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Carol Jackson

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by the Richard B. Russell Library here at the University of Georgia and Young Harris College. Our guest is former state senator Carol Jackson. Welcome, Carol.

CAROL JACKSON: Thank you so much, Bob, it's a pleasure to be here. I'm very honored.

SHORT: We're delighted to have you. You were elected to the Georgia Senate in 1998, but before we talk about your senate career, let's find out a little bit about you.

JACKSON: Good. Well Bob, I was born, raised, lived — pretty much my entire life right there in Cleveland, Georgia, up in White County. I grew up, went to public schools there; married my high school sweetheart. My first career, if you will, I was a hairdresser. Did that for a lot of years, had quite a successful business in that. I think that helped me in politics because I got to know an awful lot of people; but of course, White County, Cleveland, was very small back then. It's grown now because everybody wants to come to the mountains and live. But, it was very small and everybody knew everybody.

I grew up in a very political family. My great-grandfather came to live in White County when it was still Habersham, actually. He was flag bearer in the Civil War. Then, when White County became White County, my grandmother's first cousin was the first tax commissioner — tax collector, I think they were called then — and from that point my great-grandfather was the justice of the peace, which then they were elected as justice of the peace. My grandfather served many years as the tax commissioner for White County; he later went on to become the director of the Selective Service Board for White County. He was in World War I also fighting for our country.

Later, in 1940 actually, my uncle was elected clerk of court in White County, where he served for forty years. My aunt served as tax commissioner for twenty-eight years; another uncle was on the school board; a cousin served as the sheriff — my family's been in politics in White County forever, actually. I was the first one to ever serve in any kind of district office when I was elected to the state senate. But growing up in politics in White County was just such a marvelous base for politics. I was taught from the time I was a little kid that you do not get involved in anybody else's race; you don't talk about anybody, but you get out there and work for your candidate. So I learned that as a small child with my uncle going door to door handing out cards and this sort of thing. So that was great fun. I wasn't old enough to do any of that with my grandfather as he grew up, but my aunt and two of my uncles and this is how I learned how to "politic" as we called it back then.

So that was a good experience. Again, I grew up owning my own business being a hairdresser — was a very non-traditional college student. I graduated from college the same time my daughter graduated from high school. I went to Truett-McConnell; from Truett-McConnell I went on over to North Georgia, studied business, business administration. Owning my own business, that was a good thing, but as soon as I got through college, I was — actually, before I started college, I ran my first time for clerk of court in White County. That was in 1980. The only woman to ever be elected in White County, at that time, was my aunt who had served as tax commissioner, and Mickey MacDonnell, who served one term as the county commissioner. That's when the county commissioners ran for two years instead of four. So she had served there. So the first time I ran it was really an interesting, eye-opening experience. So many people that were my father's and my grandfather's age — I'd go up and say, "Mr. Smith, I'm running to be the clerk of court. You know, my Uncle Clifford's leaving and I've worked in that office and I want to be the clerk of court here." Many times the older gentlemen would put their arms up around my shoulder and say, "Now sweetheart, you know we love you but that's just not no place for a woman." So I heard that many, many times. I won the primary in that race with three men and myself; came back to the runoff and lost by eighty-four votes. And I think being a

woman had a tremendous amount to do with that. But from that day forward, I shook hands with the fine young man that beat me and said, "I'll see you back here in four years" and I began my campaign then, that very day.

And continued to work; continued to run my business; looking after my family; went back to college at night; graduated four years later; came back and had a very successful campaign. I think maybe that some of the older people decided that women weren't so bad after all. So I won that and served unopposed until 1998, when I left the clerk's office to run for the state senate. But during the time that I was the clerk of court, I became very active in some of the state positions. I came up through the chairs in the Clerk's Association, served as president of the Clerk's Association. I was the chair of the training council for Superior Court Clerks, deciding what training they needed, moving that association forward.

My office in White County was a test site for a totally automated office. When I took that office, we were still doing things with pencils. We were still indexing on an old typewriter and doing things with pencils there. We had a few adding machines but we certainly didn't have any computers. So we were blessed with having the opportunity to bring that office forward and very, very, very proud of the accomplishments. I also became involved with the County Officers Association, which was the clerks of court, the sheriffs, the tax commissioners, and the probate judges. I was moving up through the chairs as the incoming president of the County Officers Association when I left to run for the senate. So I had a good run during those years with some wonderful leadership positions with great peers supporting me. I think that gave me a real leg up when I decided to run for the state senate.

A woman had never even — well, actually, I take that back — one woman did run for that. But a woman had never been elected into a senatorial seat in all of North Georgia, actually. When I ran in the primary — let me share with you — back when I very first got into politics they didn't have any Republican primaries even. I'm sure they made up a few ballots when there might have been some state races but nobody up in White County — in most of the North Georgia counties — even ran as a Republican. Everything was Democrats. Of course, through the years, we've watched that evolve and change greatly. But I ran for the primary for the senate seat for the fiftieth district. The prior senator left to run for lieutenant governor, man named Guy Middleton, who actually convinced me to run for the state senate; supported me highly in my primary, in my general election race. But I won the primary without a runoff with two opponents, which I think was sixty-four, sixty-five percent of the votes. So I give a lot of credit to that to my county officer and my clerk of court peers who all knew me well, who supported me, and those eight counties that I was running in. So that was a real, real, real, real leg up for me there.

