

**Reid Harris 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 at the

University of Georgia. Our guest is Reid Harris, state representative and environmentalist, who has authored a book on the preservation of Georgia's marshes. Welcome, Reid. We're delighted to have you.

REID HARRIS: Bob, I'm glad to see you after all these years.

SHORT: It's been a while.

HARRIS: Surely has.

SHORT: Let's get started by having you tell us about growing up here in the Brunswick area.

HARRIS: Alright, sir. I was born to Augustus Middleton Harris and Edna Walker Harris. My father was a banker. He rose from the lowest ranks of the banks up to being chairman of the board of First National Bank of Brunswick. And my mother and dad had three children -- my brother, Middleton, my sister, Anne, and myself.

I went through school in Brunswick, graduated from Glynn Academy in 1948. Left Glynn Academy and went to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I got a degree. I went to Chapel Hill to study music, of all things. I wanted to be a music major, but it didn't turn out. So, I graduated in political science with a minor in languages, taking Spanish and German. After college, I joined the Army Security Agency and was stationed at the Presidio of Monterey in California -- the Army language school; became fluent in Russian. After service, I decided to become a lawyer, and went to Emory University. I married Doris Nelms on the third month in law school. Graduated with the Doctor of Laws degree from Emory. And Doris and I had three children. The oldest is Reid, Jr. And I had a son, Michael Middleton -- named for his granddaddy, and Douglas Howell. All of whom live on St. Simons.

When I started practicing law, I went to a law firm in Brunswick that was headed by a man named Charles L. Gowen. Mr. Gowen had been a representative from Glynn County to the Georgia Legislature for some twenty-odd years, and was chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the House. He was the principle author of the 1945 Georgia Constitution. And he ran for governor and was defeated by Marvin Griffin. That was back in the 1950s.

After I'd been with the law firm for about three years, Mr. Gowen was called to come to King & Spalding in Atlanta, and practice law there when Griffin Bell left to go on the Court of Appeals. Knowing Mr. Gowen and his background and what service he had performed in the General Assembly, I decided after the then serving representative was going to step down -- his name was Billy Killian -- he decided to step down, and so I determined to run for his spot. And I was elected in 1963; served for six years in the General Assembly.

During my time of service, I was mainly concerned with the affairs of the Judiciary Committee in the House. And during that period of time, we passed a new corporate code that has to do with setting up and maintaining corporations in Georgia. Passed a criminal code, which has to do with what penalties people get when they do the wrong thing. A criminal practice code -- how you try people for crimes committed. We did an Appellant Practice Act, which governs all appeals to the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court of Georgia. And we completely redid the Civil Practice Act, which controls all of the trials and constitutional courts around the state and is patterned on the federal system of practice.

In 1968, I had been down to Florida and had seen the havoc wrecked by phosphate mining. I came back to the General Assembly and put in the hopper, the idea of a resolution to see if we ought to have strip mining controlled in the state of Georgia. That resolution didn't see the light of day. I put it in the next year, and the guy that had really opposed it had been a friend of the speaker's, decided that he'd go along with me, because he could sell more equipment to the miners. And so, that resolution passed. And in 1968, the Surface Mining Land Use Act was passed for Georgia controlling how the mines were left when the ore had been taken out. During that period of time I worked with Rock Howard, who was in the head of Water Quality Control. We visited phosphate mines in Florida, iron mines in Alabama and Georgia, kaolin mines in Georgia, and quarries of marble and granite in Georgia. And so, Lester Maddox signed that act after the General Assembly passed it.

And I thought strip mining was over. I thought, "We got that under control." Unfortunately, that April, after that law was put into effect, the Kerr-McGee corporation from Oklahoma came to Georgia and they wanted to mine phosphate on the coast. They sought a lease from the state Mineral Leasing Commission. A lot of us got up in arms, because we were afraid that mining it would devastate the coast. Well, Rock Howard with Water Quality said it, that mining 70 feet and beyond, the fresh water supply could be contaminated with salt water. And so, he opposed it vigorously. A group of us from the coast fought Kerr-McGee's application, and it was overcome. But had they come, they would have mined a third of the coast. They would have mined out to the three-mile limit and most of their mining would have been also in the marsh. And so, the whole nursery and the propagation of shrimp, crab, oysters, and fish would have been disturbed to a great degree. And so, we fought it. Well, that was sort of a wake-up call. Somebody has got to protect the marshlands. And somehow, the good Lord chose me to try to do that.

