

Jane Kidd interviewed by Bob Short
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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short, and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics sponsored by Young Harris College and the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia. Our guest today is Jane Kidd, who is currently chairperson of the Georgia Democratic Party. Jane,

we are delighted to have you.

JANE KIDD: Thank you for having me.

SHORT: We want to talk about your tenure as chairperson of the party. I'd like to begin by asking you if you agree with this -- that to be successful, every political party must have three things -- good candidates, money, and organization.

KIDD: I think those are the critical elements. I think in the past candidate recruitment and developing good candidates might have been easier, because the position of a political candidate or an elected official was much more revered and admired. And people such as my father and Senator Russell saw it as a public service, and some way they could contribute back to their communities.

But I do think it's very different now in that public officials are so scrutinized for every aspect of their life that it is more difficult to recruit candidates than it used to be. We work with all of our county parties to help identify young leaders in their communities and encourage those young leaders to run for local office, to be on school boards, to be on city councils, to be on county commissions; because the best experience in running a campaign is actually running a campaign. And so, it's very difficult for someone to come out of the blue and run for even a state House or Senate seat, or a state-wide office having never run a campaign before and held an elected office.

So, candidate recruitment is critical, and I think there was a lag in the '90s of qualified candidates. And you ended up with -- we ended up with a lot of older candidates and older elected officials that had been there for a long time. And that was good, because they had a lot of experience. But we weren't growing and developing the young candidates that we needed to take over in the 2000s, I think. So, I think that's something that we've been working on since I took office in 2007 is trying to get our local counties to identify and groom and bring up bright young people who want to contribute to public office.

Now, money is the hardest part. You know, it's always the hardest part. And when Democrats, or whoever is in power -- if you are in power, you can raise the money. And so, when we lost the governorship and then -- well, the Senate first and power in the senate, and then the governorship and then the House, then raising money for the Democratic Party was very, very difficult. And in the past, the governor -- the Democratic governor, because we had Democratic governors for over 150 years -- the Democratic governor was the main fundraiser for the party. And we would have fundraising events like our Jefferson-Jackson dinner every year, and that would basically raise enough money to run the party through the year -- pay the salaries and run the party. And then the governor would also raise money to help the Senate caucus and the House caucus to help make sure Democrats stayed in office and elect more Democrats.

When we lost the governorship in 2002, then a lot of things happened to the party. We lost the central organization of all the county parties in our congressional district chairs. We have thirteen congressional district chairs that are assigned to the county parties within their congressional districts. And the organization -- which is that third arm that you were talking about -- kind of disappeared, and all the control kind of centralized in Atlanta. And the party tried to raise money. It was very difficult when you're out of power. The normal people that give money to the party want to give money to the people in power. And if you are not in power, that money does not come.

So it's very critical. Those three elements are very critical. And what I've been working on since 2007 is to get that organizational framework, that grassroots network from county party to county party, you know, to congressional district to Senate district to House district all together so that we have active, vibrant county parties. And we have been working with them, teaching them how to canvass and do calling to raise money so that they can run their own campaigns and help the candidates in their area. And so, I think the organization is in a different place than it was back in 2002. It's in a better situation. The Obama election in 2008 helped us, because he brought so many young people into the state to organize that a lot of our old-time Democrats learned from them how to stay connected and be organized.

Raising money is something I'm doing right now, and I do it almost full time all year long. But right now we are facing a Jefferson-Jackson dinner coming up March 22. Governor Tim Kaine, who's the chairman of the National Democratic Committee, is our speaker. Under my administration we started "Georgia Giant" awards. And the first year we honored John Lewis and Max Cleland. The second year we honored Shirley Franklin and Carl Sanders. And then this year we're honoring Andy Young and Tommy Irvin, who is not running for reelection and is the longest-serving Democratic official in the country. So, we're real excited about that. But we use that Jefferson-Jackson dinner as our big fundraiser.

But we're also trying to raise money for a coordinated campaign this year to run all of our Democratic candidates -- statewide and down to the Senate and House levels -- to make sure we elect as many Democrats as possible in that coordinated campaign. The state party is the only legal entity in the state that can work in combined campaigns. So, we can work for the governor's race and also help a House candidate and a Senate and put those names together on a flyer or on a TV commercial. And that's the advantage of having the state party as that entity that can raise money and work on combined campaigns.

