

**Bill Lee interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Bill Lee**

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short. This is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by Young Harris College, the Richard B. Russell Library, and the University of Georgia. Our guest

today is Bill Lee from Clayton County, Georgia. He served in the Georgia House of Representatives for 42 years. Bill, welcome.

BILL LEE: Thank you, sir.

SHORT: Tell us about growing up in Clayton County.

LEE: Well, Robert, I grew up in a rural community, had two brothers and two sisters, a fine mother and father and made it through school without too much difficulty and went to work a little after -- right after getting graduating I was drafted into the Navy. Spent three years during World War II in the naval air station in Jacksonville. Had very good duty down there. Lucky, I gave some calisthenics classes in the morning and run the golf pro shop in the afternoon. So my tour of duty I was available -- but I did what I was told to do. But I had a good life growing up.

SHORT: When did you get interested in politics?

LEE: I think when I graduated 11th grade. I served as a page up in the legislature and Wayman Wells was a representative and he asked me to help. I stayed a whole week and I said, "I like this place here. I'm going to set my little goal, I may want to come up here one of these days. That's why I went to the legislature." That plus you got to love people. To be in politics you've got to like people and I like people. I know a lot of people. I've helped a lot of people. I've

served a lot of people and I had been very fortunate to do that.

SHORT: So when did you decide to run for the legislature?

LEE: Well, in 19 -- I was elected in 1956. I decided a couple years before that that I was going to do this, made it my point to get there and I got successful and I got elected.

SHORT: Well, back in those days politicking was a little different, wasn't it?

LEE: Oh, yeah. You'd go to the little stores, country stores and sit around and the pot belly stoves and tell stories and I enjoyed meeting them kind of people. If you get two or three people in one community you're all set. That's the way I started out.

SHORT: Well, you didn't have hired guns like James Carville or Mary Matalin back then.

LEE: No, we didn't use them kind of people. We used our own little good judgment, what integrity we had and our few friends to help us. Didn't need much money then to run.

SHORT: What do you think about the expenses of running for public office today?

LEE: I think it's way out of reason. There's no semblance of fairness about that. It just -- it's

terrible to raise that kind of money and that's just -- the system ought not to be working like that.

SHORT: So you were elected in '56 and went to the General Assembly in '57.

LEE: '57, yeah.

SHORT: What was it like to be a freshman?

LEE: Well, a strange world. I'll tell you, the first fellow that I met when I walked in that chamber, and I was naïve as all get-out, was Carl Sanders. He was a member of the Senate and he came over there and he introduced himself to me, and he said, "I want to welcome you. I've heard about you. I know about you." And I remember that very vividly, but I was told that I should keep my mouth shut, listen and learn, and I did that for a while.

SHORT: Well, 42 years, that's quite a while. But I believe Marvin Griffin was the governor when you went --

LEE: Yeah, Marvin was. I served two years during his administration and also served in the House with his brother Cheney who was a piece of work.

SHORT: Do you remember the rural roads fight that Governor Griffin had with Lieutenant

Governor Vandiver?

LEE: Yes, sir. I remember that very vividly. It was a very bitter -- I took the Vandiver side of that issue and I'm glad I did, but I didn't make many friends on the other side during that.

SHORT: Looking back over your political career, you had some opponents but you've always come out victoriously on all of your races.

LEE: Yeah. Well, people enjoyed running against me. They got a lot of encouragement. I was kind of part of the leadership up there, close to some of the people that they wanted to get me out. And they worked at it, but folks were true blue to me and I survived a lot of elections. I volunteered to retired in '88.

SHORT: Did you ever consider running for another office?

LEE: No, sir. I never did. People tried to get me to run for Congress. I said, "I don't want to run for Congress. People elected me to this office. I'm going to do it as long as they'll let me do it."

SHORT: Now, I'd like to talk about some specific historical events while you were there those 42 years. Going back now to 1966 when the legislature elected Lester Maddox governor.

LEE: Yes. That was a very historical event. I guess the most historical of mt tenure. We were faced with that challenge and we did that at night where the world could see, and I voted for Lester, which my district went for him overwhelmingly when he was on the ballot and running. And of course, he was elected and I served four years with him as a governor.

SHORT: How did you find his administration?

LEE: Lester was -- he kept the store pretty good. He didn't create any waves. He had some good advice and he made some good appointments and Lester did a whole lot better than I thought he was going to do to start with, to be honest with you.