So, in 1968 -- no, excuse me -- 1969, I put a bill in the hopper to control the mining of the marsh or any alteration in the marsh. The bill was not liked locally. The Chamber of Commerce was against me, the city fathers were against me, the county fathers were against me, all the industry was against me. And so, we had hearings in Atlanta by the committee to which the bill had been referred. And lots of folks came from Glynn County, up and testified against the bill. Well, I saw that the bill had very little chance. So, I sat down at my desk one night at my apartment in Atlanta, and said, "How can I change this bill to make it more palatable?" So, I struck some provisions in the bill that had to do with how it was presented to local communities -- the desire to mine was presented to the local community, and provided that anybody that could show by a title insurance policy that they owned the marsh -- could present that policy to the secretary of state of Georgia, and he would issue a permit to mine it. But I knew that no title insurance company in the country would write a policy insuring title ownership in any body. The people in the Legislature didn't understand that. They said, "Well, if a fellow can prove he owns it, he ought to be able to mine it. If he can't prove he owns it, he shouldn't be allowed to mine it." So, I got that bill through.

I lost on the first vote in the House by two. I needed two more votes to get it passed. So, I had to regroup, go before the Rules Committee, and the Rules Committee would put my bill on the calendar, and the speaker wouldn't call it up. And I had to keep going back to Rules to get it put on the calendar again. Finally, the speaker called the bill. I needed 98 votes to actually have it pass the House. I got 97 votes. And Speaker George L. Smith voted 'aye' and sent it to the Senate.

So, it got to the Senate. It was close to the end of the session by then. Al Hallaway from

Albany was chairman of the Industry and Labor Committee to which the bill had been placed. So, I kept writing to Al saying, "Please have a hearing on my bill." Well, he says, "Too late this year." So, the bill went over to the next year. And in the meantime, Holloway had come down to Sapolo, had some hearings during the recess of the General Assembly. And I got the first inkling from Al that he might go along with me on this bill. Turned out that his father was a fisherman, clams-man, oysterman up in Chesapeake Bay, and that he'd been ruined by mining. So he decided, "Hey, we can save the Georgia marshes." So, Al became sponsor of the bill in the Senate. He moved it back to its original design, and the Senate voted it out 39 to zero.

Okay. it came back to the House now. It had been amended in the Senate. What was I going to do? Well, I came home that weekend, did a little study, went back to Atlanta, and I got to the House chamber about 6:30 in the morning. And I pulled out some old daily reports. And about 7 o'clock, I ran over to the Senate and I saw the secretary. I said, "You can pass this bill. I've got to have it on the floor of the House this morning. Can you get it back for me?" "Oh yeah, I'll have it back."

So, I kept waiting on that bill to come. Still didn't come, didn't come. We had the prayer. And the preacher came and prayed, and he talked a long, long time. Finally, that was over. They unlocked the doors. The Senate sent its messenger over. The bill was there from the Senate back in the House chamber. which it had to be to vote on it. So, I stood in the back of the chamber, raised my hand, yelling, "Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker." And the House was in an uproar. Everybody was yackety yackety yackety after the preacher. Speaker with his gavel banged the place back to order, and screamed at me, "For what purpose does the gentleman rise?" I said, "Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of having the House agree to the Senate amendments to House Bill 212." Oh, the speaker didn't like that. He put down his gavel and he stared at me, and he motioned at me to come up to where he was at the head of the House. He says, "Can't we put this off?" I said, "Mr. Speaker, I've been through too much. I need to get this bill voted on today." Well, there'd been a long tradition in the House. Once you recognize a man, he's got the floor. If he had said to me, "For what purpose does the gentleman rise?" And I had said, "For the purpose of having the House agree to the Senate amendments." He would have said, "No way, my friend. Not right now." But he had recognized me. He wasn't going back on precedent. So, after I'd said, "I've got to have the vote now." He said, "Okay. We'll vote on House Bill 212."