A lot of it has to do with the disclosure rules. And we report to the federal FEC and we report to the state government. All our money that comes in we report and all of our money that goes out we report. So, it's all public record and disclosed, and there are lots of rules. And we just had a Supreme Court ruling recently that made a huge difference, and I think in the next five years you will see drastic changes in the campaign finance laws and the way corporations are treated in that. So, if you talk about the organization -- we've built the organization; tried to connect our county networks and teach them how to organize in their own communities. And then we're always raising money to try to keep our ship afloat and elect more Democrats. And then candidate recruitment is very important. But it's a very tough job, because in the state right now there's just a lot of -- the Democrats are not the party in power. And so, to get someone to take that leap to run for a U.S. Senate seat is very difficult.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about your moving into the chairmanship. Unusual, because in the past the Democratic Party has been the governor's thing. The governor appointed the chairperson, and he appointed the executive committee. But when you came into office there was no governor, so all of this fell on you. Explain to us how you approached that job.

KIDD: Well, it really was the first time that the chairperson had been truly elected. And there were five different people running for the chairmanship when I ran in January of 2007. And the county parties and the congressional district chairs were very disaffected with the state party and had not been very happy with the way it had been run. And so, it really was the first election. Like you said, up until that point the governor just appointed -- basically said, "This is

who I want as my chairman." And the county parties would just elect them.

But because we didn't have that process, I emphasized the three things that you just mentioned. I emphasized county party organization and infrastructure. Grassroots -- bringing in the grassroots statewide. That we would raise money to help more Democrats be elected, and we needed to recruit and find viable candidates that would be good legislators and good government officials -- elected officials, and run government well. So, it was a tough election actually. In the party rules you have to win by a majority, and with five, we had a runoff and dropped the lowest -- after the first election, we dropped the lowest vote getter, and then we had to run -- you know, we voted again and dropped the lowest vote getter. And it finally came down to me and one other person, and we were able to garner enough votes from the other candidates to put me over the top.

SHORT: Well, you've certainly had the experience.

KIDD: Well, you know, I had been an elected official in city council in my hometown of Lavonia for six years, and that was in my twenties. I was twenty-seven when I was elected and served for six years. So, I had done that. Very little campaigning, but a lot of meeting and legislating, so that was very good experience about how to build consensus and bring people together.

And then I kind of took a hiatus in 1992. I was congressional campaign manager for Congressman Don Johnson, and he won and then I was his district chairman. So, I went through a congressional campaign, which was very good experience and actually helped him serve the tenth district at a tough time under Bill Clinton.

And then I kind of dropped out again and didn't get back in until I ran for the House of Representatives in 2004 and was elected and served from 2005 to 2006. In that office I was able to see the state party more closely, and see what the state party could do for elected officials. A lot of our elected officials see themselves as separate from the state party, and that's unfortunate. And that's why we need to work together with them. So we meet with the Senate caucus and the House caucus -- the minority caucuses -- at least once a week, if not more. We help them in their communications needs. If they want to get out and do a joint press conference, then the state party will help them do that. We want to help them get elected and run their campaigns, so we work with the Senate caucus and the House caucus to elect more people.

But these politicians have not been in the minority before, and when all of this happened they really didn't know how to be the minority and how to fight back. They had been in control for so long, and I would say that even today some of the longtime legislators haven't made that flip to governing from the minority side. It's very difficult. And it's a very difficult thing for them to learn. So, we're trying to help them with that.

And we can say some things from the party that they can't say. We can be critical. Right now we're analyzing the Republican candidates for governor, and we can be very critical of those candidates right now. And we don't have our nominees on the Democratic side, so we'll wait until we have our nominee to tout the benefits and the good things about our Democratic nominee. So, now is a good time for us to make sure the people understand the caliber of the Republican candidates. So, that's something the party can do that the state legislators can't do right now. They're busy during the general assembly trying to make laws and, unfortunately, cut budgets and balance budgets.

SHORT: How do you deal with infighting within the Party?

