

Mary Margaret Oliver interviewed by Bob Short
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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 for Political Research and Studies at the University of Georgia. We're in the office of Mary Margaret Oliver, member of the Georgia House of Representatives, former State Senator, and our guest today. Welcome, Mary Margaret.

MARY MARGARET OLIVER: Thank you. Good morning.

SHORT: You were born in South Carolina?

OLIVER: I was born in Charleston, South Carolina, lived on the Battery for one year and then my family moved back to my house district around middle of DeKalb County. So I'm a native of my district.

SHORT: Good. When did you first get interested in politics?

OLIVER: I didn't grow up in a political family. I didn't know politicians. My dad had the neighborhood pharmacy down at Emory Village and hung out with politicians occasionally at Druid Hills Club, but he was always very apolitical and kind of nervous around politics, appropriately so. And the first politician I ever met, I was taking his deposition in a jail condition suit. When I got out of law school there were, in the dark ages, there were very, very

few law firms who would even interview a woman at that time. I remember a federal judge telling me in that time that he couldn't really hire a woman law clerk because it wouldn't look right if they were working late at night.

So I was offered a job. I was grateful to be offered a job out of law school with Georgia Legal Services that was opening a rural legal services program in north Georgia. So, in my 20s I spent an exciting professional time really, a wonderful learning experience going to 27 different county courthouses and all those little towns and all those mountain counties up there. Lived in Gainesville and traveled to Elbert County and Franklin County and Hiawassee and circuit road through those counties. In the 70s, mid-late 70s, Georgia counties had not really caught up with a lot of the federal litigation entitlements or rights that had been granted to people. A couple of the counties had not complied with the Voting Rights Act. Henry County was a county that claimed in their legal defense that the Voting Rights Act didn't cover them, which was an interesting legal defense. Hall County had a residency requirement for public health benefits. Floyd County Public Health had a policy that you would not be entitled to prenatal care if you are an unwed mother. So these kinds of cases walked in our doors and, as a young lawyer who knew nothing, they still were easy cases to win because the law was against those policies. And those experiences of being a young lawyer in rural Georgia, having come from Druid Hills, which is a well off community in Georgia, were what opened my eyes to politics and to advocacy and to the real world.

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

OLIVER: I went into private practice with Pierre Howard. After I finished my legal services and finished teaching, I taught in Boston for two years. And of course, Pierre Howard was my state senator and came from a many generation political family. I had not ever walked in the state capitol until I was over 30 years old. And I was assigned to work on a foreclosure fraud bill from the legal services community, a consumer rights bill. And I walked in the capitol as a legal services lawyer assigned to work with, to be taught by Jim Martin. And interestingly, both of us ended up in politics. Both of us ended up Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee and we began as legal aid lawyers in the hall as lobbyists doing consumer advocacy work. I think people walk into that environment of the State Capitol and they immediately are engaged and excited or they run for the door as quickly as they can. It's, as you know, a very unique physical, intellectual, emotional and, in essence, competitive environment. And when I walked in the door I said, "this looks like fun." And I got the bug, and afraid I haven't been able to lose the bug.

SHORT: Do you remember your first race?

OLIVER: You never forget your first race. Your first race is the most important one, the one where you got the most emotional energy. It's really, in retrospect, I've run a statewide race. In retrospect, your first race is the one when you have the least to lose but it's the most emotional and benefiting. Me, my first race was a special election that my House seat where I grew up, where I lived opened up based on the unfortunate unexpected death of the lady who'd had the

House seat for a dozen years, Peggy Childs. And I will never forget walking into my law office, Pierre and I's law office. And this was in the days of pink slips -- and there were eight pink slips, I think Pierre had lined them up on my desk, that said Peggy Childs had died the night before.

And the law was at that time, it's changed a little bit now, that the governor had to call a special election when a House seat was vacated within 60 days. And so, it was a hit-the-ground-running special election with four candidates and I won after a run-off. And it was the highest voter turn out for any special election at that time in Georgia's history, which we had over 30% turn out.

Now that number was broken by Louise McBee's special election race in Athens. Her race generated a higher voter turn out.

But a special election gave me a very quick, didn't have to think about, you know, you do it.

You just jump in it. And I did it and I had a good resume to win from house district.

SHORT: So you got elected and you went to the State Capitol.

