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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by the Duckworth Library at Young Harris College and the Richard B. Russell Library at the

University of Georgia. We're delighted today to have as our guest Matt Towery, State Representative, campaign consultant, author and current Chief Executive Officer of the political information and polling firm Insider Advantage. Welcome, Matt. We are delighted to have you.

TOWERY: Thank you. I'm honored to be a part of this series.

SHORT: Well, with your permission we'd like to divide our conversation into three parts. First your early life; secondly, your experience in and memories of your career in Georgia politics; and lastly, your work as an author and as a pollster.

TOWERY: Absolutely.

SHORT: So let me begin by saying that you're a rare breed, a native Atlantan.

TOWERY: A rare breed and I don't know if it's a blessing or a curse to be honest with you. I have been -- in fact my uncle who was not from Georgia, but who lived here all of his life, just passed away literally last night, that -- he lived to a great age of 80. He was head of the MA First Company which is the company that created lead for Scripto, all their pencils -- no longer an issue here, but the reason I bring him up is that all of my family on both my mother and my father's side is from Georgia many, many, many generations on both sides.

My mother's side of the family her father -- their roots were in Crabapple, Georgia back and I

had members of my family on that side of the family who fought in the Civil War. Then the Towery side of the family was rooted in both Atlanta and Gainesville, and I had members of my family that fought in the Civil War on that side.

Now all that said, I have absolutely no interest in the Civil War. I don't read Civil War books.

That's not to be disrespectful of history, but it has never been anything that really captivated my attention. I think, in part, because when you grow up seeing these pictures of relatives who died in a war that you have mixed feelings about you would just as soon leave it alone.

I also consider it a blessing and a curse because when you grow up in a state where -- when I was a child -- I was born in December of 1959, Atlanta had just around a million residents. We now as I speak today in the year 2009 going on 2010 Atlanta has a population over the metro area of about 5.6 million people. That's a substantial, if not amazing, change. And so we went from very small city and relatively small state to something that I could never fathom.

But growing up with those sort of roots it's a plus and a minus because so many people in Georgia now are not from Georgia, and it used to be -- there used to be some pride in saying someone was old Atlanta or old Georgia. I have found that that any pride or concept of that has long since disappeared as old Atlanta and old Georgia disappears, and I'd just like to say that everybody who -- the few of us who are natives back, you know, into the 1800's and even before (our families), that that just means that we were guaranteed that we were all poor. This state did not have many people who survived the Civil War wealthy, and I feel quite certain that knowing both sides of my family, although I'm not big on genealogy, I feel certain none of them did either.

That said, I grew up in a family that from the early 1900's on was in two divided industries. My father's side of the family was always in the printing and advertising business, and all the way from the 1900's -- early 1900's with my great-grandfather who was the first person to install the linotype at the *Atlanta Journal or Constitution*, I can't remember which. Probably the *Constitution*, but they both shared the same linotype, which would be the equivalent of being the guy who installed the very first computer and ran the IT department today. So he was a salesman and an expert on the linotypes and he was so good at it the people at the paper asked him to stay. He stayed and died I think in the early 1950's, but was -- ironically for people who think of me as a Republican, although I'm now nonpartisan -- but he was the head of the union for the paper. So I always get a kick out of that.

My mother's side of the family was from the dress manufacturing business. Everyone in her family was in the same business, and so we were in the manufacturing or the creative side in business in Atlanta all through the 1900's. We sold our family business which was a commercial printing company, we were the largest sheet fed commercial printing company in the Southeast in 1997, which was a good time to sell because the economy was good and people would pay cash.

So I grew up primarily in the Vinings area where my great-grandfather on my father's side, but that would be my I guess maternal great-grandfather. I never keep that stuff straight -- they owned a farm which was adjacent to a farm owned by a gentleman who took on Herman Talmadge for governor, Mr. Carmichael. And they owned that farm. It's now the area that's known as Atlanta Road which has now somehow become Vinings. It used to be Smyrna, and at

that time it was Oakdale.

So my roots were really in Atlanta, downtown Atlanta -- not downtown, but in the Atlanta area, and in the Vinings area. And I went to school first at an elementary school in Cobb County for several years, and it was a great experience because Cobb at that time was still relatively viewed as a rural county, even though where I lived, which was right off of Paces Ferry, was literally five minutes from the school I would later graduate from, which is Pace Academy. But my friends when I had started attending Pace in the early 1970's thought that I lived in the country.

The elementary school that I attended was really a great thing because at that time Cobb was still emerging as -- thought of as sort of a rural area even though where I lived was five minutes from where I would later graduate which is Pace Academy on West Paces Ferry, but my friends would always kid me that I lived in the country. And Cobb was sort of symbolic of Georgia at that time in the 1960's and early '70s, which it was growing.

So they built a new little school up in the Vinings/Smyrna, whatever, area -- really didn't have a name. It now, ironically, is the bridge - you cross that bridge that bears my name to get to the school. I don't think anybody at that school knows that. And it says Matthew A. Towery and I go by Matt so when I cross it I don't even realize I'm crossing the bridge, but people will ask me from time to time if I knew the dead guy they named it after. I say, "I'm that dead guy."

The great thing about that school was that you had a combination of two groups. You had the sons and daughters of business leaders who had chosen to move into the edge of outside of Buckhead and outside the city of Atlanta, but fairly affluent group, and then you had another group of native individuals, native in the sense that their families have lived there many

generations. They were all African-American and they lived in one community, which is now Vinings Overlook. And the poverty level among that group was substantial. One girl lived in a car for a period of time. Many of them wore the same clothes to school basically everyday.

The great thing about that is the teachers would have us, because they were short staffed back then, they would have those of us who were more advanced in reading and the like, help out by reading -- helping the students who were slower and didn't have the opportunity, slower in terms of their development in reading, help them out with their reading and other tasks that we had in the classroom. And so from a very early age, I think, unlike a lot of my friends, I had a very integrated situation. The class was probably a third African-American, but it wasn't just African-American. It was an African-American population that was substantially affected by the economy and their economic situation. And, ironically, the good part - - the good end of this story is that for those who lived there and stayed the developer bought their land from them. They all owned the land and they ended up making a substantial amount of money.

I think the great part of that is that you had an opportunity to see what truly a mixture of all different types of folks working together, knowing each other. No one thought anything, by the way, of that situation. It never dawned on me until years later that really there was a substantial - - I didn't look at these students that I was working with and say, "Gee, they're different from us." I mean we were all -- we were a class of 30 people. I mean when you got 30 people in the class and 15 of them are in a situation where you're helping them learn to read, you just don't think anything of it when you're in fourth grade or third grade or whatever.

So it was a great experience and I think it sort of helped me as I got into my political years when

I served in the House because I felt totally comfortable with any group or any set of circumstances because I had been around it. I certainly had not been treated to some privileged life in the sense that there was no exposure to how other people live. That said, Pace was a lot different. It was not the Pace Academy it is today, which is one of the nation's top day schools -- private day schools, or I would not have been admitted. But it was, you know, one of the three or four top ones back in Atlanta when we really didn't have many.

Those were great years for me. I won't go into all of the details of it except that it was a wonderful school then. Nurtured the individual, allowed me to win in one day the state drama championship and the state debate championship, and then also go on to win the national bicentennial debate championship, which is really how I ended up in politics.

My early political year, although I should stop and say really that's not my first brush with politics. In the little elementary school that I attended before I went to Pace, Teasley Elementary, I think it was in fourth -- third or fourth grade, around 1969 or maybe early '70, I'm sure it was '69 -- we were asked to write a business letter. Every class when you're in third or fourth grade you have to learn to write a little business letter. And so I wrote my business letter and everyone chose someone. Well I was enthralled with politics for some reason. I think it dated back to the Kennedy assassination because I remember that day even though I was only three years old it stayed in my mind forever as it has in most people of my generation. I think that's probably what prompted me to be interested in politics and news.

So I write to then our rather controversial governor, Lester Maddox, who had been hospitalized in one of his many instances in which he would either get a gall bladder attack, appendix attack,

nosebleed - whatever. Lester was always having, you know, little emergencies happen as I recall. Now my memory is getting hazy these days, but this is my story and I'm sticking to it. I wrote to Governor Maddox, you know, wishing him that he would get well. And I didn't know much about his politics. You really don't understand that sort of thing when you're in fourth grade. I knew he was controversial, but I knew he was governor. I thought, "Gee, I'm going to write to whoever the governor is."

Well we're at my home on an evening eating dinner and the phone rings. And we still laugh about it in this family because my parents are both still alive, and my dad answers the phone and this man asks for Matt Towery. And it's an adult voice, and my dad's a little taken aback and he says, "Well who's calling?" "Lester Maddox." And he looked at me and he said, "Matt, Governor Maddox is on the phone for you." And it really was Lester Maddox. You know we couldn't figure out if it was a hoax, somebody was playing a game, and he didn't know anything about my family at all. Somehow he had gotten the telephone number. I guess because I had my address on there, and asked me if I would come down to what they called Little People's Day which is -- I think that's what they called it, which he would allow any citizen to come and bear any grievance or whatever, but he wanted to meet me. And he then had his brother Wesley call me to see if I needed a ride, which suggested that they had no earthly idea of whether my family had 10 cents to rub together or not. So this wasn't a ploy to get political money. It wasn't a ploy to do anything. He just -- for some reason the letter had touched him.