KIDD: Well, there's always a lot of it. You know, you have different personalities in every level who want to either be in control or have a different idea from everybody else. And I have to step back and tell people that it's principles above personalities. And so, I have to look at what's best for the state as a whole in the Democratic Party and try to get them -- if it's on a local level, if it's a county party issue. We have to tell them that they're only one of a 139 counties, and so they need to get their local act together so that they can help us as a whole elect more Democrats. So, it's very difficult, but I think if you can stick to principle above personalities -- what are the principles we believe in, and how can we make that happen? How can we push those principles instead of letting personalities pop up and disrupt things?

SHORT: 2002 was not a very good year for Georgia Democrats. What happened?

KIDD: Well, I mean, there were several factors. You know, they kind of call it the perfect storm. It was the perfect storm of some negative things that happened to lose control. I think Governor Barnes and the people around him thought that he had it made. You know, that it was going to be an easier race. His opponent, Sonny Perdue, had been a state senator. He was not that well-known and he didn't raise a lot of money.

Governor Barnes, during that campaign, made teachers very angry. And I think it was more of a communications problem than it really was a policy problem. But when he started talking about getting rid of the tenure system and having teachers have to perform annually and be scrutinized and evaluated annually, a lot of the teachers got in an uproar. And they just focused all their anger on Governor Barnes. So that is a huge constituency across the state, and I think that rumor mill and that activism among teachers really hurt him.

And then he had changed the flag -- the state flag. A huge issue. A lot of moderates and government officials knew that the flag was holding Georgia back on a national scale, on economic development, on some other issues. And he changed the flag. So, there was a small but adamant group of what we called 'flaggers,' who that was the key issue for them, and anybody but Roy Barnes was going to work for them.

So, you put those negatives for Governor Barnes, and then a fresh face -- and the mood of the country was kind of a turnover. Georgia had really been leaning Republican up until that point anyway, and this was kind of what bubbled over and to finally the Republicans being in power. And Sonny Perdue ran a good campaign. It was a grassroots campaign. The Republicans went back to the grassroots much earlier than the Democrats did. And Governor Barnes focused most of his resources on television, and Sonny Perdue focused most of his resources on the less expensive grassroots. And grassroots is really what gets you the votes. And so, that's one of the changes that we've made since I've been in the party, is that we've emphasized the grassroots, the door-to-door, the person-to-person, the networking between the county parties and their surrounding areas. And so, I believe that's what will put us over the top in the 2010 election, and we can elect a Democratic governor.

SHORT: What challenged you to want to be chairman of the party at a point where it looked like that job was rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic?

KIDD: Well, as a state legislator, and someone who had run a state representative

campaign, and then I ran for the state senate and lost in November of 2006. Now, what had happened is that the state legislature -- the Republican-dominated state House had redrawn that one senatorial district after I had said I would run. And they made it more Republican, made it more conservative, and split the Athens -- the blue island of Athens in half. And so, that was a very personal, kind of pointed move, and I didn't think that was right. And I took them to court. I took them to federal court and state court. But, I think what I saw is that the party wasn't giving us the guidance and the central leadership that we needed to have. And I think it had just gotten lost once we didn't have the governorship.

And so, we were going to try to bring it back to the grassroots -- what we knew would work. One vote, you know -- trying to get vote to vote to vote and make the county parties feel like they were still associated and in close touch with the state party, and move as one as much as we can. You know, Democrats are very diverse. We have a diversity of opinions. We have to be very tolerant of the differences of opinions, but kind of stick with the main goals that we all believe in.

And so, I saw that as a challenge. The party had not been that helpful to me in running in my House seat or my Senate seat. And I felt like that was something that the party could do to help elect more Democrats and win more elections -- that that was kind of the central role of the party. I had come off a loss in November. The party position was open. I'd been involved in the Clarke County Democratic Committee, but I had not been involved in the state party at all. And in a way, I think that was an advantage, because I hadn't really been involved in kind of the decline of that county party, state party coalition. And so, I was seen as kind of a fresh face to bring it back together at a more grassroots level.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about reapportionment. Reapportionment has had an effect on the Georgia Democratic Party.

KIDD: Absolutely. And that's what I keep telling people this year. 2010 is so important; because this is the year of the census redistricting will happen in 2011. We're not going to win enough Souse seats to take the power back in the House of Representatives. We're not going to be able to win enough seats to take the power back in the state Senate. Our only hope is to win the governor's position, and if we have a Democratic governor, than the redistricting process will, I think, be more equal and balanced and weighted. But if we do not elect a Democratic governor in 2010, than redistricting will be all the Republicans' game. It will be their mission, and they will draw those districts as they see fit.