Well, that few minutes I just couldn't believe. Robert Harrison from down in Camden County rose. He said, "Mr. Speaker, we have not seen what the Senate did to this bill." And the speaker said, "Well, that's not a motion. What does the man have in mind?" He said, "Mr. Speaker, I move that we print this bill. A gentleman has that right." So, the speaker said, "There's a motion on the floor, gentlemen. Shall this bill be now printed?" House voted it down. Then the speaker says, "Are there any other objections?" Silence. "The question is on the passage of House Bill 212 is amended by the Senate. All in favor, vote 'aye.' and all opposed vote 'nay.'" They voted 133 for the bill. The bill had passed the House and Senate.

Alright, now it's got to go the governor. So, time went by. Legislature adjourned. Bill still hadn't been sent to the governor. I kept trying to check, "When is it going?" He had only a certain amount of time in which to either sign it or veto it. So then I got word from the *Atlanta Constitution*, the governor was going to veto the bill. Well, I got on the phone and I called George Bagby, who was head of Game and Fish. Called Jane Yarn, who had been very active in getting the bill passed. Called all the folks I could think of to get in touch with the governor, "Please don't veto the bill." So then, Zell Miller called me. I think, I don't know. It was on the next to last day before the governor could veto it or sign it into law. He said, "Reid, I want you to

come to Atlanta." He said, "The governor's going to act on your bill one way or the other." I said, "What's he going to do, Zell?" "I don't have a clue." So, I flew up to Atlanta. Went in the governor's office. The governor never knew my name. He always called me 'chief.' I think he called everybody 'chief.' He said, "This is a very controversial bill." I said, "Governor, nobody knows that better than I do." He said, "Where are my pens?" So he got the pens to sign. Took several pens to sign it on the dotted line, and the bill became law after over a two-year fight with me bloody as I could be.

SHORT: That's great. If you will, let's go back for a minute to the ownership of Georgia's marshes.

HARRIS: Okay. Historically in Great Britain, the king had title to all lands. When it came to places like rivers and marshes, the king kept them open for public use -- for fishery, for navigation. When we went through the Revolutionary War, the king lost all control -- when we won the Revolutionary War, the king lost all control of everything in the United States. And what he owned reverted to ownership with the states, so that Georgia became the owner of its marshes. There were very few grants given. They are still recorded in the secretary of states' office -- no, they're now in the archives' department. But you can go look and read those grants, and they are so indeterminate. You really can't find the ground that was granted. So, title insurance companies, which generally insure titles, wouldn't ensure titles to the marsh. They said, "It belongs to the state." And that was my contention all along, that the marsh belongs to the state.

It was a really interesting sidelight to that ownership question. One of my best friends in all of life was a man named Jack Ashmore from Atlanta. He had bought the King and Prince, he developed the Island Club and Sea Palms; he bought Sea Palms. Now, a representative in all those matters. But Jack wanted to put up fences at both ends of the King and Prince property to keep people from coming on the beach in front of the King and Prince. I said, "Jack you can't do that my friend." He said, "Well, I'm going to give it a shot." So, he got Carl Sanders, who was his partner, to represent him before the Georgia Supreme Court on the ownership question of the foreshore. I happened to be on another case in the Supreme Court the day that that argument was made by Carl Sanders. And Jack wanted me to come to the counsel table and sit with Carl. I told him I couldn't do it. I said, "I'm on the other side of this my friend." Well, the Supreme Court ruled that the state of Georgia owns to the high-water mark everywhere that the tides exist. So that gave a much stronger case for my marshlands, because it showed again that the state owns the marsh. So, those two things intertwined.