I think it's important with people and politics and, I think we've seen this through the years, how people might start on a county level or a city level and move up. And I think it gives them a really, really good foundation because when I was elected to the state senate in 1998, I knew many of these people because I had chaired the legislative committee for the clerks of court as well as serving on the legislative committee for the county officers association. So I knew so many of the leaders in the senate and in the house when I went in.

So each year, just before a new session starts, they elect what's called a policy committee. Generally, the policy committee is composed of long-serving people in the senate, and I was very, very, very honored to be chosen by my peers to be a member of the policy committee for the state senate before I was even sworn in as a state senator. Got some wonderful committee appointments. I was on the Appropriations Committee, which is almost unheard of at that time

for a freshman to go through the appropriations. I served on Natural Resources; on the Banking Committee; Corrections, I was vice-chair of the Corrections Committee during somewhat of a tumultuous time in Corrections. So a lot of good things happened there. So it's been a real, real, real life changing experience. Absolutely.

SHORT: How did you manage to get the attention of your colleagues as a new senator?

JACKSON: Well as I said, having served on legislative committees as clerk of court and as a county officer, I knew a lot of them. It's really funny because some good advice that I got going in from one of my friends in the senate is as a freshman three things you should always remember. I think this is great advice. Three things you should always remember: one, keep your pencil in your pocket — do not sign onto any controversial bills, and I'll talk to you a little bit about that in a few minutes; the second piece of advice was to keep your mouth shut — you don't know enough to add anything to what those that are there and seasoned already know; and the third thing is keep your rear end in your seat, don't go running to the well every time you have an opportunity.

So that was three good pieces of advice I think that I got with that. But, right after like my third day in the senate — probably before I got that good advice about keeping my pencil in my pocket — one of the long-serving members of the senate who I had met came by. And he said, "Senator, I've got this little old bill here," you know that later became a clue right there, "I've got this little old bill here I'd like for you to sign on, don't think it's very controversial, just an optometry bill. Just want you —" "Oh, thank you, Senator. I am thrilled! Thank you so much for giving me the privilege of being the second signer on that bill." I signed that bill and, my goodness, I had every ophthalmologist and doctor and whatever on my case over that optometry bill. That was the bill that would give optometrists expand their scope of practice and give them a right to prescribe certain types of medicine. So that was my very first experience with keeping my pencil in my pocket. But that was a good experience.

SHORT: But I know you sponsored a lot of good measures. Let's talk about some of those.

JACKSON: Good, good. One of the things that I was very proud of to be a sponsor of was one of the bills that brought so much attention to water issues. Of course, you know in the district that I represented, the fiftieth district, and at that time, that was Dawson, Lumpkin, White, Habersham, Stephens, Rabun, Towns, and Union Counties. Those counties — I think like I've heard ninety percent of the state's waters actually begin in those counties — and the Savannah River Basin and the Chattahoochee River Basin are both — the headwaters for both of them start there as well as the — I believe it's not the Oconee. What is the big river over in Dawson County that starts over in Dawson County? That again was part of those — so I introduced a bill that brought an awful lot of attention to preserving water. The whole time that I served I really, really, really was very concerned, and still am, about the state waters, state and local waters. Preserving our water rights; don't give your rights away; take care of the people that live in North Georgia. And I certainly want to share with my neighbors downstream, but I don't ever, ever, ever want us to get to the point where somebody in Alabama or Florida says that White County can't drink out of the Chattahoochee River. That's just not where we want to go. So I've been very, very interested in the tri-state "water wars" as they call them with waters. That's been

one of my favorite issues.

Another issue that we dealt with was in the Corrections Committee. We have, in the state of Georgia, the probation office run through the Department of Corrections. We had in Georgia such a tremendous load for our probation officers to supervise people that were on probation and so many of the misdemeanor cases were falling through the cracks. Now, they don't need a tremendous amount of supervision in misdemeanor cases; however, there is an awful lot of money to be collected. If that money goes uncollected because those people are unsupervised and their cases, as they say, "fall through the cracks," that money does not come back to the counties or go to the state where it's supposed to go — it's gone. So I worked with corrections and with some of the private probation people, as well as with my peers in the senate, to introduce a bill that started the private probation in our state to handle misdemeanors. That was a very important bill and has proven to be extremely successful. That was one of my early pieces of legislation that I dealt with.

The committee that I served on at the time for the armed services, military committee, I did some legislation that protected our veterans, veterans' services. I worked very closely with Mr. Pete Wheeler, long serving department head and such a gentleman and such wonderful stories to be told about Mr. Pete Wheeler. But he helped me greatly with supporting bills and introducing bills for veterans and dealing with veteran's affairs for the state of Georgia. Those are some of my early bills.

SHORT: Getting back to water for just a moment. I presume then that you are opposed to this new idea of inter-basin transfer of water from the Chattahoochee to wherever, to provide more water for downstream.

JACKSON: I am opposed to inter-basin transfer. I've always been very vocal about that. I still am. I don't think that the people in the Chattahoochee River Basin should suffer. I think there is enough water to go around if we manage it. It's all about preservation. It's all about preservation of water. There's plenty of water to go around — I don't know what's going to happen twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years from now with water. But for today, my message is "protect and preserve our waters," absolutely.