By population we're guaranteed to gain one congressional seat, so we'll have 14, I believe, after 2011. But we might get another one -- we could. Before the recession hit, it looked like Georgia's growth was going to allow us to get two additional congressional seats. Because of the recession, our population growth has slowed a little bit. I think we'll just get one. But, you know, it went to court. In the last redistricting, it could not be agreed on in the state level, and had to go to court and the courts drew the lines. What we're hoping this time is that we'll be able to come up with a reapportionment plan that the governor can sign off on and the legislature can present to the governor and that everybody will be happy with. But I don't believe that's going to happen unless we elect a Democratic governor.

SHORT: A lot of partisanship. Is there a better way to go about reapportioning in the state?

KIDD: One thing that happened when my senate district was changed the first day of the session in 2006 -- after that happened, Governor Sonny Perdue created a commission to look at nonpartisan redistricting. And a group of very smart people got together -- it was a pretty well-balanced commission -- and they recommended that a commission be formed to do the redistricting instead of the legislature, so that it would be less partisan. And that was the recommendation to the governor, and a lot of states do do this -- have independent commissions that do the redistricting. And they seem to be fairer processes. They did put that into a bill, but it was never pushed to create that commission by law. It was never pushed by my predecessor, who won that Senate seat, and the governor didn't push it. So, it does not exist to this day. And so, unfortunately, redistricting is going to be just like it was in the past. It's going to be pretty partisan.

SHORT: It's generally felt in Georgia -- well, I guess also in the South -- that to be a Democrat is to be a liberal, and to be a Republican is to be conservative. Is that a true label?

KIDD: I don't think it's a true label, but it definitely is the status quo in people's mindset at this point. And I do think the National Democratic Party in the '90s -- probably the '80s and the '90s -- was perceived as so liberal that a lot of Georgians retreated from that liberal label. But I believe most Democrats in Georgia are moderates. They believe that government can be a good thing, but it needs to be limited. But when needed, if necessary, government can provide regulation where it needs to be. It can provide services where they need to be, and I think that's a pretty moderate stance. Most Democrats in Georgia are actually moderate to conservative. Older Democrats that grew up in my father's time -- that were Democrats in my father's time and in the '60s and '70s would say that they were moderates and even conservatives. My father, I believe, was a conservative Democrat.

So, I believe the labels have been misused and distorted to the point now where a lot of people will say they're not a Democrat, because in their minds it does say liberal to them. But I do believe there are a lot of Georgia Democrats that are more moderate to conservative, and just don't talk about the party labels as much anymore. And a lot of them have withdrawn from the Democratic Party because of the effective branding that I believe the Republicans have done on the Democratic Party -- as liberal and far to the left and extreme. I don't think it's really true, but I think they've done a pretty good job of building that image of a Democrat.

SHORT: How much longer will race be a factor in Georgia politics?

KIDD: I think Georgia was late to come to turn red and be a Republican state. I think we're probably going to be late to letting race be less of a factor. President Obama got forty-seven percent in the 2008 election. That was very close, a few percentage points away from a majority. So, that was, I think, a huge revelation to the state of Georgia, to see that forty-seven percent, and I think a lot of that was race-related. I think a lot of people could see past it -- forty-seven percent could see past the race issue. And there was probably another twenty-five percent there that the race wasn't an issue, but it was party-related -- the Democrat or the Republican. But I just think that because we were slower to come to desegregation, we're going to be slower for race to be such an issue.

But, you know, right now it's not just between African-Americans and Caucasians. We

have, you know, many new minorities in the state that are part of that too. There's a huge Hispanic population in this state. It's a controversial issue about immigration and whether a lot of our immigrants are legally here or not legally here. There's a huge Asian population in the metro Atlanta area and all over the state, but the concentrations are in the Atlanta area. So, it's not just black and white now, it's a lot of diversity. And I think it's all fear-based -- of something different from themselves. Anything that looks a little different from you is somewhat of a threat and fearful to people. And most people don't want to change their ways, and when they see something that appears to be a threat to their ways, there is some fear involved. And so, the more diverse we get, the more we get to know each other on a personal level, I think that race issue will diminish. But it's not ready to be gone in Georgia for some time, I'm afraid.