Now, we've had several cases that have arisen. I wrote an amicus curae brief for the Supreme Court of Georgia this past year on the question of how far the Marshland Act extends, whether it goes to high-land or not. And I took the decision that it did not. The Supreme Court ruled that it did not.

SHORT: So, our marshes are well-protected.

HARRIS: I predict that ad infinitum the marshes in Georgia will belong to the people of Georgia undisturbed, except in very rare instances. I made a provision in the act that utilities could go in the marsh to erect power poles and telephone lines. Let's see, the people who own the fringe of the marsh can build a dock out to the water. Railroads can traverse the marsh. But those

are very rare exceptions. And except for those, as far as my brain can comprehend, I think the marshes are protected.

SHORT: Thanks to Reid Harris.

HARRIS: Well, thanks to a lot of people besides me.

SHORT: Let's go back for a minute to your political career. Do you remember your first campaign?

HARRIS: Oh, I remember it very well. I announced, and a man named Ray Whittle announced right after I announced. Ray Whittle had been the chairman of the Local Commissioners in Roads and Revenues for a long time; been real active in politics down here. And I thought, "Boy, I have got a job to whoop this fellow." And as it turned out though, I think Ray was way over-confident. He didn't go out. I knocked on doors all over the county. Walked up and down the roads and just talked to people. And I never saw Ray on the campaign trail. That got him, I think. And then the fact that it was evident from tax executions that he had not paid his state and county taxes, even as the tax commissioner. People didn't like that. So, they elected me. And kept electing me, thank goodness.

SHORT: So, you went to Atlanta. What was it like up there? What was your impression when you arrived at the State Capitol?

HARRIS: Strangely enough, I had never been in the building. And I can remember the first day so well, because at that time the Capitol was absolutely open to anybody that wanted to come in the doors. And they had all kinds of children in the Capitol, running and screaming and standing round the stairs getting their pictures taken. And lobbyists everywhere, you know, particularly outside the House chamber and the Senate chamber. And then that big old room that I walked into where the House sits for something or to wait on a bill. I don't know. It's a strange thing. I really felt at home, like I belonged there. And then I got to know certain fantastic people, you know, unbelievable. It's such a conglomerate of folks that serve in the Legislature.

I'll tell you one little story to show you the difference in people. There was a farmer that was there during the time of daylight savings' times being voted on. And he made a speech on the floor of the House and he said, "Now, if you change this time, you're going to ruin the crops of the state of Georgia, because the sunshine won't shine on the crops enough." And he was dead serious.

SHORT: Tell us about some of the people with whom you served.

HARRIS: Well, Elliot Levitas is probably -- I hope really, he doesn't see this tape -- but Elliot is one of the most brilliant men I've ever met in my life. Elliot's a Rhodes Scholar. I was looking there on the net the other day at what Elliot has been doing; he's been to Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Poland, you name it. The world has been his oyster, I mean, literally. Ellis Arnall, you know, took Elliot under his wing. And Ellis Arnall was probably one of the most brilliant governors we ever had, and he saw in Elliot that he was a brilliant young lawyer. Robin Harris -- there's nobody you can compare with Robin as far as dedication to service, just an

unbelievable leader. Those would be two of my top picks. Al Halloway was quite a leader in the Senate, and Bob Smalley was quite a leader. My friend from Columbus, Milton Jones. They're completely different kinds of people, but they all had the common "I want to do good for the people" sort of attitude. What can I do to make it better?

SHORT: You were in service in the Legislature during two very historical events. Let's talk about those. First of all, when the State House representatives took the power of appointment away from the governor.

HARRIS: Let me give you a little background on that. When Carl Sanders was governor, he made a joke out of the power of the governor to dissuade people from voting against what he wanted, saying that people would get called down to his office and he'd explain to them what he needed. And if they didn't give it, they didn't get it. And it just infuriated me.