SHORT: Well, there's certainly several historical events that occurred while you were in the senate. Let's talk about some of them. First of all, let's talk about the process of reapportionment.

JACKSON: Oh, okay! What a touchy and important subject, what an important subject. Of course, you know the state of Georgia — many of the states can do their own reapportionment however they want to do it, they do it. But in the state of Georgia, we have to get federal approval. And that all goes back to segregation, integration, rights to vote, and all of that era. It all goes back then — and we're still falling under that. But you will know that gerrymandering is one of the greatest tools that political parties have used for many years and will continue to use as long as they're permitted to. It is just the way that politics are. If you can divide a county, a district, or a state however you need to divide the state up— to keep your people, your party in control, keep your candidates winning — that's the aim of the game.

We'll go back to the 2000 census. Of course, in the year 2000, the Democrats were in control of the house, in control of the senate, in control of every office in state politics — maybe

a couple of public service commissions — but for the most part, it was all about the Democratic Party. That year, that map for the state of Georgia looked like a huge bloodletting, and actually, that's what it turned into before it was over. The district that I represented, the fiftieth district, there was a — I will go forward to say against my wishes — that district was cut up tremendously. You had, I think it's been referred to as a bicycle path that ran around at the state line to get into Rabun County, to take Rabun County and put them with Cherokee or some of those counties over there. It was a bad, bad, bad situation that that turned into. You saw so many counties split in every direction. It was a tough time and we had our hands held to the fire on voting, on dividing, on how that was to be split. And I'll be very honest with you; I personally believe that the citizens of the state of Georgia were so greatly offended by that particular year of gerrymandering that they said, "Enough is enough is enough." So that became the beginning of the end for the total state leadership, as far as the Democratic Party is concerned, I believe. Of course then we saw the very next term. We saw a change in the governor's office. We saw a governor elected for the first time in many, many, many years as a Republican.

SHORT: 1872.

JACKSON: Yes, 1872, the first time. This governor — I don't know who was more surprised the day after the election in that particular year. I don't know who was more surprised, Roy Barnes or Sonny Perdue. You know, that was quite a shock to both of them. When it first started, I think we were looking at some \$20 million that Governor Barnes had to spend on his campaign and he ran a rugged campaign. We saw Sonny Perdue with less than \$10 million; he ran a rugged campaign too. It was a tough, tough year, tough campaign. But then when we woke up the next morning after the election, we saw scrambling like you've never seen. I've never seen it in politics. And as I've said, I've been involved all my life — Marvin Griffin, he was my daddy's commanding officer in the army so we'd always been involved in Marvin Griffin politics because my dad loved him so much. This is the first time I had seen such scrambling for positions. We saw the next morning I had won my senatorial seat. The next morning before I got out of bed, I had a phone call asking me to switch parties. We saw, in a ten day period, four men switch parties — taking the senate from Democratic leadership to Republican leadership. This was the talk all across the nation. The entire nation was talking about Georgia politics. Now we did not see that happen in the house. We saw several people switch parties, but they did not take over the leadership. So that was a major, major change. I think if we could look to the big — you start out with a tent and you've got one hundred people in this tent, and this tent of one hundred people all believe the same way. And then you offend a few people in this tent — maybe the teachers, you offend a few of them. Well they start to leave out from under this tent and then you offend some of the people who were so adamantly opposed to the switching of the flag; and you see them leave the tent; and then you see some people who were so offended by the gerrymandering of reapportionment and they leave the tent. And at the end of the day, you don't have enough people left in that tent to reelect. So I think that's an oversimplification of some of the things that lead to that change.

I think as people look back now they can say, "we needed some reform in education." I think the teachers are looking back and saying, "thank you, Roy Barnes, for apologizing to us. Thank you for recognizing that we are good teachers and that we are good people, and that we're not going to let one or two rotten apples ruin the whole bushel." I think you're seeing that, I think that you're seeing people — I voted against changing the flag. That was what I heard

overwhelmingly from my constituents. And that's who I represented, was my constituents. I didn't represent the entire state of Georgia, I represented the fiftieth district, and I did vote against changing the flag. It was not a personal issue. It was not a political issue. It was an issue that this is what my people said we don't want to change and I listened to them. In that change, I think people look back now and say — well, you know — it's okay, it's okay.

SHORT: You served in the senate with Governor Perdue.

JACKSON: Yes. Yes, I did.

SHORT: What was your relationship with him?

JACKSON: Governor Perdue was the president pro-tem of the senate when I was campaigning. I went down and had a meeting with Governor Perdue with then majority leader Senator Walker and Senator George Hooks, who is still serving in the senate, to discuss my campaign. We had a very long and very open discussion about my Democratic campaign. I think it was two weeks later that Governor Perdue in fact did switch parties and ran as a Republican. He was my friend; he still is my friend. We certainly didn't agree on some of the politics that went on. We had a congenial relationship.

SHORT: Up until the time that the switch occurred in early 2003, I believe in that session, you had some very important committee assignments. Did those change?

