he was helping us. Leroy Johnson was an African-American in the right place at the right time because he had the right kind of temperament. He could work with white people and he didn't mind it. He had that confidence. And this state owes a lot to him, him and Ben Brown. I'll tell you that.

Usually, a man who's in a place of leadership, he gets credit for everything he's doing. Credit for everything that's bad. Without Ben Brown and Johnson, we couldn't have pulled that thing off. That's the wrong word. That thing wouldn't have gone off as smoothly as it did...

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: ...because they – we knew what was going to happen and we knew how to – and by knowing what was going to happen, we could use preventive measures that didn't make it look like the folks that were supporting Bond made us do it.

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: Because they never did get to raise a ruckus so they could get a policeman there...

SHORT: Uh-huh.

SMITH: ...because there were no policemen there. So they never could tell the world what bad

people we were.

SHORT: Hmm.

SMITH: Okay.

[END]

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