SHORT: Some disenchanted Democrats think the state party is too liberal, too urban, too dependent on labor support. Do you think that that's true?

KIDD: Well, you know, Georgia has the huge metro Atlanta area, and then we have the rest of the state. Fortunately, I grew up in the rest of the state in Franklin county, so I know what it's like to not feel like you're part of that big Atlanta. That is the largest population and I do think it tends to be more Democratic and more liberal, so there's a natural inclination for people in the rural parts of the state or outside of metro Atlanta to feel like Atlanta has kind of taken over the state and that's where you find most of the liberals. I don't think that we're run by Atlanta. The party tries to move outside of Atlanta as much as we can. We've got a convention coming up this year; we're going to be outside of metro Atlanta for the convention. When we have state committee meetings we try to have them alternate between Atlanta and Macon or South Georgia or try to go north so that people from all parts of the state can easily get there and participate.

But there is a perception, and I do think there are some Democrats that feel like it's Atlanta-focused and liberal-focused. Labor itself is not a huge push, because we don't have as many unions in Georgia as a lot of states. But they have been very generous in contributing to the state party. And so, they don't dictate what the state party does or who the state party is, but there is strong labor support for the state party. I believe that is in an effort to elect more Democrats who might be more open to labor union issues. But, I mean, I would be happy to talk to anybody about those three factors, because I can see where that could be a perception. I'd love to talk to them about the reality -- that we're not more liberal. We are representative of the state, I believe, and Atlanta. And it's not union-controlled, but there is generous support of the unions.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the relations between the Georgia Democratic Party and the National Democratic Committee. Am I wrong in assuming that the DNC is becoming a liability to Georgia politicians?

KIDD: I think the perceptions are that the more liberal Democrats are a part of the National Democratic Committee. So, there probably are moderate and conservative Democrats who don't want to hear from the DNC. The current chair, Tim Kaine, was one of the first Democratic governors in Virginia, and he's a very moderate Democrat. And so, I think some of that will be changing in the next couple of years. You will see the DNC not as liberal leaning as it has in the past.

But we are different, and I think they know that we are different. That southern states

and southern Democratic parties tend to be more conservative than the central Democratic committee. They know that. They understand that. They ask for our opinion when they're trying to come up with a national policy. What works in Georgia? They'll ask us what works in Georgia, and we're free to tell them that and work with them on that a lot. So, I think maybe the perception is there, but the reality is not as extreme as the perception.

SHORT: So we can now look toward the future and think that the National Democratic Party has not written off Georgia?

KIDD: No, as a matter of fact, right now we are one of the five states that the DNC and President Obama have targeted to work in and try to get better known in and to elect more Democrats, so that in 2012 there might be a possibility that Georgia would reelect President Obama. They targeted North Carolina and Virginia. Florida was always targeted. Those were the states that they put more emphasis on in 2008, and they won those states. So, now they see Georgia as a targeted state in 2010. Well, I guess it will be 2012 -- for President Obama to be reelected. So, they do see Georgia as a possibility.

They know they have more work to do here. And we keep telling them they have more work to do here, and they need to help us elect more Democrats. Getting them a Democratic governor is a segway to President Obama winning in 2012. They're very interested in the governor's race this year, and I think they will help us in many ways, maybe with resources or with sending surrogates to speak on behalf of Democrats -- to help get a Democrat elected to governor.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about the controversial issue of voter identification. What is the Georgia Democratic Party policy on that issue?

KIDD: We want to make sure that everyone who votes in a Georgia election is a citizen of Georgia and a registered voter. The Democratic Party has always supported several ways of showing that identification when you register. And so, registration is the most important thing -- that you check all that ID at registration. When you come to vote, it's important that they know that you are who you say you are.

