

Wayne Garner interviewed by Bob Short
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Wayne Garner

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short and this is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia and Young Harris College. Our guest today is a legend in Georgia politics, Senator Wayne Garner. Welcome Wayne.

WAYNE GARNER: Thank you, Bob, I'm glad to be here. I appreciate the invitation and the chance to get to see an old friend and reminisce about all the things that's gone on in the past.

SHORT: Well we are anxious for you to share with us some of your memories beginning with your election to the senate in 1980; I might add at the tender age of 28.

GARNER: That's correct.

SHORT: But before we do, please tell us about your early life over there in west Georgia.

GARNER: Well, I was actually born in Atlanta at the old Saint Joseph's Hospital in 1951, in May, and we lived in a little bitty house over on Carr Street. I still remember that address; it was 992 Carr Street, right off of Rice Avenue across Bankhead highway from middle of Maddox Park. We lived there. Daddy worked at Atlantic Steel, and I had two older brothers, and we were all poor but we didn't know it. So we moved around a good bit; moved to Douglasville. My mother died of cancer when I was ten and my two older brothers, I think they were like thirteen and fifteen when she passed away—we lived in rural Douglas County then moved to Lithia Springs. My dad was an alcoholic, and so he had his troubles, and my two older brothers went in the service to escape all that—I wasn't quite old enough to go in the service then.

Hung around there, moved into the mill village there in Douglasville, and I left home—had me a job at a drug store, I was in junior high school—well, wasn't high school, that was in '67 I guess—and Mr. Whitley, who owned the funeral home, he was one of our customers. I was, even at an early age, sort of a conniver and a dealmaker, and I asked him, I said, "Do you have a job out there where I might work and live?" He said, "Yeah, I do. I'd like to have you." Said, "You can go to school and work in the afternoon." Said, "There's a room out there, you can have your own room." So I went home that night, I quit the drugstore, told Glen Marrow, who was a pharmacist and almost like a father figure, I said, "Glen, I'm going to leave you. I got to find me a place to stay where the lights are on and the heat works and so I can get to school." So I walk home and put all my stuff into two Big Apple paper sacks from Big Apple grocery store, and I walk across Douglasville that night to the funeral home and moved in with Mr. and Mrs. Whitley. And stayed there through high school because I was just about beginning the eleventh grade—tenth grade—tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade stayed there, then went on to West Georgia College, and later on bought that funeral home, and operated it. So that pretty just a thumb sketch—like I said, we're a very poor family, we had hogs and gardens, and I think I lived—my wife and I counted from the time I was born 'til I married her, I lived in twenty-seven different houses. Just moving around but didn't know any better. If you've never had it then you can't miss it.

Then I married my wife Jerri, we've been married now for about thirty-six years, in October of '74; had our first child at '77. Always had an interest in politics; we helped when Jimmy Carter ran for president. I remember being invited to the Democratic Charter Convention in Macon, which would have been in about '75, by a little known state representative in Cartersville name Joe Frank Harris. He and Mrs. Harris drove to Douglasville and picked Jerri and I up, and we rode to Macon. And we're invited to a reception at the old Macon Hilton to go up and meet Jimmy Carter and Rosalind; they were beginning their candidacy to run for president. And we're up there and I think that whole afternoon there's only five or six people in a room. Dot Padgett, who you remember about Douglasville, Joe Frank, Elizabeth, and myself and Jerri and maybe a handful of others—so very few people came because I think no one had any idea that Mr. Carter would be able to pull that off, but he did. So that sort of wet my whistle for politics and always just sort of thought I might run for something one day.

In January of '80, I was getting ready to go on a duck hunt down on the Altamaha River, down near Brunswick. That night—I got up the next morning, found out that our state senator Ebb Duncan had died of heart issues. So I go on the duck hunt, I was down there thinking in the duck blind. I said, "Well, I think I'll just go back and run for that," so I did. I believe there was seven people in the race, and we round up in a run-off with Tom Glanton, great guy who was a former

House member, had resigned and he got in the race.

Well, Tom and I wound up in a run-off and that district was basically Newnan and that northern part of Coweta County, all of Carroll, and about half of Douglas. Well, having been grown-up in Douglas, one worked at the funeral home and all, I had a good base there. Hadn't been in Carrollton very long but then, nonetheless, we got the run-off with Tom and we led the ticket. And I was getting political advice from a character in Mableton by the name of Jerry Landers, and he and Roy Barnes lived right behind each other—next to each other—and then a guy in Marietta named Wade Shoals, who was an assistant school superintendent and on the side ran some campaigns because I didn't know anything about it. So they advised me; said, "You just stay away from him. Don't get in a debate with him." And I said, "Well, don't you think I should." They said, "No you do not need to get into a debate with him because you don't even know where the capitol is; he may ask you what floor is the senate chamber on and you don't have a clue." So I never debated him, we just had some joint appearances but any rate. And in three weeks we won by about sixty-two percent. And it was true, I'd never been to state capitol; I had to call and get directions to get over here and get sworn-in. That was when then Lieutenant Governor Miller was, I believe, running against Herman Talmadge and Al Holloway was sort of taking over the duties for the lieutenant governor while he was out. So I came over and Lieutenant Governor Miller was at my swearing-in and all that, but when it came time for committee assignments, Al made the assignments. And I remember meeting with him because lordy God I was twenty-eight years old and just didn't know a thing. And they asked me what I was interested in and I said, "Well, I just like to be on a committee where I could just sort of learn the process." He said, "Well, that'll be Culver Kidd's committee," so he put me on Culver's committee.