So I went down to see Governor Maddox and then he made me a Lieutenant Colonel which, heck I was a Lieutenant Colonel then, so I figured, "Well why not keep going down?" And to make a

long story short, I became sort of the unofficial, and then later the sort of official, permanent page for Lester Maddox. First when he was governor I would go down in the summer times and I'd go out to the mansion some and I would go out to -- during the legislature when I was allowed to get out of school or whatever. And so I came to know most of the people in the Governor's office, Mary Beasley and T.A. Smith who was with the State Patrol.

Back in those days the State Patrol attached someone who served not only as sort of a - not just there for security, he really wasn't there for that reason, but almost as a lobbyist for the governor.

That's something that most people don't know... would work the legislators for the governor.

T.A., Mary, some of the others who were there, Sandy, and others who -- Louise Summers who I think passed away recently. But these were all people that worked with Governor Maddox.

When Governor Maddox ran for reelection and was defeated, back then we had a tradition in Georgia which people don't really know about, and that is -- the tradition was a lot of the folks who worked for the prior governor would just stay on. They didn't just clear house like they do now. Mary Beasley who stayed in the anteroom where Lester would receive visitors stayed in that same anteroom, that same area outside the governor's office where you have two secretaries -- space for about two or three secretaries -- and that's it. She stayed there so she was the keeper of the door for Jimmy Carter just like she was for Lester. And then T.A. Smith stayed out there for, as I recall, for Governor Carter. Then of course we had new faces like Jody Powell and Ham Jordan.

But I became then at that time the Lieutenant Governor's office was not on the third floor but on the fourth floor, and it's now I guess on the floor with the governor's office, but it's - - it's

moved up in importance obviously, but Lester was kicked up, basically up to the rafters and from the very beginning, in fact Governor Maddox asked me to come for the inauguration of Jimmy Carter and I had never met Jimmy Carter until that day. I was probably 11 years old. And I remember I was with Maddox and the Maddox family and I sat -- that time they had inauguration out on the balcony, and the VIP's, members of the legislature, whatever, would sit there and we looked out over the public who would stand out there and watch the inauguration.

And so I remember distinctly Lester Maddox introducing me to Jimmy Carter and it was the first time I ever saw Jimmy Carter and I -- there was a feeling that day that there wasn't a whole lot of love from Jimmy Carter for Lester Maddox. Well, in the weeks to come I spent probably more time playing hooky from school than I should have, and I was there on the infamous day when Lester Maddox went down to meet with Jimmy Carter and Carter basically told Maddox, "I'm the governor and you're not." And Maddox, who was prone to have nosebleeds and would get very red in the face when anything happened that upset him, came flying back upstairs hollering and screaming about "that man." I remember distinctly they had to get him to lay down on his sofa and so that was an interesting time period. It did not deter me from going down to the governor's office and Mary made no hesitance about when President Carter wasn't there I could go in and just sit in the governor's office, sit in his chair. It was a different age.

And President Carter, or then Governor Carter, would come back in the door. He didn't know me from Adam. He just knew there was this kid hanging around, and I would swiftly move out of the way. But I had chance to see Carter as governor probably as few people did as a young kid, sort of fly on the wall, and you could tell this was a quicker governor, a more sophisticated

governor. Not always as friendly as he portrayed himself to the public. I could see, even as a young boy, that Jimmy Carter could be pretty tough when he wanted to be and get down to business. But then after being around Lester Maddox, you know, that contrast should not have surprised anyone. Maddox would break out in song, would whistle like a bird, loved to have you re-recite if you said anything great about him.

He, by the way, was a great man. He was not, in my opinion, a racist. And I tried desperately, years later, with my national column to get him to apologize, and he actually did in essence. He said, "If anything I did hurt anyone's feelings I would feel badly about that." And, once I ran the column, some of his old friends called up and beat up on him and then Lester was upset saying that I had misquoted him and I played him back what he had said and he said, "Well you didn't misquote me but I shouldn't have said it."

He did mean it. Governor Maddox had an affinity for anyone who was poor. Didn't matter if you were white, black, made no difference. He really got caught up in the state's rights issue and he also was a perfect target because he was very flamboyant. And prior to being governor he had owned a restaurant called The Pick Rick, and because he was flamboyant, and because he was so into the State's right issue, he became the focal point of many of the early sort of sit-ins and the like, and the famous axe handle which he allegedly held. He never hit anyone with an axe handle. I don't think he could have hit anyone with an axe handle. I don't think Lester had enough in him to hurt a fly, but he was an easy target and he unfortunately -- and he was the first to say it. He had not gotten the education which he wanted. He was desperately poor as a child, had to support his siblings when his father passed away, and he always said to me over and over

again, "Make sure you get your college education." That was the number one thing that Governor Maddox always said to me.

So I grew up around the legislature. I would sit with Governor Maddox to the side. Back in those days they had a fairly old-fashioned system for turning people's mics when they wanted to speak and so I sat to the side of the governor as his page on whatever days I could -- Lieutenant Governor -- when I could get off, and watch the Senate operate, had sort of free roam of the Senate as well. So it served me well many, many years later when I went to the legislature I knew where every door was. I knew where the door was that led to the dome, to the Capitol, to the steps of the Capitol dome.

I even was able to tell one governor, I won't say who, that my guess is that the beautiful -- behind the curtain that they use now and they have some mahogany or some sort of wood behind it -- I am guessing that there still remains a beautiful piece of granite which used to be the granite behind the desk of the Governor of the state of Georgia. I mean I'll never get anybody to tear that wood down to find out, but none of us can figure out -- discern that they ever dismantled that because it would have been so heavy I don't know how they would have gotten it out of there.

So those were my early years.

I graduated from Pace, had received an invitation to attend numerous schools, one of which was Georgetown, which was known as one of the great debate schools in the country at that time. So I went to Georgetown. I got there. Their famed debate coach, Jim Unge,r immediately announced he was taking a sabbatical. He could have told me that first before I went to Washington. And so I called, of all people, Jasper Dorsey who was head of then Southern Bell --

Bell South later -- who was a great University of Georgia man and who had tried to get me to attend the university, and I said I want to come home. And he said we've got a dorm room waiting for you, which was really pretty hard back then.

So I came back and I was at Georgia for many years. But in 1980 -- '79 - '80, a time period that would change my life without question, several things happened. I was very active at UGA. I was president of my dorm which equated to me finding out there was \$30,000 or \$20,000 that they had collected in fees and I thought, "Well, let's create a game room." So I was a very responsible leader even then. I think we had a party honoring Coach Dooley and the 1978 football team. Some very productive things we did with that money. Probably why I got elected president.

And then I was on the -- freshman on the school government, which of course we later dismantled, probably correctly, but I was very active at Georgia. Many of the people I know now in politics, people I practice law with, people who I know in journalism, all went to Georgia during that time period, and many of them are members of the Grid Iron Society that I'm a member of. So I have very fond memories of my time at UGA. It was just a fabulous, great time and I had great professors. Most of them I knew personally, certainly in political science. I had so many AP courses that I was sort of bumped up to where I could take my major courses, some of them in my first year.

Long story made short, I kept being prodded. I was I guess not a Republican at that point. I still would have considered myself a Democrat having grown up as a Georgia Democrat and knowing all these Democrats. President Carter was suffering and I knew it, but I nevertheless -- as much

as I was disappointed in how things were going for him, these were my friends. People like Burt Lance, who I know today, who I had gone to school with one of his sons. And Mary Beasley, working for Burt. And then, of course, Jody and Hamilton, who I didn't know that well but I knew them. So I, you know, when Carter didn't do well I didn't take any joy in it, and when he did well I was very proud.

In 1979, leading up to 1980, I kept meeting this guy named Mack Mattingly who had come to Georgia and who had been told by some business people who knew me that I had won the debate championship and he asked me if I would work on his campaign as a volunteer, of course. And I kept thinking this guy is just -- he's running against Herman Talmadge. What he didn't know is I had actually started out working in the Talmadge campaign as a volunteer, but Mattingly was impressive in the sense that he was persistent and he seemed like a fresh face and he was a good man.

And about that same time I had taught at West Georgia College at debate workshops and had come to know one of the two daughters of Newt Gingrich who was involved in debate, and came to know of Newt during that same time period. So contemporaneously I started getting to know Newt Gingrich and Mack Mattingly, and by the summer of 1980 I was in Mattingly's campaign. Originally a researcher, a volunteer researcher, but very quickly started writing speeches because there was no one there to write speeches. We had a campaign manager, we had a press secretary, and then we didn't have much else. And no one really gave us a prayer of winning. So it was easy for a kid. Back then people weren't used to a 20-year-old, you know, having a major role in a campaign. Well, now it seems to be 20-year-olds run the State Capitol. So, but at that time

you were -- you had to really fight to get in there.