OLIVER: Right.

SHORT: As a freshman member.

OLIVER: Right.

SHORT: What was it like?

OLIVER: Well there were no women lawyers in the House. There were very few women. At that time there were probably 12 or 15 women in the House and Senate. I think I was the first -- Cathey Steinberg was there at that time, and she had gotten divorced. I think she and I were the only ones that were not married and had intact families where the husbands were supporting the women as a civic job, as a part-time civic job. Now the women in the House and the Senate are representative of women all over -- married, single, divorced, working, not working, all ages. It was very competitive, I think that's a good word. It's always a relevant word to me -- with a lot of talent. The House was a place that had always had, just based on numbers, a lot of talent. And my goal was to get on the House Judiciary Committee because that's where I thought the smart lawyers were, that's where the talent was in my view, and they didn't have women on it. And Peggy Childs had been on it. So I was hoping that I would have a chance to get on that, which was a very prestigious committee to get an appointment to. And that was my campaign after I won.

And who helped me a lot was Robin Harris. Robin Harris, president of our bank here, had been on the House Judiciary Committee, was a contemporary of Tom Murphy and called up Tom Murphy and said "put her on Judiciary." And I think that helped me a lot. I also think -- I remember speaking to Speaker Murphy I think the day before he had made the appointments and I was telling him, you know, a classic lawyer story. I had been up in front of Judge Bill O'Kelly, a federal judge, trying a landline dispute with a gentleman from Suches, Georgia with the National Forestry. Where was the landline in his family property the Chattahoochee National

Forest? And I was griping to Speaker Murphy that the United States attorney in my view had not proved who owned the Chattahoochee National Forest and Judge O'Kelly had let them reopen their evidence to prove it and that how unfair that was. And Speaker Murphy told me that that was unfair, all these prosecutors, they just get to do anything they want to and I think that's why he put me on the Judiciary Committee. He saw me as a real lawyer, complaining about judges.

SHORT: You know, prior to your arrival the House of Representatives was run by a small clannish group of males. There were very few women in there. How did you manage to break the ice?

OLIVER: I that my experience in my profession was enormously helpful. I had appeared before Nathan Deal when he was Juvenile Court Judge in Hall County. I was a child lawyer; he was juvenile court judge. Roy Lambert had helped me with a case over in Morgan County. I had had some professional friendships that helped me a lot going into the House. And at that time Peggy Childs had, I think, just finished law school. And when I'd gotten to the house I'd been practicing -- because I started when I was 23 -- I'd been practicing 15 years. So I had a substantial legal experience and that helped me as much as anything. I also think that Speaker Murphy made opportunities for me that were uniquely generous for me. And it was in his interest to do so. Tom Murphy's political genius -- he had many skills, but one of them was he would figure out what House members wanted personally, individually. Some House members want a trip to the Kentucky Derby, some House members want to be on this committee or work

for this industry. What I wanted was to do was work. I wanted to be busy and to do work. And he gave me a lot of work to do. And that was an opportunity where not everybody wants to work complicated issues and it gave me a lot of time to develop working relationships with people on issues I cared about.

SHORT: Let's talk a minute first about some of your accomplishments in the House of Representatives. I'd like to make it clear though that you have served in both the House and the Senate and I don't want to ask you to distinguish between the two, but let's talk about your service in the House.

OLIVER: Well, as you know, I was in the House five years and then I went to the Senate. When Pierre became lieutenant governor and his seat opened, Cathey Steinberg took it for one term. But it was simply too great an opportunity to work with him and his senate. After I ran statewide in '98 and lost I was out. And I came back to the House in 2003. Multi-member districts opened up. This year I've had the chance, because the Senate seat opens again, to run for the Senate. I prefer the House and I'm happy to tell you why. I think the House has a larger talent pool just based on numbers. I think that it has more of an opportunity for working relationships. I think there's more of a rank and file "we're here to work on stuff," feeling in the House. When I was in the Senate -- and it was true for me -- a large percentage of the Senate, a third of the people, are running for other offices, running statewide. I was doing it running for Congress. It's more of a individualistic kind of political agenda than it is the free for all of the

people's House. I think the people's House is a more fun place to be. You've got more friends to do mischief with. You've got more things to see happening in depth and I just like the atmosphere. It's more chaotic. It's more personal. It's more emotional. I just like it better.