But what the Republicans have tried to do over the last couple of years is -- it made it harder and harder to identify who you are. And a lot of Georgians don't have driver's licenses, and they've made the driver's license as the key ID. And they've narrowed it down. I think there were seventeen ways of identifying yourself at the polls before the Voter ID law was passed in 2005, and now it's down to seven. And they are a passport and a driver's license and, sometimes, a government ID. And a lot of people don't have those. We see it as a lot of our voters are the less fortunate, poorer voters, economically distressed voters, or senior citizens, who don't have driver's licenses. They have a difficult time getting to the polls, and to have to bring a restricted number of IDs with you is a little bit of a burden on those people. We want people to vote. We want everybody to vote who's registered to vote. And we don't want to put any stumbling blocks in front of voters, because we feel it's good for everybody to have their voice in government. And I think the Voter ID laws have been tended toward restricting and making it more difficult for certain populations to vote.

So, we want good, legal citizens who are registered to vote to vote. And so we work on voter registration and try to get as many people registered as possible. But some of our voters

have a more difficult time getting to the poles. And so, that's just historically been an issue that we have to emphasize.

SHORT: What are your thoughts on electronic voting?

KIDD: Personally, I feel fairly comfortable with the system that we have now. I witnessed our secretary of state, Cathy Cox, at the time when that was instituted statewide in Georgia. I feel pretty safe that those are untampered polling machines, and that there are plenty of failsafe tests to go along the system so that they haven't been tampered with. A lot of people would like a 'paper trail' as they call it to verify that their vote was cast the way they punched the buttons. And so, I'm not opposed to that at all. I think it's a technological problem right now. It's a money resource problem. It's an expensive transition, but I think it's something we should do as soon as possible, because you want people to feel confident that their vote has been counted the way they cast their vote.

SHORT: The number of independent voters in Georgia seems to be increasing. As you know, we allow crossover voting. Should we require registration by party?

KIDD: It's a big issue in Georgia. A lot of states do have party registration. Because we don't have party registration we really don't know how Georgians vote in a general election. All we know is who votes in Democratic primaries and who votes in Republican primaries. So our voter database can tell us who votes in Democratic primaries, but we need to contact that voter to find out how they vote in general elections. They have to tell us that. We call that ID -- they ID themselves -- self-ID as a Democrat or Republican. So, I'm not sure that we need to register as a party. I'm not sure that really helps people.

A lot of people don't like to be labeled. They don't like to have someone label them. We did some polling back in 2006, I mean, 2007. Maybe it was early in 2008 where we did some focus groups. And we were trying to talk to people who self-identified as independents. And around the table, the people who said they were independents, it turned out that the white men identified more with the Republican Party and their issues than independent. They said they were independent, but they voted Republican. And the women who said they were independents tended to vote for Democrats. So, people who say they're independent end up being really in one party or the other. They just don't like to be labeled, and they may have differing opinions. Some social issues, maybe they consider themselves as a Democrat. Some fiscal issues they consider themselves as a Republican. So, people like to crisscross, and I really don't think party registration is the answer to it.

I do think that there is too much partisanship. But it's because both parties emphasize that part. You know, we've gotten away from what is the best for government, what is best for the people. I read a book called *Colleagues* by Goldsmith, you know, about Senator Russell and LBJ. And there were a lot of times when the Republicans and the Democrats would go in a closed room and fight for their issues and come out with what was best for the people. And then they would, you know, kind of fuss about partisanship. But actually in the policy-making they were doing what was best for the people. And I think we've lost a little bit of that.

And, unfortunately, a lot of that is because of disclosure. Everybody wants everything to be transparent. But I think even President Obama said it recently, if it's all transparent, nobody's going to cut deals, and some of making laws is cutting deals. I'll give up this issue if you'll give

up this issue for this bill. And nobody's going to do that in public with everyone watching. So I'm all for transparency and Sunshine Laws, but I do think we've not allowed our Republicans to negotiate with Democrats, or Democrats to negotiate with Republicans, because everybody's looking and watching and waiting to see how they vote and to make sure they're partisan. And that has not allowed for a lot of flexibility in lawmaking. So there are a lot of problems right now.

SHORT: Also, problems in Georgia with ethics. How can we clean up that situation?

KIDD: Well, I think that there have always been temptations with power in government. There have always been temptations to prefer people. People are inherently selfish and self-centered, so most people want to get something out of whatever kind of power they perceive that they have.