But Gingrich, to his credit, really is the one who pushed me on Mattingly. He said, "You know, you got a guy who won the national debate championship. You ought to use him." And so Mack reluctantly did it, I think primarily to keep Newt off his back. They would often, although they were great friends, they would often bicker back and forth because Newt was always telling Mack what to do and Mack didn't want to hear it.

And so we went through the summer of 1980 with me coaching Gingrich. He had challenged his opponent to a debate in every county and on all three TV stations. So that now is unheard of, but back then we only had network affiliates. We didn't have cable. And so I helped Newt prepare for those debates, went with him to those debates and then we would critique them afterwards. And that's really -- I was riding in the car between Mattingly and Gingrich throughout that very historic 1980 summer and of course with the Mattingly campaign. The Gingrich campaign got close primarily because we gave the opponent so much free name ID on television. We didn't think about that.

And so Mack, of course, won in one of the great upsets of all time. I was in the room when he won. There were about 1,000 people who claim they were there. I was actually in the bathroom of the suite taking numbers in from of all places Cobb County. And I never will forget I was just supposed to read the numbers out to Bill Stewart who is an accountant and friend of Mack's.

There was about 10 of us huddled in that bedroom because we had been declared the loser the night before with the wonderful exit polls, --which by the way I still don't believe in to this day - - and Tallmadge had been declared the winner, but as the night had gone along we started to see

Mattingly's numbers creep up and that's when you started to hear about the so-called metro Atlanta donut, the infamous donut that has sort of disappeared now for Republicans. It's expanded and there's a bigger hole in that donut.

Cobb County was the last number to come in and it would put Mattingly over the top, and I was reading off numbers from precincts and I was analyzing them rather than just reading them, and I never will forget Mack saying, "Just shut up and read the numbers." So I read the numbers and Bill Stewart hit a thing on this old calculator and he said, "We won," and we did win.

And as the sun came up it was about 7:00 in the morning it was over at the old Terrace Garden Inn Hotel, which is now being refurbished across from Lenox. The sun, a beautiful day, and Mack Mattingly was the first Republican Senator to be elected since Reconstruction and really the first major Republican to be elected statewide since the Civil War, since individuals were -- some were appointed as Republicans. So it was a very historic moment. Ronald Reagan was elected President. It was very hard to stay away from that. It was hard to go back to Georgia knowing that that was happening.

So I sort of played a role early on with Mattingly, in that I would talk with him, and with more importantly Robert Atchison who became his -- what they would now call Chief of Staff. Robert was 27 and I was 20 going on 21, so we were a very young group. And as all campaigns are, you don't trust anyone except the people who are part of the campaign. And so without going into all the details, I did a lot of free work for Mack.

Going into '81, I decided to leave Georgia and take the position of Special Assistant to the Senator. I would go back between Washington and Atlanta and my main job was to work on

speeches and to deal with political issues that were government related. But at the same time I was also unofficially helping Newt, and Newt, in fact, offered me a job but could not pay as much as the Senate paid, and I think became very upset with me when I turned him down. Could not understand why I didn't want to be over full-time working with him. I said, "I can't afford it, Newt. It's just that simple."

But we continued our relationship and Newt was at that time creating a thing called the Conservative Opportunity Society which was the beginning of the Contract with America, and we were with people like Jack Kemp and -- I can't even name all the names of members of Congress who back then were part of that, but we would meet in Newt's cramped office I want to say in Long Worth or Cannon. I can't remember now.

And Newt would always have these giant boards up with the paper that you draw on and would draw triangles and squares and the new outlook for America under Conservative Opportunity Society. And I probably should have talked less and listened more, my greatest regret, but it was a fabulous thing because most of the Contract with America was, in fact, born in those early years.

The Regan administration didn't really quite know how to deal with Newt. One of my first tasks that I had with Newt was -- Newt drafted an alternative version of the President's first State of the Union address and it was bizarre in the sense that it didn't address the economy, which was in the tank at the time. It didn't address the Soviet Union. It didn't address most of the things that everyone was concerned about. Instead, it talked about the need to develop a space program, a need to develop -- to give a tax credit for everyone for something called a personal computer that

they would buy. At that point in time no one knew what a personal computer was or hardly did. I think it had a few other very forward thinking ideas. But I was to go to the old executive office building and meet with the man who was the President's in charge of domestic affairs along with one of Newt's political advisors, Gary Bauer, I believe was his name, who later ran for President. I may have that name wrong, but I can't remember. I get people confused between professors and people who worked for the President. But anyway, he sat there, listened and I'm sure he thought we were absolutely insane. And we left and I looked at the guy and I said, "I think that guy thought we were pretty much off our rocker."

I don't think people knew how to handle Newt because he had so many new ideas. I know that Mack and Newt didn't know how to handle each other, and I'm going to tell a story that's very interesting. Mattingly and Gingrich are very close. Always have been and always will be, but there was a -- in those early years -- a little friction because Newt had been on Capitol Hill for two years but felt he had been there forever, and Mack was a United States Senator which outranks a member of Congress. And so Newt would advise me on things that he felt Mattingly should do, and I would often find myself taking the train back and forth between the House and the Senate when I was in DC, because I was in Atlanta a lot as well, and trying to implement what Newt suggested to Mack.

Well, Mack was more than aware of this and I never will forget the infamous time in Atlanta, in the Atlanta office when -- back then with telephone lines you could see a line if it was lit up. You could also hit that line and listen to the conversation. We didn't have any privacy like we do now. And I was in what we called the Quip Room. That was an early version of a fax in the

Mattingly office, the Georgia office, talking with Newt, and Newt -- and Mack had a bad habit of picking up the phone and listening in on conversations back then. Sorry, Mack, but you did.

And I could tell about the moment that Gingrich said, "Does Mack not understand any of this?", I heard the phone click and I knew that Mack was listening. And so I said, "I don't know. You can ask him. He's listening right now." I heard the phone click off. I said, "I better get off the phone, Newt." I got off the phone, hid in that room for about five minutes until Mack opened the door and, in a rather -- expletive deleted -- fashion, told me that I worked for him and not Newt Gingrich.

Needless to say, the two, though, worked very closely together. I think we would not have won the campaign in 1980 had it not been for some of Newt's ideas, but let me make it very clear -- Mack Mattingly's victory was not a fluke. He was a tenacious campaigner. He believed from the moment he started that he was going to win and he -- although was not as articulate as he later became with some experience, and didn't have the experience obviously of being in Washington -- he was very savvy.

I've known very few people in my life who have the gut instincts and political savvy that Mack Mattingly has. He does not get the credit for that in the political community. He also doesn't get the credit for the fact that he is the most prolific fundraiser that the Republicans ever had in this state, even going into -- he's now -- I won't say how old he is, but he's to the point of, you know, retirement plus and still doing well, but even now Mack Mattingly could raise money that most people could not. So those were my early years.

I tired of the Senate, as I tend to tire of everything. Mattingly tired of me. We argued constantly

because we're more like sort of a -- not to replace my own father I love dearly, but sort of a father-son relationship than a -- and remains today. I talk to Mack almost every day, certainly every week. It's not a -- I've had things when I've been watching television, I'll get a phone call and he'll -- I'll get a phone call and he'll say his cable's out. "What's the --? Who's leading the golf tournament?" Well I'm not watching the golf tournament. I don't even know what golf tournament he's talking about, but I'll dutifully run to the TV and tell him. We've had that sort of relationship. It's been a dear one to have.

But we were getting on each other's nerves pretty strong and I had finished most of my -- I had some courses to finish at Georgia, but applied to Cambridge University under a program under the international relations program, which you were able to go forward if you had life experiences and the like. And so I did not complete my degree at Georgia, which I to this day regret because I don't have that UGA diploma, but as far as I'm concerned I'm a Bulldog graduate because I basically am, so everything is tied to Georgia. All my friends are tied to Georgia; everything else is tied to Georgia.

I attended Cambridge University, earned the degree in international relations, which is an advanced degree. Most people who take that degree are going into the Foreign Service or they're going into some area of international relations or international finance. Some are going into the world of espionage. I didn't know that until many years later, but my time in England was fantastic. It's not worth going into a lot of detail there, just to say that it was a time to learn to become very academically attuned. And you have to write a very extensive -- they call it a dissertation, I believe, not a thesis -- in order to take the degree and that was really the first

writing I ever did of significant substance.