SHORT: Another historical event during that period was the legislative independence move that you fellows in the House created to get some power away from the governor.

LEE: Yeah, we talked to Governor Maddox about that and said it was time to do that and he agreed, and we moved forward there. The governors ran everything prior to that and that was the best move the legislature made during my tenure was to get some independence up there and it's worked pretty good. Of course, you still listen to the governor. He still makes recommendations, but we kind of do our own thing, do our own budgets and all of that and we -- independence worked well for the people of Georgia.

SHORT: Back in those days, the governor actually chose the Speaker, appointed the committees.

LEE: Yeah, Governor Sanders gave me my first committee appointment. I said, "Thank you very much." It was the Industrial Relations Committee between labor and management. I says, "I'm not sure about that committee, but I appreciate the chairmanship," and I didn't stay on that too long. But he actually did that. He elected, as you said, he selected Speaker and all the committee chairman. But those days are over. You have to earn those spots now.

SHORT: Seniority counts. Well, let's see, let's talk for a minute about the Speaker. You're probably the closest person I've ever known outside of the family to Speaker Murphy.

LEE: Yes.

SHORT: Y'all were good friends. Tell us about the Speaker.

LEE: Tom Murphy was my dear friend, a very capable individual, a good lawyer, but his highest trait as far as I'm concerned was his honesty. I never doubted his integrity. He'd tell you like it is every time. He wouldn't bat an eye. If you'd ask him, he'd tell you. He worked hard at that. He loved his state. He was a master at helping the underprivileged. Just that was his cup of tea.

He wanted to help people who couldn't help themselves -- and awfully good at that. And he run the House with an iron fist. Only way you can do it really with 179 people out there wanting your job and he's tough in the trenches, but he was fair. And I, I say Tom Murphy is as solid as stone iron grip. He's just solid as could be.

SHORT: He was also criticized by the media.

LEE: Oh, yeah.

SHORT: Did he deserve that criticism?

LEE: No, he didn't deserve that criticism, but he wouldn't cater to them. He wouldn't suck up to them. He just kind of let them do their thing. He did his thing, but prior speakers always met with the press and they would decide what they ought to do and all that. But he wasn't into that kind of -- he served the House membership in the state of Georgia and he wasn't interested in the news media telling him what to do.

SHORT: Tell us how he became Speaker.

LEE: Well, he -- George Busby was running for Speaker and several others], and as I recall George Smith was Speaker and died. And then Busby decided he was going to run for governor

and that left the opening for Murphy to get in the race and get elected. And the caucuses elect the speakers then and now, democratic caucus and republican caucus. They make the judgments whose going to -- but the full House has to approve, but the caucuses control that. That's why when Tom got elected and he was awfully good for Georgia over the years.

SHORT: He had opposition as I recall only on two occasions.

LEE: Yeah --

SHORT: Al Burruss.

LEE: Al Burruss run against him one time and he beat Al pretty bad and whose was the other one, Bob?

SHORT: Dubose Porter.

LEE: Did Dubose run against him? I guess you're right, yes. He -- he cleaned both their plows pretty good.

SHORT: You actually came to the legislature before Murphy.

LEE: Yes, sir. Yeah.

SHORT: How did you meet him? How did you get friends with him?

LEE: Well, when he came there he was kind of a -- he's a strong willed individual and he came there. He was very active as a freshman and all of that. And I just took a liking to him. He liked me and we joined forces in a lot of things and did that for a long, long time. I remember he was - - he was chairman of the bank, the banking committee and had a front row seat and Carl Sanders was governor. And Carl had put him in the banking seat and he crossed Carl on some bill he was interested in and Carl removed him as chairman and moved him on the back row. That's when we had 205 members way back under the upstairs balcony, but we've just got 180 now. We don't have those seats anymore.

But he busted him.

SHORT: Well, Murphy was certainly the watchdog of the treasury.

LEE: No question about it. Very conservative. He's liberal with some views when helping people. Was very conservative with money and the budget and that kind of stuff and he won every battle that he sought to take on up there in connection with protecting the interest of this state and conservatism. He was good at that.

SHORT: Well, also though he spearheaded legislations for a lot of worthwhile projects like the

World Congress Centers and Marta, the Georgia Dome, the Olympics.