I went on an interim committee meeting up in Rome, Georgia, and I got to Atlanta and the plane wasn't going to fly to Rome. So I took a bus that the airline provided me, went to Rome. Got late to the meeting. I caught a ride with a guy named Elmer George, who was head of the Georgia Municipal Association back in Atlanta. And during our drive from Rome, I started talking about how I just didn't like it, because the governor had too much control over the General Assembly. He said, "Why don't you do something about it?" And I said, "Well, how am I going to do something about it?" He said, "Well, you figure it out."

So, I was supposed to come and fly home that night, but I called my wife and said, "I'm going to stay in Atlanta." I called Robin Harris, and I said, "Robin, I don't like this business about the governor just having control of the Legislature." He said, "I'll come meet you. We'll have supper together." So Robin came down to the hotel and we had supper and we talked about it. And this was on a Friday, I think. He said, "Well, who would you like to get together?" I said, "Elliot Levitas, Milton Jones, Wayne Snow --"

SHORT: Roy Lambert.

HARRIS: Roy Lambert. And he said, "Well, we can meet at my house tomorrow night. Maybe we can get them all together then." I said, "Good." The strangest thing of all was everybody was in Atlanta. Elliot had just come back from somewhere. Milton had just come back. But they were all in Atlanta. So, we went over to Robin's house, and we said, "Well, we really need to get the control back in the hands of the legislators, electing their own speaker, appointing their own committee chairman, getting the appointments in the committees made by the speaker." And so from there, I came home. I thought I had done my thing. Elliot and Robin went to work, and they determined that we ought to have a meeting somewhere on government property. Turned out, we went to Stone Mountain. Ought to have it on the weekend when there was a Georgia football game in Athens that the members of the Assembly were invited to. So that was all settled.

Robin sent out an unsigned wire to all Democratic members of the House, saying there's to be a meeting at Stone Mountain after the football game next Saturday. Well, I went up to Stone Mountain, spent the night. And the next morning I got up and sat on the front porch of the lodge up there, wondering who's going to show up. This was Sunday, then. Who's going to show up for this meeting? Slowly, the people trickled in. And before it was over we had all but two Democratic members of the House that came. George L. Smith said he wanted to run for

speaker, and the question was, "George, has Governor Maddox been talking to you about being speaker?" He said, "No." So, then Robin Harris announced that he would run, and a guy named Sykes ran, and Dick Richardson from Savannah wanted to run.

So, we made up the rules for the get-together of House Democrats. Some people wanted it to be by secret ballot, electing the speaker, and Milton Jones wrote a great paper saying why it shouldn't be by secret ballot. Anyhow, at the end of the deal, we nominated George L. Smith speaker, and Maddox Hill the second man in the House. And he was elected on the day that Lester Maddox was appointed governor.

SHORT: That was a very opportune time.

HARRIS: Oh yeah, no governor.

SHORT: No governor.

HARRIS: No governor. So that went through. I guess the scariest I've ever been in my life as far as my knees were shaking, I took the well of the house in a joint session of the House and Senate and tried to get the election back to the people. Peter Zack Geer was presiding as lieutenant governor, and he ruled me out of order before I could get four or five sentences out of my mouth. But what it did was -- there was so many senators whose districts had been split by the Callaway-Maddox vote that they could say I voted to give it back to the people. And I was their hero, because I had gotten them off the hook. So, maybe part of the fact that the Marshlands Bill passed the Senate by a 39 to zero margin may have had something to do with the Maddox-Callaway debacle in the election.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about that election. It was very unusual.

HARRIS: Oh, yeah.

SHORT: In 1966, when the Democratic primary was composed of some very strong candidates -- Ernest Vandiver, Ellis Arnall were the two frontrunners in the very beginning. And Governor Vandiver --

HARRIS: Had a heart attack -- he had a heart attack.

SHORT: And Senator Talmadge almost got in.

HARRIS: Yeah.

SHORT: And it went to a Democratic runoff election between Maddox and Arnall.

HARRIS: Right.

SHORT: And Maddox won, and then faced Callaway.

HARRIS: Right.

SHORT: Which at that point was a big job.

HARRIS: Wow, yeah.

SHORT: You remember that election?