Came back, took some time off. Wrote a book about the South which was really an unremarkable book in every way, shape and form, but it gave me an excuse not to have to go to law school. And then, at my father's absolute insistence, as an only child, I went to law school. Went to Stetson University in Florida. I actually told him I would only go to law school if I could go somewhere in Florida because I was not going to live through the gray clouds and the cold and the rain of England that I had encountered, plus Athens isn't exactly a jewel in the winter either. So the combination I wanted. I tend to like Florida. I have a lot of Florida in me, I think, and so I view it as sort of my second home.

And so I attended Stetson University College of Law. I got married. Actually my wife and I had met prior to that. Marilea and I were married after my first semester in law school. Loved law school. Very few people do, but I truly got into it, I think, because I was married and I didn't have all these other diversions and I could really concentrate on it. Graduated. Did well in law school, but started my own law firm right out of law school with a fellow, Bob Finnell, who had been our legal counsel for Mack Mattingly; practiced law in that firm for many years. I think it had so many different names over the years you can't even keep up with it, but that's when my real involvement in politics began again.

I made contact again with Newt. Obviously, Mack lost in 1986. That was a very deep and dark time period for all of us, and we decided -- I was by that time a true Republican and Newt really sort of encouraged me to try to get young people involved in the party. We just had a moribund Republican Party. It was made up of people who had been around for a long time and young

people like Ralph Reed, for example, who was at Georgia with me who were very excited, also very excitable, but they were all off on different tangents and many of them had gone to D.C. or other places because Georgia just wasn't a place for Republicans. No one could win.

So in 19 -- this is virtually unknown. In 1989, a group of young people including Robert "Bobby" Baker now in the Public Service Commission, Judd "Judson" Hill, now a state Senator; Earl Earhart, now the Chairman of the Rules Committee in the House -- I mean I could go on with this list and it would fill virtually every elected politician. I don't think a single member of this group wasn't elected to office ultimately, but we were all being shut out of the mainstream Republican party, the big dollar givers and the like.

And so we formed a thing called the Campaign for Georgia's Future. We used to meet at my old law firm, and we all didn't have a lot of money at the time. We all put in like \$250 in the kitty and then we would have candidates come in and we would give contributions to various candidates running for office. Chief of those races was Earl Earhart. Earl was running against the powerful Joe Mack Wilson who had been Chairman of Ways and Means in the House for many, many years, and we knocked him off, and Earl was our first major victory. And, as I said, that group -- we're still a very tight group although we don't always agree on everything -- but we're all very close because we started our careers together when everyone was laughing at us and patting us on the head in the Republican party.

Then, Newt sort of encouraged me to run for Lieutenant Governor because he said, "If you would run, we can get young people involved in the party." So all of these people who were part of the Campaign for Georgia's Future were part of my campaign. We all figured it would cost

about \$50 - \$60,000 because that's what Zell had spent on his last campaign, I think. No, it ended up costing what today in the equivalent would be about a million and a half to two million and became the nightmare on Elm Street. It really cured me of ever wanting to run statewide ever again. It was a nightmare.

It happened to be a year that every well-known rising politician who wasn't running for governor was running for Lieutenant Governor. And that year you had Johnny Isakson running for Governor, Zell Miller running for Governor, Roy Barnes running for Governor, Lauren Bubba McDonald - who was the favorite of Speaker Murphy - running for Governor, Andy Young running for Governor. That was just the gubernatorial group.

Lieutenant Governor you had Pierre Howard, who was just a rising star. You had Bob Stumbaugh, who had been in the Senate forever. Joe Kennedy, a powerful long time leader in the Senate. You had Jim Pannell, who was a very bright attorney from Savannah. I mean one after another these were just superstars, and then you had me. And back in those days it was still old-fashioned politics. We would appear, both the gubernatorial candidates and the lieutenant gubernatorial candidates, together at these forums, often times answering questions together or right after one another. So we all came to know each other.

I had known Zell from being a kid because Zell had been early with Lester Maddox, something which we both laugh about today. And I knew -- I got to know Roy. I did not know Roy well but got to know Roy then during that campaign very well and, of course, we've known ever since. And Pierre, of course, who defeated me. I won the Republican nomination for Lieutenant Governor which was not -- sort of like the booby prize at that point in time, but we thought it

was important.

And then got walloped by Pierre Howard, who was really one of the most dynamic, at that time younger, politicians in the state. Probably we could have run for Governor and would have given everybody trouble. There wasn't a single person in this state Pierre didn't know. I learned that as I campaigned because everywhere I went everyone claimed to have been Pierre's roommate or his tennis partner.

And what's so funny about it is eight years, nine years later we were business partners, which is the great thing about this state. I mean we do fight, and I think things have gotten a little more partisan now, but in those days, particularly with us being in the minority, if a Republican would put their hand out, the Democrats weren't bad about shaking it and working with you.

So the Lieutenant Governor's race was a misery for me. It took me away from my family. I thought it was going to last, you know, six months and it lasted a year and a half. I had a state senator run against me for the Republican primary, a woman. Didn't anticipate that. Newt didn't tell me that there would be other candidates.

And then you had other problems. At that point in time, Newt was not a fan of Johnny Isakson at all. He felt Johnny was too moderate and too tepid, so I was to be the more conservative candidate to whip up the Republican base and Newt was our only major Republican elected official at that time and he, you know, this was just -- I had Newt not happy with the way we were running the campaign. We were not running as a ticket, not because Johnny and I personally didn't like each other, but Johnny had advisors that were telling him because we were both from Cobb County that I would be a drag on the ticket because I was so young.

Now, there was an alternative B plan out there and that is: If Joe Kenney had won the nomination -- Joe was an older gentleman, sort of heavysset and viewed as a -- what I would say was sort of a good old boy -- and the Isakson team did have a plan of putting their arms right around me if, in fact, Joe Kennedy was the nominee. Because they felt that would be the Achilles heel of a Zell Miller/Joe Kennedy ticket. But that didn't happen and no one put their arms around me. Ironic, because today, probably of elected officials, Johnny and I are the closest to any elected official -- current elected official, other than maybe House Speaker Pro Tempore Mark Burkhalter and Earl Earhart, the Rules Chairman, and a few others. But at that point in time they tried to keep us a distance apart.

Well, we were both defeated. Johnny not as badly as I was, but I did well and so I sort of emerged as the new sort of future of the Republican party, which is a scary thought in the Republican party. That got us into 1992 and that gets us into Newt Gingrich and the story of his speakership.

This gets us into 1991 and '92. Going into 1992, Johnny had decided that he was not going to seek a new congressional district which would be centered primarily in Cobb County. And Newt had basically, early on, started, in essence, endorsing me for that seat because he wanted to have a protégé up there filling that seat. And what we learned is that although I didn't win the race for lieutenant governor, I did win the hearts of the Cobb County Republicans. My candidate for chairman of the party won overwhelmingly.

Johnny withdrew for a period of time from Republican politics. He took a year off and during that time period that's when Johnny and I really got to be very close. We started having lunch

together and comparing notes and I think he came to realize that some of the rhetoric that I used in the '90 campaign was more designed to try to create a base and I wasn't a crazy person, at least not as crazy as maybe he thought. And we had -- we both had at that time, as I was moving into my family business -- we both had fairly substantial businesses we were running and actually that did business together. So our relationship grew much closer.

But Johnny didn't want to run. So, redistricting occurred in, I believe, '91 -- late '91, and much to our surprise Tom Murphy, who I had known a bit as a youngster because he was very close to Lester, decided for fun to move Newt's district, which was still winnable, but to move the number of his district, the 6th district, over to the new district. And Newt had come to believe that in order to have a future in politics because -- the demographics of his district was changing, and now he didn't realize that ultimately it would change potentially in his favor, but at that point in time he had no way of knowing that.

Newt started poking around at the concept of moving into the district that he had endorsed me to run in. And so we really were faced with a problem, a problem that we both recognized because we both had polls that had been taken. I did not know Newt had taken a poll. We took a poll as well. I did not take the poll. It was presented to me by a national pollster trying to convince me to run. It had Newt's name in it. In both instances I was defeating Newt, and we didn't play any games about it.

Newt understood that this was going to be a disaster if he moved to Cobb and I ran against him because Cobb County Republicans, who were still the dominant force at that time, did not want Gingrich to move into Cobb. They made it very, very clear. Partially, because, I'm sure, there

were some other people, Chuck Clay, a dear friend of mine - part of our company now - was probably thinking about it. Mark Burkhalter was thinking about it, who's a dear friend of mine both from UGA and then later in the legislature.

So there were several people thinking about running, but I already had secured the support of the Republican money establishment, the Mattingly support, and so I had what I needed to win. The only thing I didn't have was the desire in my heart to fight my own mentor, and Newt never strong-armed me. It was a series of, "Well what are we going to do?" And we ultimately decided that there was an open seat in the House about to open up, that I would go to the House, State House of Representatives, and I ended up being unopposed, and would run Newt's campaign, not just as a manager -- we hired a manager --but that I would be his campaign chairman for life. And Newt painted this grand vision of where this was going to take us, none of which I believed, but I thought, "Oh heck, you know, why not do it?" He was at time the Minority Whip of the U.S. House so he had a significant position in the Republican Party. And I might add just out of note that in 1980 when Newt Gingrich and I were together after eating lunch one day he asked me what I thought I would be some day and I think my answer was some dumb thing like "governor" or whatever. That wouldn't happen. But his answer to me was, "I'm going to be Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives." And it stuck out in my mind because I went home and told my parents and I said, "You know he might be crazy" -- because at that time the House was overwhelmingly Democrat and had not been in the hands of the Republicans in my lifetime -- but crazy like a fox.