LEE: Yeah, he was a master of picking issues that were important to the state and he didn't lose. He wouldn't take an issue he didn't think he could win, but he batted 100%, I tell you that. And I appreciate that because he had good vision for our state and we all wanted to do good by our state. He was one of the -- he'd go down in history as one of the finest public servants we ever had in this state in my opinion.

SHORT: Well, you were a very close advisor. What did y'all talk about?

LEE: Talked about a lot of things, a lot of things. I used to tell him, "That dog's not going to hunt, Mr. Speaker, we ought not to do that." "Well, what do you say that for?" I said, "Well --" and he'd listen and then two or three days later he said, "You know you're right, we ain't going to do that." I had that kind of dialogue with him. He'd ask me and frankly I'd tell him, I'd tell him like it is and he appreciated that. He'd tell me like it is. He'd get on my case. He'd call me up in a rules committee time and say, "Look, put this bill on." I said, "I ain't going to put that bill on. It's not ripe yet, Mr. Speaker." "What do you mean, it's not ripe?" I said, "It's not ripe yet." So we had that kind of dialogue.

SHORT: Good. Let's talk then for a minute about that period when Tom Murphy was Speaker and Zell Miller was Lieutenant Governor.

LEE: Yep.

SHORT: A lot of fireworks.

LEE: Yeah, news media fireworks primarily, you know, but at nighttime they'd get a long pretty good. The speaker would get along with Shirley Miller, but the press kept saying, "Well we got a big friction up here between the Lieutenant Governor and Speaker." And they did fuss a lot, but the final product was good for Georgia and good for both of them. And a little dissention is good for the soul around up there, keep your attention span high.

SHORT: Well, some people think that the conflicts they had often resulted in better legislation because members paid more attention to what they were doing.

LEE: Absolutely. Absolutely. We -- you know, Zell, he's very sharp, served in a lot of places in this state before he got elected governor and he had a feel for what's good for Georgia. And he and Murphy were strong willed, but they worked their differences out and it's good for the state.

SHORT: They were a lot alike.

LEE: Oh, yes. Stubborn and tough, tough in the trenches, yeah, tough.

SHORT: Well, let's back now to Bill Lee. You went to the legislature in 1957. What committees did you serve on early?

LEE: I was on the Industrial Relations Committee, I think Parks and Recreation maybe and Transportation, but I moved up the ladder pretty good and wound up -- when I retired I was chairman of the House Rules Committee.

SHORT: How long were you Chairman of the Rules?

LEE: About 14 years I think.

SHORT: That's the most important --

LEE: Long enough to learn how to do it.

SHORT: How do you do it?

LEE: You say no. Make them laugh. We had fun every day. People could come to the rules committee. I wouldn't believe how many would come. You couldn't get them in there coming there to see what was going to happen and we got the job done, but we were at ease, made people

feel good about themselves and I never did -- nothing routine about the way I did -- that's the only way I could survive. I'd surprise them every day at what we were going to do, but in that job, you don't need to send some of that stuff to the floor and we didn't do it. And I led that effort and they told me I was pretty good. I don't know, but people come in there to see what I was going to clown up every day.

SHORT: Did you get much pressure as Chairman?

LEE: Oh, yeah. A lot of pressure. You just had to let that roll, roll right over top of your head. Get it from the Senate. A lot of people. A lot of people to influence. You get so many pieces of legislation. Everybody, you know, is so proud of their bill and they -- but some of that stuff didn't need to pass and we didn't do it. So we have a whole lot more left over we put on.

SHORT: Yeah, let's tell the folks just for a minute what the Rules Committee's main responsibility is. That's the calendars.

LEE: That's setting the daily calendar and what the House is going to take up that day, and we'd meet every morning and set the calendar and that's how the House operated. Do the same thing in the Senate, but of course we got a lot of legislation referred up there. Speaker would put a lot of legislation up there that he didn't think was good. We were a pretty good gatekeeper, had draws full stuff.

SHORT: Bill, if you will, let's go back to 1962, another very historic period when the county unit system was abolished and the University of Georgia had been integrated, but we had that segregation issue. What was it like being in the legislature at that time?

LEE: A lot of tension. I recall when I went there that blacks wasn't allowed even in the balcony in the Georgia House. But we worked through that. Most of us were bigger than the issue and wanted to do what was right and it was tough at home dealing with that with your constituents, but a majority of us felt like we ought to move on and we did. And we got rid of that county unit system and the state's better off about it. We've got one man, one vote now, but it wasn't easy around the legislature. A lot of tension about segregation and the University of Georgia and those type things, but we survived, moved forward and Georgia came out way ahead of some of these states that handled it differently.