HARRIS: Oh, yes sir. I can remember this guy named -- he left the House and went to the Senate, from Atlanta -- can we hold this just a minute? Let me look up his name? Maybe I'll think of it before.

SHORT: Left the Senate and went to the House.

HARRIS: No, left the House and went to the Senate.

SHORT: Is that right?

HARRIS: I think he still may be --

SHORT: But he's from Atlanta?

HARRIS: Yeah. Oh, jee. He's a Republican, one of the first Republicans.

SHORT: Dan McIntosh?

HARRIS: No.

SHORT: Mike Egan?

HARRIS: Mike Egan. Mike Egan and I went to Mike Egan's law firm, and I tried my best to find some precedent for my speech to be made the next day in the joint session. I couldn't find anything. But I learned from Elliot Levitas' CD that you gave me, that Elliot had gone over to Callaway's meeting at the Marriott. And he had asked them, "What Constitutional grounds do you think that you've got a right to fight this thing on?" And Callaway said, "Where's the Constitution?" And nobody there had a copy of the Constitution. And so, Elliot says to him, "Well, have you got a list of the people in the House and Senate you people have called about this?" And he said Callaway turned to somebody and that somebody turned to somebody, and nobody had a list. So anyhow, everybody was scratching their heads about how in the world we could get this election turned around.

SHORT: Do you remember the Supreme Court decision that said that the Legislature had the Constitutional right to elect the governor?

HARRIS: No, I don't.

SHORT: Five-four decision that the Supreme Court rendered that --

HARRIS: Was this the Georgia Supreme Court?

SHORT: No, the U.S.

HARRIS: U.S.? Oh, well see, I had said in my argument that Peter Zack Geer gave me little of that the voice of the people is the most democratic way of doing things. Why give it to the Legislature when you can give it back to the source of all democracy -- the people? So, the Supreme Court -- I didn't realize that had been decided that way.

SHORT: Yeah, they decided that. That was a law suit that was filed by some Callaway supporters, who felt that they were being --

HARRIS: Wow.

SHORT: Being short-changed, because it was going to a Democratic Legislature.

HARRIS: Right. Wow.

SHORT: Do you remember that day? How did your constituents vote in that election?

HARRIS: They voted for Callaway, and I voted for Callaway.

SHORT: You voted for Callaway?

HARRIS: I voted for what my people voted for.

SHORT: Yeah.

HARRIS: So did Elliot, by the way.

SHORT: Right. Well, you served under Governor Sanders and Governor Maddox.

HARRIS: Right.

SHORT: Tell us about those two governors.

HARRIS: Well, you know, it's a strange thing. I've just handed you a paper about the separation of powers. And I didn't like Carl Sanders' attitude about the power that he wanted to control over the Legislature. I didn't think it was right. Our whole country was founded on the separation of powers doctrine; the Executive has its place, the Legislature's got its place, and the Judiciary's got its place. Maybe except for that, I thought Carl was a fine governor, but I didn't like that particular thing about him. And then I thought I wouldn't like Maddox. When Maddox was elected, I said, "Oh, this guy, you know, got too much race bother about him, and he rides bicycles backwards." All kinds of things about Maddox that I thought he shouldn't be governor, but he turned out -- in my estimation -- to be a fine governor. He was not the racist that I thought

he was. And he certainly helped the university system, as much as any governor. And he helped the penal system, as much as any governor.

So, I never will forget, one night he was speaking on Jekyll Island. My wife and I went, and he had his wife with him. I went up to him after his speech, and I said, "Governor, instead of riding back with the state patrol, why don't you let my wife and I drive you back to St. Simons to get on your plane?" He said, "That'd be nice." I'll never forget, he got out of the car and he turned to me and he pointed to the plane. He said, "Look at this." He said, "Look at me, I'm getting ready to get on a plane that's owned by the state of Georgia to take me back to Atlanta." And he said, "I never thought this little man would ever be in a place like this." And it just touched me. I mean, it was so humbling, you know? Wow.