SHORT: You were appointed Chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the Senate. The first woman to hold that position in God knows how long.

OLIVER: Ever.

SHORT: Ever.

OLIVER: It was the first woman who had ever served as a chairman of any major committee in the Senate and I was appointed as a freshman. It helped to practice law with the lieutenant governor.

SHORT: Yeah.

OLIVER: And Pierre Howard and I had a good working relationship and personal relationship and friendship and he knew that I was a good worker bee. And of course I was serving in his Senate District so he and I agreed on so many issues that he cared about. But he also knew that he could send me things that I would just kind of take the heat for it. You know, on motorcycle

helmets, he personally wasn't going to let people take the motorcycle helmets off, but he would send it to committee and I would always not do a hearing and people would complain, complain, complain and Pierre would just tell him he just couldn't do a thing with me. And he was happy for them to feel like he was just being victimized by this woman over there. It worked for him, it worked for me and we had a good working relationship and I was a good worker bee for him.

SHORT: You served on some other very important committees in the Senate. Education I think.

OLIVER: I was Vice-Chairman of Education and I was Chairman of the Education Subcommittee for Appropriations. And that was the year that the lottery money first started. Those six years that I was the Senate, '92 to '98 were the years that the lottery money started flowing into the state coffers. And that was all in my budget subcommittee and it was probably as important an opportunity as I've ever had.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about education. Seems we haven't been able to really improve the quality of education in Georgia. Are we going about it wrong?

OLIVER: I think we're going about it half wrong for sure. When I began my political career everybody stood up and supported education. "I'm for public education. I'm for public education. I want to support the teachers." Today nobody's for public education. They're for charter schools. They're for vouchers. It's a fascinating change. Nobody -- when I say nobody

I mean the leadership of Georgia today. The Republican party's not for public education.

They're for these 45-50,000 children over here who are in home schools or in voucher schools, the special ed. voucher schools or in the charter schools. There are 1.5 million children in the state of Georgia in school, and we're spending all of our time, political muscle, political chips dealing with 100-200,000 children who are home school, chartered school, or vouchered school. So we're way off track right now. I know the states are moving ahead and I'm very concerned about it.

SHORT: What can we do to improve?

OLIVER: Teacher quality, teacher quality, teacher quality. Our state's education system, education schools that are producing teachers are producing too few, not high enough quality and we're not focusing like a laser on teacher quality. I think Roy Barnes lowering the class size was the right step. The research is a little mixed on that. I think improving the principle opportunities, principles are really key. It's about our work force in education that we've been not helpful enough.

SHORT: You've earned the reputation as being the champion for children and for consumers.

Tell us a little bit about your legislation in those areas.

OLIVER: I have had a really interesting opportunity to study the Georgia's Child Welfare

system and to be involved in its policies. During the years that I was not in politics I went and joined the Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic at Emory Law School. Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic is a multi-disciplinary, primarily lawyers, but also public health and medical and Candler Theology students graduate program on abused and neglected children. It is focusing on foster care system and on basic maltreatment issues around children specifically in Georgia. I taught at Emory for seven years with that after I went back to politics, continued my role there. But from the beginning of my politic career, foster care children, children in that system and children who are at risk based on actual physical abuse and neglect have been a focus of my politic life. Some of that Tom Murphy just said, "Go do this," and some of it came out of my own law practice. The extent to which violence falls upon the people in families and in society is a very central theme of a lot of political debate. When is violence predictable?

Georgia's constitution's primary principle is the protection of public safety, public safety of its citizens. How many of our citizens are more at risk based on family violence than on random violence? Many, many more. 40%, 50% of the women show up in emergency rooms are there based on familial violence. Number one death by children in Georgia is violence by an adult. Number one reason that a child dies under 18 months is an adult kills them. It's never less than the number two cause. Accidents take over after a child leaves about 18 months. But adults murder children in the state of Georgia every month, if not every week. Murder suicides occur leaving children orphans. When are acts of violence preventable? And what is our responsibility as a society to put forth and fund policies that prevent violence against children?