SHORT: I recall Governor Vandiver appointed the Sibley Commission. Do you recall that?

LEE: Yes, sir. It was a very effective commission. Good, solid people on it and they did their job real well and the legislature followed their blueprint.

SHORT: That was George Busby I believe sponsored that legislation for the governor.

LEE: That's correct.

SHORT: And he later became governor himself.

LEE: Right.

SHORT: Let's talk a minute now about the abolishment of the county unit system. For the first time, and I was alive then, for the first time within my memory it sort of altered who would run. You had the country. You had the Talmadge people who always had a candidate and in '62 it was Marvin Griffin. And then you had Carl Sanders who was from an urban area and that county unit system, I would think probably contributed more to his election than anything.

LEE: I think you're absolutely right, Bob. The whole system, Gene Talmadge used to say he didn't want to run much anyway where they had a streetcar, anything like that. He was a rural Georgia boy and they prevailed for years and rural Georgia still has a good bit of clout in the legislature, to be honest with you, to this day. And that's okay. I mean, that part of Georgia -- needs people looking after their interests, but the county unit system wasn't fair, wasn't right and we saw fit to get rid of it. It was the urging of the courts and others, you know, they filed a lot of suits and all that stuff.

SHORT: That led to the creation of a confederation of legislators that became the urban caucus.

Were you a member of the urban caucus?

LEE: Yes, I never did join. Well, I went to some of their meetings, but I wasn't an active member as -- Joe Mack Wilson started that in Marietta. I was in a position I didn't need to be many more caucuses. I needed to be looking after my business. So I wasn't active in that, but I did go to a couple of their meetings and they did some good, but that divided the house a little bit more than it should have. But there again, we overcame that.

SHORT: Yeah. Now, I understand they've got a rural caucus.

LEE: Yeah.

SHORT: Black caucus.

LEE: Yeah, they got all kind of -- women's caucus. They've got a caucus for everything. Need them like we need a hole in the head.

SHORT: You mentioned Joe Mack Wilson. As I recall, we was chairman of Ways and Means for a long team, which is a tax type committee.

LEE: Joe Mack was a good member, but he wanted more than his share, to put it that way. But I

remember the legislature.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about some of the other legislators with whom you served. Tell us some of them.

LEE: Bobby Hills is from Augusta, I believe it's Augusta or Atlanta, one or the other. One of the smartest individuals I served with. He was a minority member of the legislature. Very good -- had to be -- self destructive with drugs and that kind of thing. Smart boy. George Busby. I served with him. Good guy. He served -- he got the constitution changed where a governor could serve two terms and he served two terms. Joe Frank Harris, served with him. He was quiet, but a good humble servant. Larry Walker, strong. Denmark Groover, don't come any better than Denmark. Bless his heart, he's gone on to his reward, but greatest orator we ever had in the legislature, and there have just been so many, many good folks that I served with, both sides of the Senate and the House. Not very many places in Georgia I can't go and find somebody I've served with. Some of them gone on, but some still living.

SHORT: When you first ran for office in 1956, did you think you would serve 42 years?

LEE: Didn't have any idea I could serve two, to be honest with you, but I was so naïve about all that stuff. But it just fell in place and Clayton County where I lived then kept growing. I'd make one mad, I'd go find two to take up for them. And I had one little piece of philosophy during my

life and I literally did this -- tomorrow I would meet somebody I didn't know today. I did that all my tenure and I found somebody tomorrow that I didn't know today. And that helped me tremendously. I'd look them up, see them in a restaurant or something I'd just tell them who I was and that worked for me. But my tenure, I don't claim to be any expert. I don't claim to be a wonderful record. I do claim that I worked hard and I tried to serve my people. They approved because they let me serve 42 years.

SHORT: Well, I have observed, and I know you know this, that all of Georgia's governors since 1948 have been from the legislature. Is it a benefit to have that experience?

LEE: Absolutely. Absolutely. Legislative experience is -- you can't beat it. It's very, very helpful anybody wants to run not even governor, attorney general or anything. That experience is tough to come by. It's good and we've had some good governors during here and we'll have some more.

SHORT: Well, come to think of it, one of those legislators became President of the United States.