Unfortunately, I think in the last ten years it's been new power and new when the Republicans came in power. It's never been exclusive to one party or the other, but the recent problems, I think, came from new power. And that, "Well, now we finally won this we can do what we want to do and be who we are and do what we want to do." So, I guess it is more regulation, more scrutiny of the financial disclosures, more scrutiny of, I guess, your tax returns, more disclosures. It is a moral issue, and most of that can't be regulated by laws and rules. It really is a moral issue, and I think people need to look at elected office as a trust of the people for you to behave ethically and to act on their behalf in an ethical manner. And I think we've just ended up with a lot of public officials that think they're above the law, and think that they're more important than that trust and that law, and it's very unfortunate.

I can't even imagine that kind of thought, because I've always seen elected office as a public servant, because I was raised by that. I was raised by my father and Senator Russell, and in that environment of public servants. But I think a lot of people who haven't come to politics and come to government in kind of the new age and haven't been raised by that kind of heritage see it as a power and how to get something for themselves personally or maybe their friends. And it's a real problem; you have to find the right candidates first, and then you have to put the right kind of controls on it, so that you make sure that the government officials behave ethically. And if they don't, they get punished and are out.

SHORT: Do you think it would help if Georgia Democrats more fully understood their legacy?

KIDD: I think history is very, very important. And I don't think that the newer generations understand how important Senator Russell was to the national scene, and how important the Southern perspective was to the national scene. You know, we teach history in our schools, and every time I'm at the Capitol there are school groups that are there. But I do think that maybe we need to be more focused on the giants of Georgia politics, and make sure the children understand what made them so special. What made them so important to not just Georgia government, but to nationwide politics.

So, I do think history is very important, but unfortunately, as they say, it's wasted on the young. Getting the history and the legacy to young people is very difficult to do, just because of the stages of life; you know, they learn it for class, but they're not as into the values that are communicated through that.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about that legacy. In 1964, when the Voters Rights Act was signed, President Johnson told your great-uncle Russell, "I'm turning the South over to the Republicans." Yet, thirty-eight years later is the time when Georgia elected the first Republican governor. Don't you think that was due to the leadership that was provided by the Democratic governors in the interim? People like Carl Sanders and George Busbee that kept the Republicans in their place, so to speak?

KIDD: I do believe that the moderate and conservative Democrats that we had in the governor's office from that point -- really up to Roy Barnes -- allowed Georgians to identify with and still consider themselves Democrats; because our transition had been smooth, our economic growth had been rapid and vigorous. I really do think that it really came down to an ideological mentality. When the Democrats finally lost control in Georgia, I feel like the Republicans -- you know, a lot happened. The Christian right took over the Republican Party and started comparing themselves with everybody else. "If you're not like this, then you're not right, you're not correct." I do think that we had wonderful leadership in our governors from the time that the Civil Rights Act was passed to Governor Barnes that kept Georgia in a stable, growing, vibrant condition. And that's what allowed people to still consider themselves as Democrats, because they were not leftist liberal extreme governors, they were moderate conservatives. And I think, like I said, I think it was more perception that the Democrats had become too liberal to lead Georgia than it really was reality. And a lot of that was framed by the national political scene.

SHORT: Are you pleased with the progress that the party has made under your leadership?

KIDD: I'm very pleased. It could always be better. I'm very impatient. I would have liked to have been able to snap my fingers and make a lot of improvements, but people do not move that way. They don't change that way, and it took us from -- probably sometimes through the Barnes governorship for Democrats to kind of lose their focus and lose their organization, and it's going to take us another four to eight years, I think, to really come back in Georgia as a strong political force in Georgia. But I think we have made improvements. I do think we're more unified today. I think we're more sure in our values and in what we believe. I think we were encouraged by the election of President Obama, and that the South is coming more into the mainstream of moderate Democratic rule. So, I think we have made a lot of progress. We have a long way to go.

SHORT: So in your opinion, the Democratic Party is much better off than it was?

KIDD: Well, it's not so identified with one person anymore. It was always identified with the governor. And so, now, since we don't have a governor, we've had to kind of re-identify ourselves as a party, and as individuals as a part of a party. And so, it's not as identified with one individual as it had been before, and I think that's been a healthy transition.

SHORT: Well, your term as party chair will be ending at the end of this year. Do you plan to offer for reelection?

KIDD: I haven't made that decision yet. I really think it's important for us to put all of our attention on these elections -- the 2010 elections -- and after they're over in November, I'll make that decision then. But I really have decided not to make that decision until after the election.