SHORT: What were some of the big issues that were prominent in Georgia during the years you served in the Legislature? Of course, there's always education.

HARRIS: Oh, boy. See, my problem is the biggest issue to me was the marshlands. You have no idea how many hours and hours I slaved over that legislation. There's some things I need to talk to you about back there, I've got some handwritten memos on how to put the Marshlands Act together. And it just was almost all-consuming to me for two years.

SHORT: Well, tell us what those memos said?

HARRIS: Well, there was a law. It was putting together the Marshlands Act in more than one way. I mean, I came at it from many different directions trying to find a way to get that conservative body to get that legislation out.

SHORT: You wrote a book about that.

HARRIS: Yes, I did.

SHORT: Well, tell us about your book.

HARRIS: That book has been a joy to me. This is the book. It's called *And the Coastlands Wait*, and it tells about -- well, it starts out with the Surface Mining and Land Use Act and how it came to be. And then it talks about the Kerr-McGee thing I talked about before, and then how the law was written and how it got passed. I had come home from the General Assembly in 1968 after the passage of the Surface Mining and Land Use Act, and I had a telegram in my pocket from my senior partner in the law firm. And I wondered what in the world he was doing calling a meeting on a Saturday morning. So, I went in the meeting with my senior partner and the other partners, and the senior partner lit his early morning cigar, looked at me, and he says, "You're not running for the General Assembly again." I said, "Sir?" He said, "You're not to run for the General Assembly again. What is your answer to me?" I said, "Sir, I can't give you an answer now. I'll give you an answer next Monday." So, I came over to the island and I walked the beach. And I came home and I told my wife what they had said. I said, "Maybe I can make some concessions. I need to run another two years -- for another two-year term." She said, "You can't go back over there. It'll never work." I said, "Well, maybe it will."

So, I made some concessions on salary and some other things. They said, "No." I said,

"When do you want me to leave?" And this was, I guess, March. They said, "Well, at least by the first of June." I said, "Fine." It's the greatest thing that ever happened to me. I set up my own shop. You couldn't believe the clients I got. I mean, you can just tell this place here didn't come cheap. I had some of the finest clients in this whole state. And they just flocked to me, because of the fight I had put up. And so, that's that story.

SHORT: But you ran?

HARRIS: Oh, yeah. I ran.

SHORT: And you were elected.

HARRIS: And I was elected. And I got the Marshlands Act passed. And that was a strange thing about that firm. They lasted together for another few years, and then they just broke all to pieces. I mean, just went asunder.

SHORT: That was the Gowen firm?

HARRIS: Right. After he left -- what was the firm called? -- Conyers, Fendig, Dickey & Harris, and I was the Harris. Been there ten years, and I learned a lot.

SHORT: Who were your new partners?

HARRIS: Really, that never did work for me. I had some people, they just didn't turn out though. I mostly practiced by myself. I moved to the island when the Ashmore's came and opened a shop over here.

SHORT: So, you went back for another term, and then you decided not to run again.

HARRIS: I decided that I had to come home. A lot of people think that legislators make money. They don't make enough to live on, by any means. By that time, I had three sons. I had to make a living. So, I had thoughts back then -- and this might sound peculiar -- of running for governor, because by then I knew people all over the state. And a lot of people thought I was a man of courage, I guess. And a lot of people were encouraging me to run. I came home and talked to my wife about it. She said, "Reid, please don't do that. Please don't do that." She said, "We've got these three kids here, and I just really don't want you out there." So, that's settled it.

SHORT: That would have been 1974?

HARRIS: No, that would have been -- well, let's see. Oh, I'd been up against Carter, and that would have been enough. Good thing I didn't.

SHORT: You served with two more Georgia governors. You served with George Busbee.

HARRIS: George Busbee and Joe Frank Harris.

SHORT: Tell us about them.

HARRIS: I don't have too much to say. Joe Frank was really laid back while I was in the House. I never knew him well. And Busbee was floor leader under Carl Sanders and head of Judiciary. You know, I knew Al Halloway, who roomed with George, much better than I knew George. George was a hard man to know. I mean, he's not a guy you got close to, except for very few people. So, I really wasn't close to them. I've named the people that I was real close to.