LEE: Yeah, Mr. Carter. He was a reorganizer of state government and we did some of the stuff he wanted, but not nearly all of it. He was a little over ambitious about that, but he was at the right place at the right time and he took some mighty good advice from people that knew what

they were doing and he prevailed. And he wasn't a very popular president. Times were tough then, the interest rates and all that, but he -- and he got beat after one term, but he made it, Plains, Georgia.

SHORT: There was quite a bit of feuding going on during that period between Governor Carter and Lieutenant Governor Maddox. Did that have any effect on the legislature?

LEE: Not really. Not really. I think generally members of the legislature understood both personalities of both people and worked around that. Wasn't paying much attention to it.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about George Busby. You served with him. He was on the Appropriations Committee, chairman, for a long time and he made that decision as you said to run for governor instead of speaker. Did you think at that point he could win?

LEE: Well, I knew he had capabilities. I knew he had a good mind, but he was kind of -- I had my doubts, to be honest with you, but he ran a good campaign. "A workhorse not a show horse," and the slogan worked well for him. And he had a lot of good help out of the legislature, and if you get a lot of good help out of the legislature you can win races. Those people are grassroots. But I wasn't sure he was going to win, but he did and I did all I could for him and then of course he served two terms.

SHORT: He had a very successful administration.

LEE: Sir?

SHORT: He had a very successful --

LEE: Oh, yeah. Very successful. He knew what he was doing.

SHORT: He was able to change the constitution, which hadn't been done in years.

LEE: Yeah, we did that. I was on the conference committee that adopted that new constitution, one of the most time consuming things I was involved in during my tenure, but tough to write a constitution. Finally got it ratified.

SHORT: He was also very effective in bringing trade to Georgia.

LEE: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SHORT: Well, the Far East really.

LEE: Yeah, in that area. Brought a lot of stuff to Georgia, a lot of good [indiscernible].

SHORT: Improved the banking system by making it possible for overseas owners of businesses in America to do their banking here. And so to me the Georgia House of Representatives has been the heart of the Democratic Party in Georgia for many, many years and I think that, you know, I can look back at Speaker Murphy and you as being responsible for perhaps the election of George Busby and the election of Joe Frank Harris. And what has happened to the Democratic Party in Georgia?

LEE: Well, it's not what happened to the Democratic Party. It's what the republicans, they took the issues and run with them and the democrats, when I was there we were the conservatives and the republicans were the liberals. And they reversed that on us and the diversity up there, the caliber of the people running. Republicans had better candidates and to be quite candid, we had - - we lost that leadership capacity and -- going to get it back though. It's moving in that direction pretty fast and I don't know how long it's going to take. This year's election for governor might help that.

SHORT: Is there any individual in the Democratic Party that stands out to you as a leader that can bring the party back?

LEE: Well, Roy Barnes can and he's running for governor.

SHORT: You knew Roy. You served with Roy. What do you remember about him?

LEE: Intelligent, too impatient or didn't take a lot of advice at times when he should have and that kind of stuff. But Roy had a plan and he got involved in way too many things that he could still have his way and get somebody else to do it. But he was -- he just wanted to work at it and be heard. And he got heard a little too much and it kind of hurt him politically. But he might make a comeback. I predict he might.

SHORT: Let's talk about reapportionment. Your district was reapportioned several times and I'm sure that brought a hardship on your campaigning.

LEE: Yeah, well we used to run countywide and we had Clayton and Fayette in one district and we had four members, and then the courts said we couldn't have multi-member districts. I wound up in the last district, I had a little small district, which I didn't like. I felt like I was a state representative, not a little district where they got ward politics. But that's the way it finally worked out to get one man, one vote. Reapportionment is tough, nasty. It's not a friendly atmosphere. It's not a winner. It's a loser, but necessary. I went through about four of those, five. But a lot of hard feelings. Some never got over the way they -- a fellow had been there ten years, you cut his seat out, he don't like you.

SHORT: Most of the decisions regarding reapportionment in the early years were made by the

federal courts. There's been a suggestion that perhaps it would be wise to have a reapportionment commission to do that every ten years instead of having to go to the courts and having to take it to the legislature. Is there any merit in that?

LEE: The courts have been too active in it, I think. That's people's business and people ought to do it in commission, the legislature would be better. I don't have any hard feelings, strong feelings either way. But the -- it's one of those necessary evils and I -- a commission might work. Might ought to try, see what they'll do. But the legislature's going to have the final say so and I don't know whether you need another layer to mess with that or not.