How many times do we give a parent who's a drug abuser the chance to be a parent? 68%,

something like that, of the children in the State's foster care system, children whose abuse has been proven is based on neglect. Most of that is drug, alcohol abuse. How many chances do you give a parent to be a parent before you have to protect that child? That's a tough question. The primary constitutional right that a parent has to raise his or her own child is a huge constitutional right. When will government interfere with that bond between a parent and child -- constitutional bond? When do they have to? That's an interesting set of very difficult questions. And I've spent a lot of time on them.

SHORT: You also spent a lot of time on senior citizens issues.

OLIVER: Yeah. Guardianship issues, my law practice has a lot to do with the state management and guardianship issues, conservatorship issues, abuse of the elderly, financial abuse of the elderly. There's a lot of work to be done.

SHORT: In 1998 you ran for lieutenant governor.

OLIVER: Right.

SHORT: Got the most votes but got in a run-off.

OLIVER: Right.

SHORT: As you look back on that campaign, was there anything you might have done differently?

OLIVER: God, yes.

SHORT: What?

OLIVER: Lord, yes, there's probably 7,000 things I could have done differently and done better. The first time you're in a statewide campaign you're in another world, as you know. At that time, no woman had ever raised the money I raised. No woman had ever gotten the endorsements. At that time, it was pretty unique with that level of race. And in terms of governor or lieutenant governor, Karen Handel in 2010 will be a relevant candidate. But at that time in 1998 I was the most competitive woman who'd ever -- at that level.

And that race shows what you can predict and what you can't predict. And most of politics I find is unpredictable. I had almost a 10 point lead between the first and second place. I had about 29 points, Mark Taylor had about 20 points. He was always in the -- you know, very, very close whether he was going to be second or third. And he got into the second spot by one point or something, two points. Uniquely, there was not a run-off for the governor's race. Roy Barnes didn't have to go to a run-off. So the lieutenant governor's race was the highest race on the ballot for an August run-off in 1998 and the turn out was 11%. If Roy Barnes had been running

in a run-off in the governor's race, the turn out would have brought out the suburban vote. So I lost based on that unpredictability of turn out dropping to 11% because Mark Taylor's base was stronger for him than my base was for me basically. The rural voters liked him better than the urban voters liked me. I won my area, he won his area but he won higher.

Also, the reality, I don't think I had a run-off strategy. It was a little bit of a -- any time you do it the first time you're a little bit in the ranks of the amateurs. Mark Taylor was not an amateur. He'd been running for this for 20 years. I didn't have a good run-off strategy. I didn't have any run-off strategy. But I don't know what run-off strategy I could have had if there's no governor's race. And I got outspent in the run-off I think six to one. That's where his money came out. That was smart strategy.

SHORT: So what happened after that?

OLIVER: Well it was an interesting transition. I have said to many people that being out of politics for those four years was incredibly valuable. And when I came back to politics, surprisingly to me, I came back, I was a better legislator and a better person and much more balanced in terms of understanding what you can do and what you can't do in that incredibly difficult environment down there. I spent a lot of my last ten years in politics in my 40s not -- physically, I was just too stretched. I had pneumonia three times, I had -- you know, I was sick a lot. And it's just pure stamina issues but after I'd took that time off and devoted my time to my law practice, which I was grateful to have a place to come back to, and teaching at Emory, I

hadn't been sick since, you know, knock on wood. I think really that environment is something that you've got to look at from outside in order to do better at it. And being out of politics was made me a better politician when I came back. I'm convinced of that.

SHORT: So you ran for the House?

OLIVER: I woke up in a district where there was a multimember district that Roy Barnes had created based on trying to -- Democrats hold on. Stephanie Stuckey Benfield was in the House and the two person district was other -- House member was a Republican. The design of this district was let the Republican get beat and I had a perfect resume. I was reluctant in a way. I didn't want to come back to the painfulness of it and the stress of it. And it was very unpredictable. Again, totally unpredictable what was going to happen. Tom Murphy was gone when I walked in in 2003. Governor Barnes had lost. Shock. Sonny Perdue was governor. Speaker race between Terry Coleman and Larry Walker, and Terry Coleman won and new day in the House. Different kind of House.

SHORT: But you got appointed to the Judiciary Committee.