SHORT: So, what was life like after your public service?

HARRIS: Well, for a long time, I was persona non grata in Glynn County, as far as public people were concerned. The chamber didn't like me. The powers that be didn't like me at all. But then there was a group of people that really understood, I think -- so, there I should back up and explain one thing. So many people back then did not understand what the marsh meant -- the productivity of the marsh, the fact that the shrimp were in a nursery at the end of the marsh and the crab and the oyster and the fish. I mean, there was no concept of that. So, the people couldn't be judged on what they didn't know.

Dr. Marland had come to my office early on with the Kerr-McGee debacle, and brought me reams of information on what the marshlands mean. Except for the scientific community, I was one of the very few people that understood the values there. So, you really couldn't blame those people that fought me so hard, because they didn't know what they were fighting for or against. For a long time, as I say, folks kind of glanced at me, like, "What in the world are you doing?" You know? But through the years, I guess I can say it out right -- it's taken forty years to get recognition for what I've done, and it's just begun this year with the Rock Howard Award that the Board gave me. And Zell Miller did recognize me several years ago when he was governor. For the most part, people don't know what I contributed. I pulled out some correspondence, knowing you were coming, and looked back at some letters I got that are still disturbing to this day. Hurtful, hurtful.

SHORT: But you did continue practicing law?

HARRIS: Oh, yes. Well, it's a strange world. I stopped practicing law in 1985. I had a problem with my eyes. I went to my local doctor. He said, "I don't know what to do for you." And he sent me to Emory. And I unfortunately got put with Dr. Cavanagh, who was the head of the eye department at Emory. I've just finished reading a book on Dr. Cavanagh and all of the terrible things he did to people. Dr. Cavanagh put a fungus in my eye. He did a corneal transplant and put a fungus in my eye to see how long it would take to destroy that cornea. Of course, I didn't know what he had done; that cornea went bad, and I went back to him. He did another cornea, and put another -- and so that cornea got destroyed. Well, Dr. Cavanagh wanted to start immediately to operate on my left eye. I said, "Let's get the right eye right before we go over there."

So, I began to distrust him. My wife was always distrustful of him. And so, I went down to Florida and saw a doctor down there. He said, "Oh, you've got fungus in this eye." He said, "Not but two people in the country that I would suggest you go to. One's in Miami and one is Dr. Kaufman at LSU eye clinic in New Orleans." So, I went down to Dr. Kaufman. Dr. Kaufman

gave me the third corneal transplant that lasted for two years. If I have ever met in my life two people who thought that they were God, one was Dr. Cavanagh and one was Dr. Kaufman. I mean, literally. The day after my surgery in New Orleans -- and I never will forget -- Dr. Kaufman came in, had on his jodhpurs and boots and his riding crop, and his daughter in tow, going out to ride horseback. Well, needless to say, I'm blind in the right eye. And all of that could have been avoided. But anyhow, that's the story of the eye.

SHORT: How would you like to be remembered?

HARRIS: For the marshlands. That is a glorious thing that God has granted to mankind. You don't have to plow it. You don't have to water it. You don't have to fertilize it. You just go out there and get that good stuff to eat. And not many places on earth you can say that that happens in. A lot of marine scientists now that say that the Georgia Marshlands are the most productive areas on earth, as far as the bounty of producers is concerned. I can go, when I've got to go to the next world, and think I did something for the aid of mankind. And it was a battle when it was going, but it ended right.

SHORT: Have we forgotten anything?

HARRIS: I can't think of it. I'm about talked out.

SHORT: There's nothing else you want to talk about?

HARRIS: Well, I can't think of it. Except buy my book.

SHORT: Well, Reid Harris, we are very much indebted to you for being with us today.

HARRIS: Well, I thank you so much for coming. I really do appreciate being recognized after all this time. It makes me feel good.

SHORT: Good.