JACKSON: Oh, I got stripped. You've heard the old saying, "I've saddled this horse, and I'm going to ride it?" That was basically my attitude. The people elected me to serve them that term as a Democrat. And that's what I did. I did not want to switch in midterm. It was a moral thing. It was a much more of a moral thing than a political thing for me. The political thing to do would have been to have said, "oh yeah, I'll switch. Give me this, and give me this, and give me this." And I would have probably gotten it. But, morally, I just didn't feel that that was the right thing to do. So I did not. But I was on the Appropriations Committee; I was the vice-chair of two subcommittees in Appropriations, which is said to be the most powerful committee in the legislature; I was the vice-chair of the Natural Resources — I didn't get taken off of Natural Resources but my offices got stripped. I was the vice-chair of the Banking Committee; again, my offices got taken away from me there. I got removed from the Judiciary Committee. I got removed from the — oh gosh, I had four major committees — I got removed from the Ethics Committee. I was the vice-chair of Ethics as well and I got removed from that. And I got put on some mundane committees; but you know what, there were still plenty of places to make a difference and that's what I worked to do, to make a difference, and to support my people.

I'll share with you — we've all heard about so-and-so's bills getting stolen. The summer that I was running for that term, when the legislature and the governor's office — when the senate and the governor's office changed leadership roles — of course the lieutenant governor now was still a Democrat; but because the senate had gone Republican, they were able to change all the rules and basically stripped him of any powers he had. So he didn't have much choice in all that or much chance with that. But through the summer of that year of my campaign, I had worked — started working actually before the session ended — with the GBI as well as some of my colleagues and some of the leaders across the state in a bill that was called the

“Methamphetamine Bill” that was passed. It was a good bill; it was a very strong bill. It had a lot to do with the terrible epidemic of methamphetamines that was, and is still going on, in our state. But I worked this really hard and we had finished the bill up. And I called the director of the GBI right after that and I said, “I had sent the bill to him for his approval because they were the ones who’d enforce it.” And he said, “Yeah, we’re okay with it, but the governor, Governor Perdue, has said ‘don’t take any bills to the senate until they come over my desk. I’m going to approve any bills before they go to the senate.’” Of course, I could bypass that and go, got a bill, and dropped it in, but I was supporting my friends in GBI.

And so I waited, and I waited, and I waited, and I made numerous calls — oh, as far as I know, it’s still on the governor’s desk, and this — you know that sort of thing. One day, near the end of that term in the senate, I’m sitting back there in my seat and bills are being presented. I saw the title of a bill that didn’t make a lot of sense to me. It was like, “Hmm, I don’t know what this is.” It just got on the calendar — the very last thing, the Rules calendar the night before — and there was no time to research it. So I’m sitting there and the president pro-tem of the senate, backed up by the majority leader of the senate, comes to the well, and he starts talking about this meth bill. And I’m listening and I’m going through my notes quickly and I find the bill — and there’s my bill! Almost word for word as I had done it.

Of course, I am flabbergasted that somebody stole my bill that I had worked so hard on. So when they finished the presentation — of course you turn your light on and the president of the senate, the lieutenant governor, gives you the right to speak. But when you speak from your seat, you can only ask questions, you cannot make statements. So the way you start off is “isn’t it true?” That’s your question. I said to the gentleman in the well, I said, “Isn’t it true that this is the same bill that I, the senator from the fiftieth, have worked on all summer, and had planned to introduce” and we talked back and forth and we kind of — jagged each other around. So he took his seat. The president pro-tem of the senate came to the well and again I turned on my light to ask him questions. And I said, “Senator, is it not true that this was the senator from the fiftieth’s bill that she has worked on all summer long with the GBI.” And we talked and he said, “As a matter of fact, Senator, it is. Welcome to the minority.”

So that was my real shocking introduction to getting your bills stolen. But that went on when there were just Democrats there. If the governor decided he wanted a bill, they always found a way to do it. Usually, when it was with their own party, they call you in and say, “This is an important bill. The governor wants this bill; will you support it; will you sign up and let the governor’s leaders — floor leaders?” So it’s gone on forever, just like gerrymandering has. We’ve since laughed about it; it’s just what it is. The main point is the bill did get introduced and it passed, and I’m the one that did the work on it. It’s okay.

SHORT: That’s legislation-mandering.

JACKSON: Legislation-mandering, instead of gerrymandering. That’s right.

SHORT: Let’s go back to 2002 for a minute. That was the election year when Speaker Tom Murphy, who had been speaker for some almost thirty years, was defeated.

JACKSON: Longest serving speaker in the nation.

SHORT: Were you surprised by that?

JACKSON: Yes. Yes, I was very surprised when Speaker Murphy was defeated. The man had done such an incredible amount for the state of Georgia, certainly for his district. His district, probably when he was elected, was one of the least served — maybe that's not a good word — didn't have very much going for it. And when he came in, he brought that district to one of the most outstanding districts in the state. They had colleges; they had great roads; they had interstates — that district had everything going for it. I believed that the people in that district would have known what they had and what the leadership was that they had. And what he had done and could do for them, and I just never thought they would have beat him.