SHORT: I'm sure you are aware of a draft Jane Kidd for the United States Senate movement in the state. Are you interested?

KIDD: I am not going to run for office this year, for any political office this year. The movement is spurred on by a group of enthusiastic young people who I've been fortunate enough to work with and who admire me. But I'm not going to run for the U.S. Senate this year. I think it's best for me to stick with the party and try to win the Democratic governor's position.

SHORT: But that's this year?

KIDD: Right.

SHORT: What does the future hold?

KIDD: You know, I really don't know. I don't have strong political ambition. I would say I'm not an ambitious political figure who wants to be something bigger and better. Daddy had laid out what he wanted to do in his political career. He and his father sat down when he was fourteen years old and said, "I will be governor of Georgia. I will be U.S. Senator." And, I mean, he had those aspirations laid out.

But I didn't have that. And I want to contribute to government, contribute to the state of Georgia and the growth and development and improvement of the state of Georgia. But that could be in many ways, and I haven't decided that elected office is the way that I will do that. I may decide to do that later, but right now I'm not going to run in 2010.

SHORT: Let's go back for a minute, if you will, to 2008, when Senator Chambliss, who is a Republican, was up for reelection. And his opponent was Jim Martin, a fairly well-known Georgian. Martin got him into a runoff. Did you look on that as a victory for the party?

KIDD: Absolutely. 2008 was a victory for the party. Eighteen counties that had voted red in the state of Georgia voted blue in 2008. So, they changed from red to blue and supported the president and supported Jim Martin. Everybody said nobody could beat Chambliss. He became very vulnerable at the end of the Bush administration when the economy was tanking and things were bad. The bailouts happened then. Chambliss and Isakson supported the bailouts. And Jim Martin made great strides in chipping away at Chambliss' support at that time.

And really, I believe there were some political mishaps in that campaign that kind of stopped Jim Martin's growth. Actually, the Democratic Senate Committee who was working with Jim Martin to win did some independent expenditure television commercials, and they were criticizing the Fair Tax. Now, that's a whole other issue. But they criticized the Fair Tax on behalf of Jim Martin, and Jim Martin had never taken a position on the Fair Tax and would not have done that. And those kind of happened at a time when Jim Martin's political support was growing, and then a whole level of Georgians that support the Fair Tax heard that and kind of cut

off their support at that time.

Obama did not come back into the state. He pulled out of the state in August as far as his manpower and his resources. I think if he had stayed in the state and made Georgia a targeted state, then Jim Martin would have benefited from that, and maybe both Obama and Jim Martin could have gotten over the fifty plus one percentage. But because Obama did not stay in the state -- he didn't come back to campaign for Martin, we knew that we were going to have difficulty winning in a runoff. Our Democrats don't come back in runoffs and vote. And we got a great deal of people to come back, but not enough. But in the general election, if Obama had stayed in Georgia and if we hadn't had that little blip in the DSC support for Jim Martin, I believe he could have gone over the top along with Obama. And those factors just did not come in at the right time.

But we always knew that forcing Chambliss into a runoff was a victory for Democrats in Georgia. Winning eighteen counties and turning eighteen counties blue. We won four state House seats, beat Republicans and won them back for Democrats. So, we had some real improvements -- some real victories in 2008. And now we just have to build on that for 2010.

SHORT: So, how does the Democratic Party in Georgia stack up with the Republicans with a big election year coming up?

KIDD: Well, because we're not in power we don't have as much money as they do, and they've stockpiled a lot of money. Former Speaker Richardson stockpiled money, Sonny Perdue stockpiled money. And all of that money's going to go into the elections of 2010.

But I think there is a move around the country and in Georgia against incumbents. I think that we may be able to capitalize some on that, that we've had a Republican governor now for seven years, and look where we are. Our economy is a mess, our budgets have been cut, we've cut education and transportation. And all of the issues that are critical to the development of Georgia, all have been cut and damaged in the last seven years. So, I think there will be some overturn, anti-incumbent push that will help Democrats. So, I think we've got a real good chance to win back some -- maybe six House seats, one or two state Senate seats, and elect a Democratic governor. And those are our goals, and I think they're definitely doable for 2010.

SHORT: Well, thank you very much, Jane Kidd, for a most enlightening conversation.

KIDD: Thank you.