1992 comes. I take over Friends of Newt Gingrich, which is his political organization, and

suddenly I find myself in the battle of our life. We were running against a little known Republican who came out of the State House named Herman Clark. He hires Jim Lovejoy who had formerly been on Mack Mattingly's campaign staff, who had become a political consultant, and we are losing to an individual who no one even knows. Ralph Nader's group, Public Citizen, came in and started running ads against Newt and we were going down the tubes. Newt was not even running television ads.

I had to go and find him at an Amoco foam and rubber plant somewhere. He was on a tour, and it's ironic. I was watching television, Good Morning America, and at that point in time Mike Dukakis was reflecting on how he was defeated four years earlier and he said the biggest mistake in politics is -- if you get attacked on TV, respond immediately on TV. Well we were being attacked and we weren't responding.

So I drove to the plant and I said, "Listen you've got to listen to me. We've got to cut ads." So I head on a plane to New Orleans that night. Newt's ad man was a guy from New Orleans, a guy named Jimmy Farwell. Great guy. We cut an ad that night in New Orleans to respond to the attack ads. Had it trafficked within two or three days after that. Long story made short, we won the race by 900 votes. We had a recount, typical Gingrich at that point in time. I've been through more recounts with Newt Gingrich than I could care to remember.

So it was pretty clear to Newt as he, you know, without self-aggrandizement that had I run, this would have been a very bad situation. In fact, as he left to go downstairs to declare victory, he said, "Towery if you'd run you would have killed me." Well, really I didn't care about that at that point. I was really more worried about my reputation being destroyed because as I went

down at 11:00 to go -- I'm going to tell a story that's never been told before: Jay Morgan -- who is a longstanding political strategist in this state, who ran Johnny Isakson's campaign in 1990 and was going to be my strategist in 1992 -- Jay had ironically persuaded Johnny that I was bad news in '90, but we had become friends and in '92 I said I wanted the best so I went for Jay. When Gingrich and I made the deal I said, "You've got to take my people," which he did. And so Jay became a strategist in the campaign. At 11:00, a great news reporter at WSB, who has since retired from WSB and gone on to other things -- Bill Nigut -- goes on live. At that point in time, five minutes before we go on live, Jay pulls me into our smaller war room right off the ballroom and he says, "Matt, there is no way we can win this race." And I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You've got to be kidding." Well, no." At first he said Matt, "Newt is going to lose and they're going to blame you and me." And I said, "Why are they going to blame us? I mean we're the ones who saved him on this thing." He said, "They're going to blame you." I said, "Oh this is great. I've given up a congressional seat. Newt's going to be checking out books at the Kennesaw library and I've got -- I'm going to get the blame and Herman Clark is going to be the congressman who nobody's ever heard of. This is really turning out to be a great deal I made with Newt."

And Jay told me an interesting thing. He said, "We've only got X number of boxes out in north Fulton and we have to carry every one of them by 80% or more or we can't win." And I said, "Have we carried any boxes in north Fulton by 80%?" He said, "No." So I go on the air with Bill Nigut and I'm convinced that we've lost and I'm putting my best game face on, but my stomach is just churning. And I go back up to the suite and we carry every box that remains by

80% or more. First time anyone's ever heard that story. Whether that was a Lyndon Johnson deal or not, I'll never know but I certainly thought it was interesting.

And Newt was just elated and just went right -- it was like the bullet had gone passed his head and five minutes later he was right back to being Newt. I was sick because I still couldn't get over the fact that we had almost lost, so I didn't really care whether I would have beaten Newt Gingrich or not.

But that then established a longstanding relationship which basically was this: I could do what I wanted in Gingrich Land, but didn't have to do anything. So there were times when I was heavily involved in decisions and things that Newt did. There were other times when I left Newt to his own devices, and to his credit he honored the deal to the day he left office, except for the day he left office, which I'll talk about in just a minute.

Fast-forwarding to 1994, I had developed in the legislature very quickly a strong bond with both House Speaker Tom Murphy, who I loved. I had campaigned against him in 1990 because I needed the foil, but Lester kept calling me and saying, "Tom's very upset with this." And I kept telling Lester, I said, "Go back and tell him that it's just a game I'm playing here. I'm not going to win anyway."

So Murphy forgave me very quickly and we got back to our relationship, and our relationship in the House was one of very deep friendship, but ironically I had a deep friendship with another person, Zell Miller. And Zell -- I really got to know him as an adult, obviously as I was running for Lieutenant Governor, but I had known him as a child, and Zell and I clicked just as Murphy and I clicked. It was just an unusual situation.

So I found myself in this triangulated situation of being Newt Gingrich's Chairman and then dealing with -- of course and at that time we had Bill Clinton coming into office, but we literally had some of the most interesting years in politics during that time period. A few snippets prior to Newt being Speaker: In that time period Zell proposed changing the state flag. And I never will forget: I was going to Chair the State Republican convention the year that Zell proposed changing the flag, and Newt and I were eating in a little restaurant in Vinings and they came to me and they said I have -- I don't remember if it was Zell. I think it was Keith Mason on the phone who was Zell's Chief of Staff and I think maybe Zell was there with him, and he wanted to know -- they knew we were having our Republican convention and they said that they were going to announce that they wanted to change the state flag and would Newt speak in favor of it? Would I speak in favor of it at the convention? So I said, "Well, I'll call you back."

I went back to the table and I said, "Newt, that was Zell and he wants to know..." I said, "When are you going to make this announcement?" He said, "Oh, fifteen minutes from now." Didn't give us a lot of time. So the two geniuses that we were, Towery and Gingrich, decided, "Hey, no skin off our nose." Newt's district was not going to oppose it. My district would not oppose it. And so I called back and said, "Sure thing." Newt spoke that afternoon on the opening day of the convention and he was just getting a great reception from the crowd and then he said, "And by the way I want to say that I second and support Zell Miller's determination to change the flag of Georgia," and the entire state convention stood up and booed him. And so as he got off the stage he said, "That was a really good decision we made, wasn't it?" I said, "Well you won't hear me talking about it tomorrow."

So we got through that. But we had many different instances where Zell needed help either from Republicans and there were about 15 or 20 of us in the legislature who could deliver a vote either to Zell or to Speaker Murphy, and often times they were at odds. But many times they weren't. And there was a precarious mixture there. You had the African-American Black Caucus, which was very strong, and many times the white members were, quite frankly, at odds with the Black Caucus and they needed Republicans to step in and do the dirty work. Other times, the Black Caucus was at odds with the leadership and we would join the Black Caucus. So it was nothing for us to make a deal with Tyrone Brooks or Calvin Smyre or anyone else. There were other times when you found you could be helpful to everyone and sometimes you couldn't be helpful to anyone, but I was a believer that partisanship really -- it was great to be partisan when it was time to run an election, but otherwise you needed to work together.

'94 came along and Guy Millner, who was a businessman who had never run for office before, a very successful businessman and a very close friend of my father, decides to run for the Republican nomination. And being as incredibly Republican as I am, I can't avoid a Republican race, even against Zell. Now, what most people don't know is that Zell did not have his heart in running for reelection in 1994. I think, probably you know it, a few people know it, not many. He was persuaded to run again, but I could tell that his heart was not completely in it.

And I helped Millner in winning the nomination, but my original plan was to just sort of drift off and let the general election sort of occur as it would occur, and Zell be reelected. But a funny thing happened on the way to the forum as they say. Millner approached my father and basically wanted me to help with the campaign because they were having tremendous problems

strategically. And so he made an offer and that is that we would get all of their printing for Norrell if I could be on loan from our family's company to go over and to help the Guy Millner campaign.

Long story made short there, we waged a heck of a war and Zell won by less than half a percentage or a percentage point at the last minute. Guy Millner almost became the first Republican governor. And to his credit -- I'll probably be the only person ever to say it -- Millner was a much better candidate than most people historically give him credit for. He wasn't a great speaker, but he was a great listener, and I prepared him to debate Zell by talking like Zell. I debated like Zell. And I hit him with very personal, mean, nasty questions, and by talking like this and looking right at him and I could, you know, I was known for being able to imitate people and I just went in as Zell Miller.

Well, when we debated Zell at least, there was a couple of those debates Millner won those debates, and Zell really got irritated at me over it because he knew what I had done. But to his credit, Zell got over that immediately and we resumed the very same relationship we had before. And he was a tremendous friend and is still today and, in fact, a colleague of mine because one of my many jobs is as counsel at McKenna Long where he is a special advisor. So we laugh that we ended up together in the same place.