He ruled with a strong hand, as you well know. He was my dear, dear, dear friend. I was one of the rare birds that could go from the senate to the house and still have good friends over there. There's generally been a battle but the speaker was my very dear friend. He did rule with a strong, strong hand and I know in doing so he offended a lot of people. And again, that accounts somewhat to the Republican movement that was coming in to the state of Georgia. It had already begun north and was working its way south and that happened. I saw the speaker several times after that and I don't think I have ever seen anybody any more hurt — heartbroken probably not the right word — but hurt that his people didn't recognize all the things that he did and how much he cared for them. I think it broke his heart.

SHORT: Democrats in the house were able to hold on for another two years. In 2004, the Republicans swept the state, became the majority, and things in the capital changed.

JACKSON: Right. They changed tremendously. You hear the old saying, "it's the same song, just a different verse," and I guess that's true. I guess that's true to a large degree. You know when the Democrats were in charge, they got ethics; so and so did this, or so and so did that. The Republican Party was trying to point out all the shortcomings of any Democrat that did anything that was considered to be unethical. They painted themselves to be above reproach. I think once they took over, we all see that they're human too; we're human, they make mistakes, they make poor judgments, they make bad ethical calls. History's a wonderful thing. If we go back as far as we can and we watch those circles, they just kind of tend to evolve, don't they?

SHORT: They do. Let's talk for a minute about your part of the Democratic Party. Some say it's become too liberal, too urban, and too dependent on minorities and labor unions. Is that a fair criticism?

JACKSON: I think it's a fair criticism. I wouldn't say that it's too any of those things. I think it's a fair criticism that it's leaning in that direction. And that would be not the entire party; I think that you've got what I referred to myself as serving in the sensible center. You've got moderates that call themselves Democrats and you've got moderates that call themselves Republicans. You've got the extreme right who I certainly don't agree with, and you've got the extreme left that I don't agree with. I think that sensible center is what it takes to run a state, to run a nation, to move us forward.

I'm currently serving as a county manager up in White County where everybody in that county is elected as Republicans. We all have the same vision. We all have the same wishes for our county. We're all very interested in the economic crisis that we're going through. I think when you have that sensible center, you can move a county forward; you can move a state

forward. If you get too far off in either direction, I think you take the state in the wrong direction.

SHORT: Do you think that a third party could be made of your sensible center?

JACKSON: Could it be? Certainly. Can it be? Will it be? Not any time in the near future, I don't think. We're seeing a lot of movement and hearing a lot about the group that calls themselves the Tea Party. It's composed largely, I think, of Republicans. But you're also seeing a lot of moderate Democrats that are moving into that group. We have a person in White County this year running for the commission seat, who served as a commissioner for four years, has been out for four years, and he served as a Republican — ran and served as a Republican. He's coming back running and is an independent. Independents have tried to make inroads over the years. I almost think you've got to be an organized group.

In my lifetime, Bob, I think that we're seeing more organization out of the Tea Party, as far as a political body, than we've ever seen as an organized group before. To say that they will ever become a force, you know we go back for — in history, we had the Whigs, the this, and the that, all the parties. It's just that we haven't known anything — you and I, in our lifetime, which has been a pretty good while — we haven't seen anything except Democrats and Republicans. And so, the nation was formed with lots of different parties through the years. The Tea Party may make it. It may be an organized group that — they've got some strong leaders; they've got some very recognizable names. They may be a force to be reckoned with.

SHORT: Well, in Georgia, it's very difficult to get on the ballot as an independent.

JACKSON: Yes, very difficult.

SHORT: Purposely.

JACKSON: Yes, by design.

SHORT: Right.

JACKSON: By design, no doubt. You have to get a huge amount of signatures, a percentage of the signatures of the voters that elect you. Now we had one or two people in the house that served as an Independent for a little while. I think they're out now; I don't think we have any Independents in either the house or the senate. There may be some running this year. I'm not aware of it if there are. By design, yes, the law was passed several years ago when it was all under Democratic control to stop an Independent; or to slow them down; or if you're going to run as an Independent, you got to really have your heart in it because you sure have to work for it.

SHORT: A lot of hoops.

JACKSON: Yeah, lots and lots of hoops.

SHORT: Yeah. Do you think the Democratic Party can regain its majority in Georgia?

JACKSON: Can they regain? That's such a broad question. We have some fantastic leaders that are Democrats. We have some fantastic leaders that are Republicans. If you put the right person as a candidate, I think that you can. I do believe that the majority of the people in this state are much more interested in the person than they are in the party. You've got — I think I've heard the numbers — you've got twenty percent that would die before they'd vote anything besides Republican. You've got twenty percent that would die before they'd vote anything but Democrat. But you've got this group in the middle, I think that still may call themselves Republican or they may call themselves Democrat — but I think at the end of the day, they're much more interested in the best person for the job, whether it be Democrat or Republican.

SHORT: Moving ahead now to 2006 Governor's race. You got two popular Democrats, Mark Taylor and Cathy Cox, opposing each other for the right to run against the incumbent, which was Governor Perdue.

JACKSON: Right.

SHORT: That was a very bitter race. Did that hurt the party?