SHORT: All right. Now, let's talk a little bit about how the legislature spends the state's money. The budget is always the number one agenda when the legislature meets.

LEE: Absolutely.

SHORT: Explain some of that to us and tell us about the green door.

LEE: Well, the budget is very vital and all budgets have to originate in the House. That's in the constitution and it is -- up to the last couple, three years we've had good growth, been able to spend money pretty freely and do a lot of things we ought to be doing for the people, using their money. But got tight lately, but it's saying this budget starts out the first week and it's one of the

last things you do each 40 day session. It just takes that long to work through this process. A lot of people got different agendas about that. The lobbyists out there worrying about the budget and their little pet projects and all of that.

But it's amazing you get through that, it really is. But the conservative approach that we used when I was there, we'd take the low estimate of the budget analysts every year -- they'd give us a low figure of what your budget was going to be -- a low figure, a middle figure, and a high figure. We'd take the low, being safe and didn't overspend didn't know it was -- sometimes that had happened the last three or four years. It's got us in a bind, but that's the way we did it. We negotiated with the Senate and the House, a lot of that was newspaper stuff. We can work that stuff out, but just take a little time. We're in no hurry and we got plenty of time. But the green door, I guess, was one of the most effective groups you could ever imagine. Very few on it, they made hard decisions and that's what prevailed in the budget. A lot of members didn't like that. I mean, because they wasn't in there. Did it behind closed doors primarily and press. We'd let one in there once in a while, tell jokes, and then meet in another room. But budget's tough. It's hard to manage people's money and I think we did pretty good with it really.

SHORT: How did you get to be a member of the green door committee?

LEE: Speaker, the speaker's selected those. He selected people willing to work later, stay at night, midnight, all weekends. It wasn't easy. I think, you know, I lived close to the Capitol when I was there and I didn't worry about hotel rooms. I had one there once in a while. We'd

get a time maybe we was going to be there a lot at night, but I'd come home every night and I was willing to work, do my thing, do my job and that's helped me personally do a lot of things I did. But I feel sorry for a fellow that lives way, way off and has to come to Atlanta and don't get to go home much on the weekends during some of the legislative sessions. Because that budget takes a lot of time and you learn a lot about state government.

SHORT: Tell us about conference, the budget conference committee. Did you ever serve on the conference committee with the budget?

LEE: One time. One time. It was next to the last year I was there, I believe it was. Tom Buck got sick and I served. But the green door was the budget committee. They would meet -- conference committee would be meeting in this room, green door was in this room and then the conferee would come in there and say, "Well, we got this proposition. What do you all want us to do with it?" That's how that was, the way that worked.

SHORT: Let's talk some more about some of the controversies that the legislature faced when you were there. One that comes to mind is Governor Zell Miller's flag controversy.

LEE: Yeah, Zell wanted to change the flag and he gave it an all American effort. In his State of the State that year, that that was his speech, changing the flag, time to do it. Prior to that, he called a bunch, I guess it's probably 15 up to the Capitol, Senate and the House. I guess he

thought we were the leaders. He sat on the back of his desk with his boots hanging off. We didn't know why we was going there. He called me, said, "The governor wants you to be there at ten o'clock." I said, "Fine, I'll be there," and said, "What's it about?" "Well, we don't know." But we got there and he had the Chairman of the Republican Party and the Chairman of the Democratic Party in there. Said, "One thing we got to do in this state is change the flag." He was flipping his heels. He's hitting the back of that desk. I said, "Governor, what if you don't prevail?" "Well, we can't afford to fail." I says, "Pretty chancy. Going to be tough." "Well, we got to try, got to try." And that's how that's done.

He introduced that bill. I had it up in House rules and I had it up there when the session ended when he wrote me a letter, said he'd count as good as I could and didn't have the votes. But he was sincere in that. He really was. And after that, Roy got into it, you know, and got it changed and one thing that hurt him politically running for governor, but I -- his second term. But that issue's put to rest now, I think, know it is.

SHORT: To get back for a minute to something I failed to mention was about reapportionment was the addition of black members to the legislature. After that first reapportionment I guess in 1962, Senator Johnson was elected and was the first black member since God knows when. You served with him.

LEE: Yeah, I served with him and Grace Hamilton over in the House. Fine lady. Good member of the House and we've had some very, very good black members of the Georgia Legislature,

some not as good as others. But they've had their place. Some of them acted ugly, but few -- very few. And, but they were accepted there and it's -- they work in a viable part of it, got good numbers in there now.