1994 also, though, was the year that we took Congress over. Now I want to disabuse people of the idea that I was intregally involved in the Contract with America. I was not. I was intregally involved in what was used to create the Contract with America because much of what we used in the Contract with America were things that Jack Kemp and Newt and others were working on in

the 1980's and that I was talking about when I was running in 1990, even though I was running for a statewide office.

So I was obviously involved. I was keeping involved in Newt's reelection campaign. I believe Michael Coles might have been running against him that year. It was either -- I think it was Michael Coles. He chose a bad year to run, obviously -- also a dear friend now. But we didn't know that we were going to take Congress until about four or five days -- really had a great shot until about four or five days before the election.

There was suddenly a surge across the nation beginning to take place. We didn't know that we were going to defeat Speaker Foley, for example. And, so for everyone who says that the, you know, it was the Contract with America that caused Newt Gingrich to win -- no, it was a combination of Bill Clinton and what we called "Hillary Care," which was the healthcare that we used to really scare folks, and a combination of that and then the Contract with America being a fresh set of new ideas. And that led to just an avalanche and suddenly I wake up. We lost the Millner race, but the next day I'm suddenly Chairman of the political organization of the Speaker of the U.S. House, and that then led to 100 hundred days of glory and then a little bit of chaos.

And I'll talk real briefly about the years of Newt Gingrich. Let me just dispel people of a couple of misconceptions about Newt. First of all, he was the most effective leader I've ever seen in that 100 days. We passed virtually everything. He, to his own admission, was still trying to find his leadership style. And after that 100 days it was very hard for Newt to lead the Congress because one day he would want to tell them what to do, and the next day he would tell the various chairmen that they were their own CEO's and to do their -- make their own decision, and

I think he would tell you that in his own self admission. So we had a little bit of a Congress that was -- that had accomplished so much that we probably got a little carried away, but then we didn't accomplish as much as we thought we did.

There are some time periods though that I'll dispel. What is the shutdown of government?

There's this great story that runs all around the country that Newt somehow stormed off of Air Force One, was upset because he was forced to fly in the tail section of the plane. That is not the case. What happened is we were negotiating the budget and we were getting down to that time period where we got close to the shutdown in government, and Clinton, who by the way had a great relationship with Gingrich... it was a complete joke, the concept that Clinton and Gingrich disliked each other. They used one another perfectly. Again, I'll use the word foils -- as foils, and that relationship never disappeared.

I would have never have been a major donor to the Bill Clinton Library or gone to see movies at the White House with Bill Clinton -- and stayed up until 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning going through every room in the White House with Bill Clinton -- if we had been enemies. So that just was not the case. I thought Clinton was a great president in many ways, and really a guy who I really liked a great deal. I think Newt liked him a great deal as well, and I think that Clinton viewed Newt as very smart and astute and not the crazy man that some people thought.

The airplane incident didn't go down that way. Newt was upset because they had a long flight back. They were coming back from a state funeral. I believe it was Rabin's. I can't remember. Someone would have to refresh my memory, but I think it was the assassination of Rabin. And in coming back, basically Clinton had suggested that they meet on board to try to hash all this

out and the meeting never took place, and Newt got off the plane and with bad phraseology made it sound as if he was upset because he couldn't exit the front end of the plane. The fact is his irritation was that he thought they could have a very productive -- Newt's a person who really thinks, you know, you can really sit down and work out everything, you know. "Let's do it, let's negotiate, let's never stop working." That's one thing I can dispel.

The second thing I can shed a little light on is his resignation. It never should have happened. Gingrich, in my judgment, was forced out not for any of the reasons that the public thinks was the case. We were told that a wild group led by Lindsey Graham and others of young Republican Turks had said that they would not vote for Gingrich. I don't think that's what happened.

The morning that Newt resigned I was in Atlanta, talked to the people in Washington and the vote counting was going very well. We had it. I went to my mountain place with my family and my cell phone goes off in a very bad reception area around 5:30 or 5:00, and I got all these people crying and screaming that Newt's going to resign in thirty minutes and will I talk to him? Well, he wouldn't come to the phone, and I was rather upset because I felt like, "I gave him my seat, get to the phone." And in reality -- in my judgment now -- it was Marianne Gingrich who didn't want me to talk to Newt. In fact, when I tried to talk to Newt later that night, Marianne blocked me from getting to him.

He finally called me at my -- I think he called me at my cabin. He had gone out behind the house using, not a cellular phone, but a portable phone, I think, and he sort of snuck out the back. And I never will forget, I said, "What in the world have you done?" And his answer to me was,

astonishingly, "I'm not sure." I said, "Why did you not just keep your seat in Congress if nothing else? In two years these bozos will blow it so bad you'll be right back -- you'll be like Winston Churchill." Well, he said, "There's no use talking about that now. It's done."

And so I remained -- I think I know the story. I don't think it had anything to do with the things that people think. I don't think it had anything to do with any relationship Newt had with anyone else. That was not what was used to persuade him to leave. But I think there's a story there that someday will come out and I think it would -- it reflects poorly on the individuals who did it. If I had to blame one person for Newt leaving Congress it would be Tom Delay, and he may be able to dance with the stars, but he was tap dancing in the background and I really had that confirmed in a conversation.

You're never supposed to say what a president says to you, but I'm going to say it. I saw President Clinton not long after Newt resigned, and Clinton thought that I knew more than I knew, and we started talking about Newt's resignation and he said, "It was Delay wasn't it?" Well I'm not going to tell Bill Clinton that I don't know what I'm talking about, so I said, "You're absolutely right." I said, "How do you know?" And then I said, "But of course, you're the President." And he said something very interesting to me. He said, "They did it for--" as I recall, "--they did it for Junior." And I didn't know who Junior was until years later when George W. Bush ran for President.

What most people don't know is that we were planning to run Newt for President in 2000, and we were having meetings even in the fall of 1998 to start setting up the preliminaries to run the campaign. And, quite frankly, Clinton was very helpful to us because he was even willing to

debate us in New Hampshire. How many presidents do you know who are willing to help their Republican enemy by having a debate in New Hampshire, where four years later he knew -- or six years later -- that individual would be running for president?

The other thing I can say about the Gingrich-Clinton years is that there would have been no Bill Clinton had there not been Newt Gingrich, and I'll explain that very quickly. In the 1992 race, I got a phone call from Gordon Giffin who later became ambassador to Canada. He said, "We have a problem." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "Well, we need Georgia's primary moved up." I don't think this was in '92. It might have been '91. It was whatever time period it was. I'm a little hazy on all this stuff because it seems like it was in the summertime. They had already determined that they might not do well in the early primaries and caucuses and they needed Georgia moved up to guarantee Bill Clinton a good shot in the arm. Clinton had Zell Miller's support overwhelmingly, and they wanted that primary moved forward.

I called Newt, the only Republican. Their concern was that the Bush White House Justice Department would not clear it because we were still, and still are, under the Voting Rights Act, and, you know, while you like to think it's apolitical, it might not always be. I talked to Newt. Once again, in one of our brilliant decisions we decided unilaterally that there would be no problem with it, and so I called Gordon back and said, "Look, what do you want us to do?" He said, "Come down and testify, I'm going to be holding some hearings, and say it's okay."

So I came down, testified in a hearing on behalf of Newt, and I don't know who else with the Republican Party, but basically said that I would see no reason and I don't think Speaker Gingrich could see any reason that this would violate the Voting Rights Act. The primary was

moved up and ultimately it is the primary that saved Bill Clinton because he was having deep problems at that time with Jennifer Flowers and other issues that were coming out.

So anyway, back to the Gingrich resignation, he resigns. He's no longer Speaker. I have already left the legislature. I chose to leave in 19 -- actually I had promised to only serve three terms.

By my second term I had three jobs. I was a legislator. I was working for Long, Aldridge and Norman at that time. I became their first major Republican hire. And, of course, my job is to deal with clients in Washington, D.C. who want to understand the thinking of our Speaker.

Well, you could imagine with the first Republican Speaker and having been his chairman I didn't have trouble having clients.

And so the problem there is I was also serving in the Georgia General Assembly. That meant flying to Washington, D.C. at night, having meetings with people in the evening, getting up around 6:00 or whatever in the morning to fly back in time to make it to the floor of the House at 10:00 in the morning, which I was notorious for going in, hitting the button, and leaving because I was exhausted. No offense to all the wonderful reverends who give the sermon of the morning. Finally, Speaker Murphy busted me one morning. He said, "Doorkeepers, lock the door so Mr. Towery can't run out again."

But, you know, holding down three jobs is great. The printing company had grown. We'd grown to become one of the larger printing companies in the southeast. We were one of the largest manufacturers of corporate annual reports in the world, and although my dad was still very active, I had become CEO. How do you run a company that big, work for a national law firm dealing with major issues like tort reform, representing the pharmaceutical manufacturers

and trying to make Puerto Rico a state, and at the same time keep your sanity? Something had to go and I can tell you the job that paid at that time \$12,000.00 a year plus per diem was the one that was going.