JACKSON: I think so, probably. Everything that I have heard has said that it did. There was the bitter race. We were so — almost even, as far as Democrats and Republicans at that point in time — those two people were the two strongest Democrats in the state of Georgia at that time. Two outstanding people: one had served in the house; one had served in the senate; one had been the secretary of state; one had been the lieutenant governor — had both done outstanding jobs. Then they came against one another, both as democrats, and it was a bloody, bitter, bitter, bitter fight. I think that it did. I think that even though Governor Taylor won the primary, I don't think that the people that were supporting Secretary Cox ever warmed up to him because it had been so bitter. I don't think he was able to gather them into his race. It seemed that it was awfully difficult for him, at that point in time, to get the sting back in his engine of his campaign. And I do think that that had a — for that particular election anyway — I think it had an adverse effect on the Democratic Party, yes.

SHORT: Does it continue today?

JACKSON: The battle between the two of them, or the hurt feelings or what have you, does it continue today?

SHORT: Well, the split in the party.

JACKSON: As far as the Taylor-Cox?

SHORT: Yeah.

JACKSON: Not so much. I don't hear it so much; I don't think so. I think people from both sides of there may have left the party. The people that had been really leaders in the party, I think they may have left. Not necessarily to switch, but just became discouraged. They became discouraged with the process, they became discouraged because their candidates didn't win, and

they just said, “I’m just tired.” I heard a lot of people say that, “I’m just tired. I’m just going to step out of politics for a while.” You saw an awful lot of that in donors, in financial donors. It takes so much money to run a campaign and people had put an awful of money into these campaigns, and I think they were very discouraged about it. It’s made it difficult to raise money because the one’s that had given tremendous amounts of money said, “I’m just not putting more money in a campaign because my candidate didn’t do.” I think that feeling is just beginning to maybe soften a little bit.

SHORT: You thought about running for secretary of state.

JACKSON: I did. I thought about running for secretary of state, as we say, “tested the water” — even though Georgia’s not that type state — we still talk about doing that. It was a great opportunity for me. Again, I went back to my base — being the clerks of court, the constitutional officers, and the people I had served with in the legislature. I went back to that base, had a very warm reception from all of them. I was running a business at the time. My husband passed away right after I was elected to the senate. I was continuing to run that business by myself. I came to realize that I could not do both: I could not conduct a statewide campaign and continue to run that. I had some health problems, came on the scene at that time. I had a lot of encouragement to move into the fiftieth district — which I’d been gerrymandered out of — to move into the fiftieth district to run for that senate seat again. I consulted with a lot of people, a lot of prayerful thinking, a lot of consultation with people that I knew and trusted. And in doing so, I made the decision to not run for secretary of state, but instead to run for the senate seat. I had real estate over in the fiftieth district so I moved prior to qualifying time to the fiftieth district to run for that seat.

Qualified. One week after qualifying closed, my opponents — I think it was her campaign manager— filed a suit against me questioning my residence. We had to go to court, had a very expensive litigation. Of course, obviously, I did live in district and had lived in the district, but we had to prove that in court. Went through that hurdle. A lot of things happened. The economy was going bad. I sold my business. In early September — if I can talk on a personal note for a minute — in early September I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had to have surgery — now we’re talking September, October, November — two months before the election. I had to have surgery; had to start radiation, which was somewhat debilitating. The treatments, the energy level, everything — I was not able to conduct the type campaign that I always had. Since 1980, I was a hands-on, out with the people candidate. Because of my sickness and my energy level, I was not able to do that. The end of September, I was diagnosed with Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever.

SHORT: Oh.

JACKSON: Spent two weeks in the hospital, came out with that. So I was not able to conduct the type campaign that I always had. However, I did enough apparently. We did a poll early on and that poll showed me ahead of then-serving Senator Nancy Schaefer. We did an exit poll on Thursday before the election the following Tuesday. That exit poll showed me up by seven percentage points. With seven percentage points up, even with the five percent disparity that they talk about in polls, I should have still won by two percentage points. Of course, I kept going as hard as I could. Had I not been the victim of this strategy, I would have been so

impressed. This was a brilliant move and it took lots of guts to do what my opponent or her leaders or whoever conducted the campaign or the party.

On Sunday — no I'm sorry — on Friday — this was on Thursday — on Friday evening, they started running really, really — I don't know who it was. It was not my campaign; it was not my party; it was not any of my people that ran these ads. I do not know who it was. It had some name that nobody recognized and that we could not trace back. But they started running these very, very nasty ads against Ms. Schaefer. Very bad against her. And of course, we're scrambling, trying to figure out where it's coming from and to stop it. I'm seven points up; I don't have to do this. So we couldn't find it out, there was no time. Then on Sunday afternoon, there was a TV preacher who later passed away — I'm sorry I forgot his name, maybe Jimmy — I don't know which one it was; but there was a television preacher that everybody knew, had great name recognition — did robo-calls on behalf of Nancy Schaefer against me. Then on Sunday, no I'm sorry, Monday morning, Ms. Schaefer goes on TV, on radio, on everything saying what a horrible person I am and what a bad thing I've done to her and that everybody knew how good she was. And with that strategy, they defeated me less than one percentage point. But they defeated me from Thursday night until Tuesday afternoon at seven o'clock by using that strategy. It was brilliant, really was.