SHORT: Yeah, and there was no tension back then?

LEE: Well, a little. Not much. Everybody knew that was going to happen. We ought to go ahead and live with it, not create any turmoil. No turmoil happened.

SHORT: I recall one instance, the refusal of the legislature to seat Julian Bond.

LEE: Yeah, I was on the House Rules Committee when that happened. He was making bad remarks, whatever, his temperament, conversations, his press releases, all anti-governor, all anti-Georgia and we made a martyr out of him, but didn't seat him. The courts finally seated him.

SHORT: Let's talk about the passage of Zell Miller's lottery legislation. That came through your rules committee.

LEE: Yeah, there again I told Zell when he wanted to vote in the House, I'd give it to him and I did and it passed by one vote in the House. And I think that was my vote. These preachers had me locked down in Clayton County and I met with them and I kind of got -- told them I felt like I

was denying the people the right to vote. And I probably ought to vote for it. And I got away with that pretty good and I went up there and voted for it, and my vote was probably the one that carried it. So he got it and it's a good thing for Georgia. It really is.

SHORT: The Hope Scholarship program has been very successful.

LEE: Wonderful. Wonderful. Helped a lot of kids. Helped educate many, many people.

SHORT: You know, we spend a lot of money in Georgia on education.

LEE: A lot of it.

SHORT: Are we getting our money's worth?

LEE: No, sir. We're not. We can do better. We can do better, and we've tried over the years, but the quality of teaching is not as good as it ought to be, to be honest with you. I think that's a weak point, weak link. We don't have the educators talented enough to teach our kids.

SHORT: The lottery money also went for technical things such as computers and there's some question as to whether or not that's beneficial to education. But it's there and it comes from the lottery fund. I want to go back, Bill, if you will, and ask you this question. What changes,

beneficial changes have you observed in state government over the 42 years you served there?

LEE: Beneficial changes -- as far as I was concerned is technology. We created some good technology techniques around there. They created a press area, a press agent and telling people what's happening. Those kind of changes, progressive changes and our state is -- well, we got a - - we don't have many Georgians left. We got a lot of -- Georgia is outnumbered in this state and that's not all bad, but changes in Georgia have been unique. Not too great or many changes, but we're trying to keep up with the times and if we need to change something or we need to change our thinking like segregation, you know, we come along, got on the bus. But Georgia's still a great state. It'll remain a great state and I just hope we continue to have adequate leadership.

SHORT: Back in 1962, or '63 when Carl Sanders was governor, he changed the structure of the highway department.

LEE: Right.

SHORT: And now in modern times they're changing it again. Do you think we'll ever get it right?

LEE: No, sir. You can't get politics out of the DOT. You can't get politics out of it and it's into everything, education, whatever, politics is part of it. The DOT board has been doing mighty

well, I think. Now, of course Perdue got mad with them and he wants to change it, but he didn't get what he wanted. He got a small little move, some planner over there that he can name, but it just compounds the cost of government. That's just agitating to me. It aggravates me.

SHORT: Bill, how did your constituents feel about school integration?

LEE: Well, it was a mixed bag. We had some rabble-rousers that were upset and I kind of new where most of them were at that time from my district. Could get a good feel and the clear thinking people were okay with that. They thought it was the right thing to do and that was a real joy to me to be able to get through that.

SHORT: How did you campaign? What were the issues, you know, your early part of your career besides racial matters?

LEE: Well, do what you can to help my county and my area. And look after, be responsible and -- I worked at it like an all-American. You've got to love people who fool with politics and I was availed to them and if they knew they had a meeting somewhere, Bill, he was there doing his part in the community and whatever and answering their question. I never failed to answer a letter I got or return a phone call. How bad they may have been, I'd do that, but -- and one letter I recall writing, some fellow blistered me bad and I wound up the letter, I said, "It's nice people like you that make public service worthwhile." I remember that one.

SHORT: I'd like to ask you as you look back over your career, is there anything you would have done differently?

LEE: Well, you know, I'm not sure there was. I missed some votes that I probably ought to have voted the other way, but I -- at the time, when you're called on sometimes it's -- you don't have much time to do research or find out how some of your folks might feel. But by and large, I'm sort of happy with my public service. It's a long tenure and I was able to meet my responsibilities knowing what I was doing and how to get there to do it. And it wasn't no spring training with me. We were hard at work and I could come home and tell my people either, "We did this, we did that, we didn't do this," and be kind of acceptable. And I don't know, I don't know a whole lot that I would want to change.