I love the legislature, but I found very quickly two things out. I wasn't going to be governor. I wasn't going to be U.S. senator. I didn't want to be that. Been there, done that. I'd walked through every room in the White House. I had been in the Speaker of the U.S. House's office as many times as I wanted. I just figured I had fulfilled what -- I was living my life through these other people and I just thought, "Man I don't want to do this stuff."

I mean governor? Maybe when I'm 65 or whatever and I'm mature enough, but I can't sit still long enough to listen to people walk in the door and talk to me about all these boring dadgum groups and associations and committees and appointments and I don't really give a rat's tail about what's going on at the Department of Community Affairs or Health -- whatever. It just got to become a nuisance.

And so I decided that I would leave because I wanted the money, to be honest with you, and I think that the problem that's happened in the legislature - not our legislature but nationwide - is we have people now who are attracted to office. They serve for a very long period of time because legislators now stay in office forever it seems like, but I don't know how they make any money. I couldn't do it.

Fortunately, I had Tom Murphy who always wanted to get out around St. Patrick's Day and who didn't play around. We didn't have extended periods of time, but if I were in the legislature today I would be broke. And so I left and I left to run the printing company and to work with the

law firm. Within 15 days of leaving the legislature, the first offer came to buy the printing company, and within that year we had four different offers. We took the highest and we sold.

And so I had one of those big burdens that I didn't realize was going to be on my shoulders off my shoulders. And that was a great burden.

And there's another reason. I think that I had soured on politics, and I think too many people do oral histories and they don't touch on the negative. In 1995, ironically, two months or a month after I had announced -- to little note other than maybe the Marietta paper -- that I was not going to seek another term in office, I get this invitation to go this island called Daufuskie Island in South Carolina. I had never heard of it. And I won't say who, but an individual who later got into a great deal of trouble who was a legislator, told us that this was the -- I was invited, as were many Republicans, many of whom are major leaders in state government now -- so it obviously didn't hurt anybody's political career -- but it was an embarrassment nevertheless.

We were invited to go to this island allegedly because this was the secret meeting of all the real leaders in the state and we had finally made it. Now what really -- the funny thing about this island is it was -- to get there you had to fly to Savannah. You had to take -- let's see, you had to fly to Savannah, you had to take a boat to -- no, a ferry to the island. You then had to take -- I mean you had to do about 20 different things to get to this island and you couldn't get off of it after 9:00 because the ferry shuts down. How wonderful.

So we're invited to this thing. One member who was invited - and I don't mind saying it because he was completely innocent of the whole thing - was representative Mark Burkhalter, Speaker Pro Tem of the House now. And Mark, like myself, ran a fairly substantial business. Still does.

And Monday of the trip came, we weren't there. Tuesday came, we weren't there because we were both busy. And we get a phone call from this person urging us to come and telling us how we're going to be out of the power structure and upset everybody. So I called Mark and I said, "Mark what do we do?" It's a golfing trip and, by the way, I don't play golf very well at all. In fact, I hit Johnny Isakson one time with a ball and I think that was my last time.

So we get this call and we're told that we have to be there. Long story made short, Mark Burkhalter and I get to the airport -- the plane, the ValuJet plane at that time -- almost didn't take off. We almost said, "Let's just not even go." We get there -- when we arrive Skin Edge tells us -- who was a state senator, great state senator who just loves to play golf and that's it -- that a lobbyist had brought some strippers there and that something had happened the night before and the strippers were upset and the like. So, you know, we're all sort of computing this, but yet we don't see the strippers. And to this day I always joke: I said, "Well, heck, if there were going to be strippers there at least I'd like to see a show," but there wasn't any show. And none of us knew that that was going to be the case.

And so I sort of just left the next day and Mark stayed to play a little golf and then he left, but clearly it -- the only people that were there -- It was one Democrat. Everybody else was a Republican, and it became -- About there weeks later it leaked out and none of us really thought anything of it because we didn't see any, you know, if you've seen a strip show you probably would have figured you need to go back and hide it, but we just didn't think anything of it. And so when the story hit, because back then it was mid '90s and (a) the state was always looking for ways to kick Republicans, and (b) we didn't have all this salacious stuff that we have

on the internet now... this was the story de jour. And so, about what seemed like for an eternity, everybody wanted to know what went on on the island. Well, I can tell you as disappointed as I am -- nothing. Except some controversy. It did reaffirm my belief that I wanted to leave office immediately, but obviously not only did I stay, but I negotiated the redistricting maps on behalf of Speaker Gingrich. But, you know, it gave me a good taste of what it's like to have a little bit of a political scandal.

In reality I think most politicians need to know what that's like. I don't recommend it on a regular basis, but it taught me a lot about how you deal with a crisis, and also usually what seems like a crisis isn't as big a crisis as you think. You think it's more important than most other people. You know what? Two years later they name a bridge after me, and I don't think that was for being on the island. Maybe it was a bridge to get to the island.

To sum up, I end my career the last 10 years with nothing to do after having sold the company. Pierre Howard and I talk one day and we talk about the possibility of forming a company that would advise corporations about how their lobbyists could be more effective. We felt like lobbyists were good, but we felt like they weren't always as effective as they could be. That became Special Corporate Strategies, which we did together. And then the internet age came and we raised a substantial amount of money to start creating a company that originally would provide sort of insider information about politics around the nation.

Well, then the internet bust came. We basically pulled back our horns and started buying informational companies such as Bill Shipp - the legendary journalist - had Bill Shipp's Georgia which was a well-known internet site. We bought that site. We bought and created other sites.

Bought the Southern Political Report out of Washington, D.C.

And then in the year 2001 got into the business of polling. I'm not a pollster by nature. I'm not even very good at math, but what I'm good at and what Pierre was good at at the time when he was active - and others in our company - was at weighting a poll. That is deciding what percent age group is going to turn out, what in terms of African- American, white, Hispanic are going to turn out. And that's very critical to having an accurate poll.

We started out unknown in 2008 - without giving a history, long history of a company that has struggled through the internet to boom to survive - and then through a couple of recessions to make sure we're okay. In 2008, we were named by the man *Time* magazine named as one of the 100 most influential people in the world because of his ability to take polling and then predict things that are going to happen, and that man named us one of the three most accurate national pollsters for the 2008 presidential race.

So in between that time period I started writing books. I wrote a book called *Power Chicks: How Women Will Dominate America*. It was published by Cox when they owned Longstreet Press, and went to Amazon.com number one or thereabouts for a period of time. I started doing television shows ranging from typical talk shows like The O'Reilly Factor and Hannity and CNN, to comedy shows such as Bill Maher's comedy show then on ABC. Continue to do those type of shows when I'm asked to with regard to polling or what's going on in politics.

And then 2001 Creators Syndicate, which is the largest independent syndicator in the country, offered me a national syndicated column, which I still write to this day, and it runs in newspapers. It's based out of the *Florida Times-Union* in Jacksonville. That's the home base. It

actually comes out of Los Angeles, and it's distributed across the country, which is a good thing because nowadays with the internet it's been picked up by more conservative sites, but large ones such as Newsmax, which is one of the five or six most visited sites on the web, but many, you know, mainstream media as well. It's fun to do. I get tired of it every once in a while and think I want to give it up, but I've given other things up too quickly, so I figured I'll hold on to it.

SHORT: Your company conducted several polls during the presidential race in 2008. Was there ever a time when you felt sure that Barack Obama would win the Democratic nomination?

TOWERY: Oh yes. I felt sure he would win the Democratic nomination as soon as the Iowa poll -- there were four companies that got the Iowa, as I recall, the Iowa Caucus right, but there was one company, Ann Selzer, who polls in just certain states, but Iowa is her home base. She developed a waiting system that took that race from being a Clinton-Edwards-Obama tie, to being an Obama lead by three or four points. And the next day Obama started taking on steam in our polls as well.

Once that happened, I knew that in South Carolina, because of Oprah Winfrey's decision to go to William Brice Stadium back in December of 2007, we saw the African- American vote there completely flip and go in favor of Barack Obama. It was split between Obama and -- Clinton actually had more of the vote. When Oprah Winfrey made it clear that this was a legitimate African-American candidate, that was it. Because once he won Iowa I knew he was going to win South Carolina, and we knew that Florida's votes were going to count because Florida had

moved their primary up. And Howard Dean, who is now a colleague of mine at my law firm as well - he's not a lawyer, but it seems like we have everybody in the world at that law firm - Howard Dean, who was Chairman of the Democratic National Party at that time said, you know, "We're not going to count the delegates," and the Democratic National Committee agreed. So Hillary Clinton couldn't get Florida and her delegates, and I felt like at that time that Obama became the odds on favorite.