OLIVER: I got appointed to great committees, committees I wanted except appropriations and then I whined and whined and whined, then they put me back on appropriations. Whining has a very important role in politics. Whine. It's funny, I remember Calvin coming to me and he said

"okay, we're going to put you on appropriations" -- Calvin Smyre -- "but you got to do one thing for us." I said "whatever." He said "you got to be Vice-Chair of Reapportionment. Chairman is" -- I forget who it was, "but they're not a lawyer and you got to be vice-chair." I said "Fine." I wasn't worried about it 'cause we weren't in the census track. Well all of sudden we're in the middle of a reapportionment litigation and it was just turning into total chaos. And my house district got redrawn and Judge Bill O'Kelley was, I think, responsible for giving me back my house district, kind of like I always had it. Divided Stephanie and mine into two house districts and I got, you know, my base back.

SHORT: You were talking about education. Let's talk about a couple of issues that are very important today. Transportation.

OLIVER: Georgia leadership has failed on transportation the last 20 years. The MARTA vote in '72 I think was a successful beginning but wasn't fixed early enough to create a transportation infrastructure governance system. We are paying for that. We have not anticipated the growth of Georgia and transportation needs in any effective way. Georgia is falling behind in my opinion in part based on transportation. I spend a lot of time right now talking about those issues. My mayor of Decatur, Bill Floyd, is now the head of ARC board and head of the Georgia Municipal Association legislative committee. He's, you know, in there for the fight, trying to get some new transportation money funded. The Republican leadership has failed the last two years to deliver for the business community what they claim to be their number one request, which was

transportation. And here we are again looking at 2010. Will we fail again? I don't know.

SHORT: But doesn't it take more than money?

OLIVER: It takes a governance structure and it takes money. We don't have either. What comes first? This ridiculous bill we passed, Senate Bill 200 I think it is that tried to divide the planning service and DOT. We're trying to figure out what it says. We can't figure out what it says. I mean seriously. The bill created the Department of Planning Director be appointed by the governor, approved by the House Transportation Committee, but it doesn't say whether or not he -- it says he can hire his staff. The bill didn't say whether he could fire the existing staff. So I mean those kinds of -- this bill wasn't supposed to pass in the way it was drafted and it got passed. It wasn't an adequate governance structure. So now we're trying to redo some of that.

SHORT: There's been suggestions that some sort of regional tax be created to pay for transportation. Will that work?

OLIVER: It has potential to work, yes. I think it probably is the best idea. I don't want my constituents of DeKalb County who have already been paying MARTA 30 years to be paying any more taxes for corridor Z or the roads out there that -- we've got to have an integrated regional transportation plan. I believe that, and I hope you'll ask Roy Barnes this. He always intended to merge GRTA and MARTA in his second term. That needed to happen. Sonny

Perdue hadn't mentioned the word transportation in eight years as far as I can tell. So, we've lost some time here. Can we make it up in one year? I'm not sure.

SHORT: Water.

OLIVER: It's pouring outside. We have more rain than any other state in the south, but our growth has really changed our water management issue. Interesting litigation. Again, you know, I've spent my years in litigation and years in the political world. It's very interesting to me. I say publicly all the time, there's a higher intellectual discussion in the litigation courtroom than there is in the political hall. The federal judge had said we can't pull water out of Lake Lanier for water purposes. He's probably right as a matter of law. We counted on that. We counted on nobody blowing the whistle on us. Federal judge has once again blown the whistle on us and solution's going to be tough. There's no common ground between Alabama and Georgia on use of the Chattahoochee water. There's no common ground.

SHORT: Let's move ahead to year 2002 when for the first time since John F. Conley (Benjamin F. Conley), which is 131 years, Georgians elected a Republican governor when Sonny Perdue beat Roy Barnes. Were you surprised at that outcome?

OLIVER: Shocked. But Sonny and I served in the Senate and of course he was a Democrat then. And he and I were loyalists to Pierre and worked together a lot and I like him very much.

Sonny and Jack Hill and I were kind of a team. We shared offices and secretaries and we really did a lot together. It was an anti-Roy vote. It wasn't a Republican vote. It was an anti-Roy vote.

SHORT: The flag.

OLIVER: I think the flag was "x" part. I think the teachers was "y" part. I think that the way Roy Barnes treated individuals and groups -- you know, it matters how you treat people. It matters. And he didn't treat people well enough, individually, collectively because he never thought it mattered. The polls told him it didn't matter. Here's my question. I want you to tell me the answer to this. When did Roy Barnes know he was in trouble in the election of November 2002?