But anyway, everything works out for the good. She served her term and of course she was — a lot of tragedy, for which I sincerely say I am so sorry. It was a bad, bad thing. Jim Butterworth has done a good job for two years. At the end of that time, I moved back to White County and continued with doing what I was doing, which was a consultant for a group of engineers. And then I was offered the job as county manager in White County. That's what I'm doing today — still involved in politics, gone full circle, back in the courthouse.

SHORT: You work with a county commission that's almost totally Republican.

JACKSON: It is totally Republican.

SHORT: It is?

JACKSON: Totally Republican.

SHORT: And no confrontation there?

JACKSON: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Political party in my job is nonexistent. Absolutely nonexistent. I love White County, always have, and always will. My interest is what's best for the people in White County. We've had to make some very tough decisions this year, financially, but we've made those decisions and we've made them not on the backs of the taxpayers. We've cut just like everybody has. My work in the judiciary system as clerk of court, in the state senate as a senator, in the private sector as a business owner for thirty years, certainly has prepared me for the job that I'm doing. My commissioners are three of the greatest folks you've ever known. Lifelong friends. We all have the same thought in mind. We're going from a three-member commission to a five member this year, so that's going to be a change. Politics has been so good to me over the years and I love it. Can't sit down with anybody that's ever been interested in politics without that's where our conversation must go, must go to politics — just like you and I driving here today, that's all we talked about!

SHORT: You're still young and energetic. Is there an elected office in the future?

JACKSON: Oh, never say never. Never say never. I don't have my eye on anything right now, but I stay open to anything.

SHORT: Let's go back for a minute, if you will, to corrections.

JACKSON: Okay.

SHORT: Georgia has one of the largest political — I'm sorry — correctional prisoners in the country.

JACKSON: Right.

SHORT: Are we going about all of that right?

JACKSON: You know there's an awful lot of debate about what's right and what's wrong. If I can regress to my dear friend, Zell Miller. When he was governor of the state, he promoted and passed some very, very, very tough criminal laws that needed to be passed. No criticism on that. What we've run into though, is the two strikes and out and some of the — the judges have much, much, much discretion in sentencing as we all know. They're elected — I'm not criticizing judges, please understand that — they're elected to office just like we all are. While they follow the law, if they err to either side, it would be to lock them up and throw away the key as opposed to alternative systems to treat.

I don't remember the percentage but a huge percentage of the population in our prison system today is drug and alcohol related — whether it be drug possession, drug taking, drugs manufacturing — whatever type you're doing with drugs or whether it be alcohol or drugs involved, where someone's been killed or where it's been family abuse where you get crazy on drugs and alcohol. Ninety percent — well, that's probably an overstatement — but such a large percentage of the people in our system today are there because of that, because of drugs and alcohol. I don't think addictions can be — I don't think you can put an addict in prison and lock them up for twenty years or ten years or five or however many years you want to keep them there and turn them out on the street and them be cured of that addiction. I think it's going to take more than that. I think there are some alternatives that are being introduced. I think that the corrections department is being very wise in studying these, not rushing out to do the first thing that's there to treat or to rehabilitate or to alleviate the problem. I think they're being very wise and looking at all the different ways that this can be handled, and I think that's something we're going have to come forward to.

And politically — let me just tell you — politically, you're not going to see many house members or senators that are going to introduce a bill that's going to weaken any criminal law politically. Because for sure somebody's going to come back and run against them and they're — every time they raise their head they're going to get beat over the head with that bill because they're going to say, "Oh, he or she wants to weaken the laws. They're in favor of drugs, or they're in favor of alcohol, or they're supporting people at (**indiscernible**)."

You're just not going to see legislators introduce bills that will weaken laws.

SHORT: Despite the fact that these alternatives would be less expensive to the taxpayers than our current system of incarceration.

JACKSON: There may come a time in the state of Georgia when there will have to be some executive decisions made, not against the law certainly, but some executive decisions made that can be made that will change this practice — whether it be through if you get sentenced to the alternative sentencing method, if someone's sentenced to twenty years for drug trafficking — then I think that you're going to see probation and parole and the executive branch, use some of their discretion in saying, "We're going to treat them with this method while they'll still be under supervision." We don't have the money to build the prisons. We do not have the money to build the prisons that it would take to incarcerate all the people that need to be incarcerated according to some of the laws that we have on the books today. It's just not there. Whenever the economy gets as tough as it is, I've always heard that people start thinking much more about their own pocket book than they do about what their neighbors doing. So now I think people are worried about feeding their family and about paying their taxes and this sort of thing — much more than they're worried about what the Department of Corrections is doing. That's everything I've read and seen leads me to that opinion.

SHORT: I know that you worked pretty hard on the state's indigent defense law.

JACKSON: Yes.

SHORT: Tell us about that.

JACKSON: Indigent defense. You know the law clearly states, both federal and state, that everybody has a right to representation when they're charged with crime — criminal, of course only certainly not civil. Before we had the indigent defense statewide, each county had to foot that bill themselves and the judges had White County — I'll use that for an example since that's where I was clerk of court — the judges would take a list of all the lawyers in that county and they would go down, they would rotate those lawyers. And they would appoint whether it be Larry Faller to this case, and Stan Lawson to this case, and Grant Cain to this one on down as they had lawyers.