SHORT: How about the Republican side?

TOWERY: That was an interesting thing. What happened there is - I was actually there as a witness to the -- there was a CNN/You Tube debate which took place in St. Petersburg, Florida and in that debate that occurred in November right before Thanksgiving -- in that debate the other candidates were moribund and a guy named Mike Huckabee, former governor of Arkansas, had a one line response about how would Jesus Christ react to something -- I can't remember what the question was, and he said, "Well, Jesus Christ would have been smart enough to never seek public office." The whole room erupted. He was very good in the debate.

We were polling for the Florida Chamber of Commerce doing a reverse poll, which is very hard to do to show who won the debate, and polling both Florida and Iowa. Both states said Huckabee by a mile. And I knew right then there wasn't enough time for the other candidates to get their act together to win in Iowa. When Huckabee won Iowa it opened New Hampshire up for McCain because New Hampshire voters will not go with Iowa and they are far more

independent. So when McCain won that, I knew McCain would probably win South Carolina because of the heavy military vote and I knew he would win Florida because we knew that Charlie Crist was planning to endorse him.

So, had it not been for Mike Huckabee you could have had Romney or any number of other individuals winning that nomination, but Huckabee winning that debate and there being no time to because all the primaries and caucuses had been moved up, we were holding a caucus in Iowa the day of the Orange Bowl. You know, can you imagine having a caucus during an Orange Bowl football game being on? So it was pretty early. And that changed both of those races.

SHORT: Let me ask you about your book. *Paranoid Nation: The Real Story of the Fight for the Presidency in 2008*. You wrote that Florida turned out to be the key. How so?

TOWERY: Well, for those two reasons. Mike Huckabee's debate performance propelled him to be the darling of the conservatives, and because of that Mike Huckabee kept Romney and other conservative candidates from getting any footing in the early caucuses and primaries, which allowed McCain then to come on as sort of the consensus candidate. On the Democratic side, with Florida not counting and the damage done in Iowa and South Carolina, either through Oprah Winfrey's visit to her campaign -- that is by Oprah Winfrey's visit to South Carolina or the Iowa caucus with Barack Obama emerging the surprise winner -- with Florida's delegates not counting it changed the entire momentum. Imagine had Florida counted, you could have taken every delegate won in Iowa, every delegate won in New Hampshire, every delegate won in

South Carolina and it wouldn't have equaled the number of delegates that Hillary Clinton would have won in Florida where she was just beating everyone by a mile, and it would have changed the entire momentum of the race, but that wasn't to be.

SHORT: You made another observation about the candidacy of Ron Paul. You said that he played a greater role in the primary than most people realize.

TOWERY: Well that's because in Iowa -- Ron Paul got stronger and then he got weaker as he went along, but he had a strong and devoted group of followers, and as Paul went along, in the first few caucuses and primaries, he was pulling a substantial amount of the vote, and that vote would have otherwise gone to another conservative candidate, potentially to Romney. And so it virtually guaranteed McCain a victory in New Hampshire and it virtually guaranteed Huckabee a win in Iowa. And so he played a much bigger role than people realize.

SHORT: Let me ask you this question. Did the addition of Governor Palin to the Republican ticket make it stronger?

TOWERY: Initially it made it stronger. In the end it made it weaker. She was not ready to be a vice presidential nominee and I have -- I came to know Dan Quayle very well. I've been very blessed in my life and met every President other than Barack Obama since Richard Nixon, including Richard Nixon. I've known a lot of people in political leadership. Dan Quayle was

one of the smartest, funniest people you ever want to know, but you would never know it from the way he came across when he was vice president, in part because he had that same sort of situation. When he was given the nomination in '88 he was hit with a question about his involvement in the National Guard. The Bush organization came in and said, "Now you're not going to say another word. We're going to control this thing," and it scarred Dan Quayle for years. When he was on his two feet he was much better.

In this instance you had a good vice presidential nominee who was treated as if he were a bad nominee. In the instance of Sarah Palin, you had a bad nominee in the sense that she didn't have enough experience. She hadn't been on the national, world stage. She certainly needed more prep on international relations and matters. We saw that with the interviews with Katie Couric and others. I mean they were disastrous. That's not to say the woman can't be a good candidate. It's just that she wasn't ready to be the vice presidential nominee and she wasn't properly vetted, and we found that out within a matter of a day or two of her getting the nomination with the situation with the daughter.

So Sarah Palin may end up being president some day, but she wasn't ready to be the vice presidential nominee, and I don't think vice presidential nominees -- I don't think there's a vice presidential nominee who has decided a presidential race since 1960 when Lyndon Johnson helped carry Texas for John Kennedy. Had Lyndon Johnson not been on the ticket for John Kennedy I don't think Kennedy would have been president.

SHORT: What do you think was the key to Obama's success?

TOWERY: The northeastern establishment control the Democratic Party who always lives in La La Land and actually believed that Joe Biden or Chris Dodd could be the nominee, just like Mike Dukakis and John Kerry, and they underestimated Barack Obama. And they encouraged Obama to get into the race, but they wanted him in the race so that he could sheer African-American votes away from Hillary Clinton in places like South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama -- what they thought were going to be critical contests. And in the end what happened is Obama shocked everyone, ended up leap-frogging over these two characters and suddenly Barack Obama becomes the nominee.

And so, I think, in that sense I would say that the real group that put him in is the group that didn't know they were going to be putting him in. They were grooming him to be president down the road. Ted Kennedy had early involvement in encouraging Barack Obama to run, but Ted Kennedy -- there's no question Ted Kennedy was closer to Joe Biden and Chris Dodd. So nobody's going to fool me into believing that Ted Kennedy or that Howard Dean or anyone else originally thought Barack Obama was going to be the nominee. No one in that party thought he was going to be the nominee. They thought he could be down the road.

SHORT: What's your professional opinion of Obama's performance so far in 2009?

TOWERY: I think that President Obama is probably a better president than the conservatives want to give him credit for in the sense that he's -- he is a bright president. He is measured. And

but he also connects with the public because he acts like a real human being in the real world. So I don't think that he's -- I don't think he's the disaster the conservatives want to portray it. On the other side, I do think that he's made a critical mistake in trying to do too many things too early, and if we've ever learned anything with presidencies, and I think Bill Clinton would tell you that, I think I would say that even with Newt, you know. I think we tried to do too much too early. I mean how do you follow your act of passing everything in 100 days when you have no other -- what rabbit do you pull out next? And then you get into the really nitty gritty things of how do you pay for stuff, which is what we're going to have to do over the next two or three years. I think that's where President Obama may have his problems. But I wouldn't give him as bad a grade as some would give him. I'm harsher on his staff and his advisors than I am on the President himself.

SHORT: Do you think the Democrats can hold on to the coalition that elected Obama?

TOWERY: I think that the question is, "Can they hold on to the independent voter in America?" and right now they're not, in the swing states. What happens is there are just a certain number of states that are swing states that decide everything, and it's basically North Carolina, Florida, Virginia are the major swing states in the South, but those are critical because they have huge electoral votes. And then you get to the smaller swing states such as New Mexico or Nevada and you start adding those states up that have traditionally gone Republican. You start adding those up, if you lose the independent voter in those states, which is how he won, then the Democrats

have a hard time, but you have to have someone to lose them to. They're losing them right now in the late 2009 on the issues, but I don't know they're necessarily going to lose it in a presidential race.

Ronald Reagan looked like he was dead on arrival - and I shouldn't use that term given what happened to him in his first year - but let me just say Ronald Reagan did not look like he was going to have a very good presidency in the first two years he was in office. And then the last two years he suddenly resurged. We saw the economy get better and he just rolled over Walter Mondale like a tank. So I just think that it's so hard to predict what the future holds, but I knew who holds that future and that's the independent voter.

SHORT: Well, Matt, you're still a young and vibrant man with a head full of ideas. Will you ever seek another public office?

TOWERY: No. Not in this state. You know I just don't have any desire. I think I've said, in my mind I've -- you know, I don't know. I may flip out some day when -- I'm going to be 50 years old in December. Give me another ten years and if I go through some nutty thing and, you know, always something could happen, but in all honesty I don't have any desire to go through this stuff. It's a hard business.

In fact, I'll end this whole thing with this statement. If I could have not written the letter to Lester Maddox, not run into Newt Gingrich and Mack Mattingly, and not become a person involved in politics and instead had gone to film school at UCLA, I would have traded that life in

a minute because it's really what I would have rather done. I just am not -- I like life too much. I like joking too much. I like having fun too much, and I like creativity. And politics is not a world for the creative. It's not a world for people with a sense of humor because if you tell a joke you offend somebody. And so, you know, and I've had my hand in comedy and I've had my hand in a lot of different things and it's a lot more fun. Politics just isn't fun. It's sort of like the Mafia. This is the life I've chosen. I can't get out of it.

SHORT: Well thank you very much Matt Towery.

TOWERY: Thank you. I appreciate it.

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