SHORT: I think –

OLIVER: Monday or Tuesday during Election Day?

SHORT: I think that he really sensed trouble because of the flag issue. And when he found out that he had really, really angered the teachers.

OLIVER: I don't think he felt vulnerable, 'cause his polling data kept telling him he was in good shape.

SHORT: I remember Bobby Kahn telling me that 55% of the Georgia electorate would vote for Mickey Mouse before they would vote for Roy Barnes. To me that's an indication that they were worried.

OLIVER: Do you think Bobby Kahn has any self awareness about why that might be true? Blaming it on the flag was too self serving for Roy Barnes. In my opinion, it was too self serving, an excuse.

SHORT: You did not see that the Democratic was sinking at that point?

OLIVER: Democratic Party has been sinking for a while. We had a group of conservative Democrats with a lot of political skills who had held it together. But that time really wasn't going to go forever. The mistake that Georgia has made -- when I say the mistake, the voters have chosen one party system for governor, House and Senate. It was all Democrats. Now it's all Republicans. It's not a good system. You need one or two of those entities to be a mix up, to have a good working system. And I don't think it's working right now.

SHORT: There are complaints that the Republican leadership in both the House and the Senate are too partisan.

OLIVER: That's a complaint of everybody. We had a change of House leadership, Republican leadership yesterday, this week. And I think that part of the reason that David Ralston won over the other candidates this week, yesterday is that the rules were too partisan, they were too mean, they were too arrogant, they were too "we're in charge, you don't matter." I think that David Ralston's partisanship will be more principled, will be less tricky, probably a little bit more honest partisanship. I think it will be a little bit more open to participation. It's what he said early, you know, he's doing away with the Hawk System, doing away with -- I think there's a lot of ways to open up the democratic process. Take the benefits of your control but don't be disrespectful to the people of Georgia.

SHORT: Let's explain the Hawk System for our audience.

OLIVER: Glenn Richardson came up with a mechanism of appointing *ex officio* members to every committee. I think there were four of them. And they had a title --Hawk. They were available at any time on any notice to come into any committee and vote. Hadn't read the bill, didn't care, but they were coming in to pack a committee by the rule. These four gentlemen could come any time to any committee and control the vote. That's very disrespectful to the Republican and Democratic members who've been sitting in that committee for ten minutes or ten days working on something important, something they cared about, something they invested in to have these guys swoop in. And it wasn't used a lot but the arrogance of it.

And one of the reasons it wasn't used a lot -- and they did it in the Judiciary Committee. They'd

send these guys in when the votes were tight. Is that we immediately -- as soon as one of them hit the door, one of the Democrats of the committee was pulled out the cell phone and called the press. Any time a Hawk walked into the Judiciary Committee where we were doing important legislation, cell phones came out and the press were called, made to come there and watch it. And we'd start doing these bird noise And it became our kind of signal to each other.

SHORT: Let's speak a minute about the appropriations process in Georgia. Usually winds up the last day of the session or last couple days of session we finally pass a budget. Could we have a more efficient way of doing that?

OLIVER: There's always more efficient ways of doing it, but the budget's about real power and the fights on the last two or three days are about a very small percentage of the budget. We have a strong governor state. Governor's in charge, in control of the budget, and really more so under Sonny Perdue than almost any other governor I've seen. We can have a better process but it's always going to come down to a horse trade at the end. I just want the people in the room who are doing the horse trading to be invested in something. What concerns me is when the horse trading is based on the picayune not important petty issues.

Joe Frank Harris built more libraries in Georgia than Andrew Carnegie. That's a contribution. He cared. He was invested in that. Zell Miller was invested in those Regent's budgets. He cared. I just want the guys, the men and women that show up for those budget hearings to be invested.

SHORT: The state of Georgia is not the same state as when you were first elected. Has state government kept up with the changes?

OLIVER: No. Although Sonny has probably done a better job at some of that. You know, he sees himself as a good manager. I think he's a good manager. Some of that is we've reduced in many aspects our numbers of state employees significantly. We've done away with the state telephone system, which we should have, this new IBM contract. I think we lost 600 employees on that. The DOAS is down, DOT is down. We're reducing the number of employees, trying to modernized based on the way industry modernized. We're making some direction. We need to do better. It's an old state. How many buildings does the Board of Regents have that are more than 50 years old? Most of them. What do you do with a 75-year-old classroom building filled with asbestos? I mean can you just walk away from some of these things that are sentimental. I mean you've got to make some harder decisions, some more modern decisions.