We didn't have that many lawyers in White County and these attorneys made basically nothing because the law said you only have to pay them x amount of dollars to represent an indigent. Well the lawyers were certainly raising sand. They did not want to be appointed on these cases because they couldn't make any money. And I recognize that, but I also recognize the fact that people that were accused of a crime, some of them were guilty, some of them were not. But they still, according to the laws of this nation and of this state, have the right to representation. I saw the great need for indigent defense for a state funded program that could do this. But you've got to also remember that was in the year that we had the coffers under Democratic control. The coffers in the state of Georgia were full and overflowing. We had the money to do that. I still believe in our constitution, our state constitution, our federal constitution — I believe in that. I believe that everybody has the right to representation. I believe in my state, I believe in my nation. And as a result of that, that's why I was very supportive of indigent defense and still am.

SHORT: Has it worked to your satisfaction?

JACKSON: Has it worked to my satisfaction? Yeah, I think so for the most part. Speaking for the fiftieth district, I think that we have good attorneys. I think that everybody that has wanted attorney, that could not afford one — and that's very key because you have a lot of people that have money that think they can have a court appointed lawyer, as they call it, or indigent defense attorney to represent them. But I know that our judges in the Enota District and in the northeastern district, where I'm most familiar with the mountain district, are very, very, very careful. They quiz people thoroughly to determine their indigence before they tell them they can have a court appointed lawyer. But we've got good lawyers in those offices; some of them are very young, but they know the law and they work hard for those people that they represent.

SHORT: Well as you look back over your career, is there anything you would have done differently?

JACKSON: Gosh. My political career, what would I have done differently? No, it's been a great ride — it's been a great ride. Still is, still is a great ride. I love it. I could probably pinpoint several things, but if I take my career as a whole — whether it be from the business standpoint, the political standpoint, from the private sector, the public sector — I would have probably done a few things differently, but it's been good. My faith is so strong that I certainly believe that everything that's happened to me in my life has happened for a reason and it's taken me to a better place. So that's how I feel where I am now and that's why I never say never because I don't know where it's going to take me next.

SHORT: What do you consider your greatest accomplishment?

JACKSON: What do I consider my greatest accomplishment? I think one of the things that — and this is not one certain thing, Bob, that I could point to — but what I am most proud of is being able to help people that cannot help themselves, and I don't mean that just financially. That's not where I'm going. You've got plenty of very educated people that don't know about, for instance, the judicial system; or they don't know about legislation; or they don't know how to get in to have a conversation with their senator, or their representative, or their lieutenant governor, or their governor. That's been a great help. A lot of people are extremely intelligent but they're not educated. I take great pride in having been able to help many of those people. A lot of people who are indigent, who can't help themselves, I've been able to point them in directions that they needed to go. I think being able to help people and to represent the people that have elected me — whether it be it's the clerk of court or as the state senator or now in my position as the county manager — I think being able to help people has been my greatest reward.

SHORT: Any disappointment?

JACKSON: Sure. Sure, there have been lots of disappointments. I was tremendously disappointed when I lost my race for the senate. That was a tremendous disappointment, absolutely. I was disappointed to see some of the people that I worked very hard for, to see them lose elections. Election disappointments, I guess, have been my greatest disappointments.

Certain people that I believed in, that trusted in, and that I had faith in have disappointed me, as they have everyone over the years. And I can point mainly toward politics for that. I guess that's been my greatest disappointments. Struggles — tons of them. Greatest education come from my Ph.D. in the college of hard knocks, but life's been good.

SHORT: Yeah. I know that you're singled out by young people, and rightly so, who are seeking public office. What advice did you give them?

JACKSON: From the time that you're old enough to be involved, get involved. Get involved in your chosen career, whether it be politic —I look at the number of people that we have, bright people that we have today, that are just kind of just drifting along and not doing much of anything. And I want to just say, "Don't do this. Don't you know what a wonderful brain, what a wonderful opportunity you have? Don't you know what good things you could do to lead our county, our state, or our nation?" And my greatest advice is, you know in high school I was always involved, president of this, you know class-this, always involved in whatever was going on. My children came along, soon when they got in school I was president of PTA; very active in the Chamber of Commerce; anything going on in the community; always active in my church, first of all, next to my family or with my family; teaching Sunday school; being involved in Bible school, that sort of thing.

Just be involved; just take a roll. Everybody can't be leaders; there have to be followers. But be a good follower; be good at whatever you are. I've had some menial jobs in my life. I've worked at a — one of my first jobs was working at the Dairy Queen. But I was proud of that job and I probably did the best curl on top of that ice cream cone of anybody in White County. I took great pride in whatever I've ever done as a job. Take pride in what you do and be involved in what's going on in your community.

SHORT: Senator Carol Jackson, I want to thank you on behalf of Russell Library at University of Georgia and Young Harris College for being our guest.

JACKSON: Thank you so much, I can't think of a place that I'd rather be than sitting in a building named for Senator Russell. What a wonderful, wonderful Richard B. Russell. Thank you very much and Young Harris College, I sit in the shadow of Young Harris College and I love it. Greatly you have honored me so very, very, very much for letting me be part of this and I just want to send a message to women in politics — there's not a glass ceiling up there anymore, my head has broken through long ago. So just get involved.

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