SHORT: For a number of years, Clayton County had two of the most powerful members of the general assembly, you as Chairman of the Rules Committee, and Senator Starr, who as I recall was Chairman of the Appropriations.

LEE: Yeah.

SHORT: Did you two work well together?

LEE: Very well together. Terrell and I, people tell you that we were strong and did more than we probably ought to have done for Clayton County, but we did it in good spirit and we worked awfully good together. It was good to have him in the Senate. He was good to have me in the House and when I left -- I left the House with Terrell in the Senate and he struggled with that a little bit, and we lost him last week, the week before last.

SHORT: What are some of the projects in your district that you're most proud of? I know that you were very active in Clayton College?

LEE: Yeah, Terrell and I both. They gave us credit for getting that here and getting it four-year status. And I was involved. A lot of good people involved in that, but we were at the right place at the right time and put the right heat. George Simpson was the Chancellor when that college was created. And we talked him into agreeing to putting it in Clayton County and he and his group wanted to put it where South Lake Mall is today. But we had a piece of property up there in Morrow across the railroad, beautiful piece of property and I had a little Mustang automobile and I put old George in my Mustang and rode him across the pretty dam and that pretty property over there. He said, "We'll put this over here," and this was -- that's where it was. And then we had a hard time getting a four-year status, but we had enough clout to get that done and Clayton College has grown. It's huge and week before last, the day of graduation they gave Terrell and I an honorary doctorate's degree in public service for our part in creating that thing. Of course, Terrell had passed away. They planned it a long time, but I went and got that and real proud of

that. It's hard for me to brag on myself, Bob. I let other people do that.

SHORT: Well, it's like Dizzy Dean says, "You ain't bragging if you've done it."

LEE: Yeah, but I've had a fruitful, good career.

SHORT: So there's nothing you can look back on that you failed to do, that you wished you'd done?

LEE: Well, there's probably some things, but I just, off the top of my head I can't come up with anything that I think ought to have been done, but I just can't think of anything.

SHORT: How would you like for Bill Lee to be remembered?

LEE: As an old country boy trying to get along with his fellow man.

SHORT: Do you have any advice for youngsters today who are looking for careers as elected officials?

LEE: Like people, work hard, convince them that you can do the job better than anybody else, and be successful. Don't let them down. The only thing you've got in public life is integrity and

I think I wound up with some.

SHORT: Well, Bill, it's been a pleasure having you. I'm sure we missed a lot of political history today in talking to you today about that illustrious 42 years you served in the General Assembly. Can you think of anything else that we should talk about?

LEE: No, I really can't. I say, at my age and status in life, I'm glad to be anywhere. I went to a meeting -- when you get out of office, you're not much and I went to a meeting the other day and pretty good meeting, pretty important meeting. Got invited and they introduced the notaries before they did me, so you know I was way down. So it's all over for the old man.

SHORT: Why did you decide not to run again?

LEE: My wife -- I bought a lot from J.T. Williams, Eagle's Landing, right after he started this facility and I said, "I like to play golf and if we ever have to move I'd want to move down here." And she decided that she was going to build a house and we -- and she built it. And I gave her an unlimited budget and she exceeded that, but we got our house down there. And that's out of my district.

SHORT: Oh, you moved out of your district.

LEE: Yeah, I moved out of my district. I think I could have got elected one more time maybe and I don't regret that. It was time for me to get out. I'd been -- Tom Murphy and I were going to quit at the same time and we kind of pledged that to each other and I told him -- he didn't believe I would. I said, "Yeah, I'm going, " and he said, "Well let me serve another term." I'm glad he did, but I --

SHORT: You know, just to set the record straight, Murphy's two years past you tied you all for the --

LEE: Four years.

SHORT: Four years tied you all for the --

LEE: Yeah, we both have continuous 42 years served in the House.

SHORT: Continuous service. That's amazing.

LEE: It is.

SHORT: Well, Bill, you've been a great public servant and I want to thank you on behalf --

LEE: Well, you're very charitable.

SHORT: -- on behalf of Young Harris College, and the Richard Russell Library, and the University of Georgia for sharing your experiences with us.

SHORT: I appreciate y'all for coming down here and doing this. Maybe my grandchildren will look at it.

[END OF RECORDING]

**University of Georgia**  
**Bill Lee**

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