SHORT: Well I was going to ask you the question whether or not, since I would say there's never enough money, what's the remedy?

OLIVER: Spending money smarter. You've got to spend money smarter. Some of it's streamlining. Most of it's leadership and talent. Most of it's leadership and talent. Spend it smarter. Invest where you have to. Do we need 58,000 people in prison? We have a higher percentage of people in prison than almost any other government on the face of the planet. Is

that serving the people's interest? Is 58,000 people in prison making people safer? Is it making people safer? No. Why do we do that? What's our biggest mental health system in Georgia? It's the state prison system. Is that a good use of mental health money?

SHORT: Are we spending mental health money on prisons?

OLIVER: The biggest number of mentally ill people receiving treatment today are in prisons. The DeKalb County jail out here has a mental health system bigger than I think almost any of the state hospitals, psychiatric hospitals. Is that the way to spend money on mental health treatment? Does anybody care about prevention? Is that smart money?

SHORT: Surely the –

OLIVER: I was in Housing Code Enforcement Court two weeks ago. I was there on behalf of one of my state houses that I manage that was in trouble and I was being cited for a code violation. And the guy in front of me, the case in front of me was a guy who was in the orange jumpsuit in shackles and his case was brought up before mine. He had been in the DeKalb County jail for 25 days. He had been in the DeKalb County jail for 25 days because of dumping tires. He shouldn't have been dumping tires. He'd violated a code violation. He committed some kind of something. The reason they brought him out of the jail in shackles in his orange suit to take priority in line -- I was standing in line right behind him -- was he was sick. He was

really sick. You could tell. He said he was sick. He said I got to get out of here; I got to get to the hospital. The Sheriff out there -- Tom Brown -- did not want this guy to collapse while in jail and then the county would have to pay for it. They were trying to get him out of jail as quickly as possible so maybe he could go to the hospital and somebody else would pay for it. That's basically what the prisoner was saying. He said "I got to get out of here, I got to go to the hospital. I'm sick." And he was sentenced for time served, 25 days for dumping tires. How much did it cost to keep that guy in jail the last 25 days? And how much was it going to cost now that his illness was advanced to whatever it was? And I'm thinking to myself, this was a bad use of money.

SHORT: Let's get back just a minute to Mary Margaret Oliver.

OLIVER: And then I got to go.

SHORT: Okay. What's down the political road? Higher office?

OLIVER: Probably not at my age.

SHORT: Judgeship?

OLIVER: Probably not at my age. Don't know. What I know is that politics is unpredictable.

Politics is unpredictable.

SHORT: Define politics.

OLIVER: Engagement in the public life.

SHORT: Let's look just for a minute at your record. What do you consider in all these years you've been in public service your greatest accomplishment?

OLIVER: Stamina. Just sticking my nose in the fights. Caring about the substance. I was author of Georgia's stalking bill and I think about that legislative act a lot. It was a real interesting debate. How do you prevent violence? I mean how do you prevent violence? Today I'm the author of -- I've introduced it every year since I've been back --requiring seatbelts in trucks and requiring no class D drivers, no young drivers being able to use their cell phone while they're driving. Do you know how many deaths that would prevent if we passed that? Injuries, maiming. Why don't we pass that? 80-90% of Georgians support that. We lose federal money, highway safety money. I mean those are the kind of things that I think I'm good at.

SHORT: Well can you answer that question why don't we pass that?

OLIVER: You had a couple of Libertarian type personalities. Glenn Richardson is more

Libertarian than Republican, in my view, when an issue like seatbelt came along. It's crazy not to pass that. It's pure personal, emotional response.

SHORT: Any disappointments?

OLIVER: Many. Why dwell on them?

SHORT: Okay.

OLIVER: Mush on.

SHORT: I want you to make me a promise that you will sit with us again in the future and let's continue your brilliant career.

OLIVER: Thank you.

SHORT: Thank you.

OLIVER: Happy to.

SHORT: Thank you very much.

[END OF RECORDING]

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