SHORT: Government Operations.

GARNER: Governmental Operations, the best committee in the senate; used to be, I heard, was that old EREG Committee where Culver actually has subpoena powers I think and well, I think they watered that down and took it away from him. So that began, that's how I got over there, and stayed in the senate for about thirteen years. Then went on the parole board and then was there then Governor Miller's campaign, I guess his re-election campaign against Milner.

SHORT: 1990?

GARNER: Yeah, that's right.

SHORT: Let's don't get too far away.

GARNER: So that's sort of how I got here. Just an amazing, fun journey.

SHORT: Well, before we get too far away from it, tell us about Culver Kidd. His name pops up everywhere we go.

GARNER: Culver Kidd was just a wily character, probably one of the smartest people I think I've ever met; he could keep more in his head. And he took his business very serious but he didn't take himself too serious, which is good. But he had two goals. One was money and jobs

to Milledgeville; that was his main function in life, to see how much he could help central state, and they knew him and loved him for that but he was a colorful character. Zell made me his babysitter; I had to sit next to Culver but I learned so much from him and he would just do the craziest things. I remember one day I heard a beeping sound in the senate chamber and I looked over and this inflatable robot was coming down the center aisle. Culver over there with a remote control, who he had dubbed—he'd gotten mad at Zell about something, called him a robot for Joe Frank Harris, so he had this little robot deliver the message. Zell got mad as hell. Sometimes in the afternoon Culver would come back from lunch, and he would like to have the occasion gimlet at lunch, but this time he had maybe one to many. And he was trying to be recognized to make a speech or respond on a bill and Zell knew that he didn't probably need to get into the well so he wouldn't recognize him. So in the senate, they give you microphones on these wires—you pull them out and that triggers something, and Zell wouldn't recognize him. Well Culver gets his microphone on the end of the cord starts—and I'm having to duck—and he's screaming out, "Oh, great leader! Oh great leader!" Finally, Zell looked at him and said, "Senator, I'm bending as far backwards to accommodate you as you are leaning sideways to talk to me." So that ended that and I finally got Culver to sit down. But then he had his office, the Oasis as you recall, the Oasis and it was up on the fourth floor—Joe Andrews, who was a lobbyist for the Georgia Industrial Small Lawn folks, he was up there and he was a bartender. Every afternoon, I mean the press, members of the senate, Bobby Parham over in the House, Pete McDuffie from DNR and everybody just gathered in Culver's office and had a cocktail in the afternoon about five o'clock. And it was just nothing never—nothing thought about it. Sometimes we'd get so many in there, if it was late in the session, we wouldn't have a quorum on the floor; and Zell would call up there, raising cane, wanting us to get out of the bar and come back on the floor of the senate. He was really something else, but he had a real soft spot for those that didn't have a voice in government. I remember going through the hospitals with him at Central State; he was so involved, even a lot of the patients knew him. If anybody had a problem down there, they just went to Culver.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute, Wayne, about that race in 1980 between Miller and Senator Talmadge. What do you remember about that?

GARNER: Well, a funny story about that because, like I told you, when I got elected to the senate—like I said, never been to the capitol—and that race was during the winter and I got sick, I got pneumonia, I just out working so hard. Finally, when the race was over, I was just exhausted. The only thing I'd ever in my life heard about the Talmadges were they were just gods. My daddy, Herman Talmadge and Jean Talmadge, they talked—my daddy liked politics and he talked about the Talmadge people and how wonderful they were and all. I just never met Herman Talmadge, never heard from him, so this sort of sets that up. Finally, election night about two o'clock, everybody finally left the house—I got in bed and went to sleep. And my phone rung about 5:30 in the morning and I picked it up and it's his voice, said, "Senator, Garner? Herman Talmadge here. I want to congratulate you on a fine victory." And I said, "Right," and I just hung up. I thought one of my friends was playing a joke on me. Well the phone rung back and it was this lady. She said, "You really, you just did hang up on Senator Herman Talmadge. He'd like to talk to you." And I got on the phone and I said, "Well, Senator, I'm so sorry. I had no idea you'd call me, gosh." And he said, "Well, congratulations." Said, "You've done a good job." Said, "I want you to get busy and help me beat Zell." Said,

“He’s giving me hell all over the state.” And I said, “Well, alright.” I didn’t know what to say so I hung up. But I remember that race; I remember watching the debates when Zell would propose some program at lunch and then at the debate the next meeting, Talmadge would have this big poster—you remember that?

SHORT: Yeah.

GARNER: —as to how much it was going to cost but that was a rough and tumble.

SHORT: It was.

GARNER: It was tumble race and I think in the end maybe justly run, justly—Governor Miller got credited probably for wounding Herman so bad that Mack Mattingly was able to beat him. But I know when Mack Mattingly beat Herman Talmadge; I had to go put my daddy in the hospital in Villa Rica, he was physically sick that Herman had been defeated. It was just a tough race but I know later on that they made amends.

SHORT: So you got elected to the senate, come over here to the capitol. Walk us through your first day.

GARNER: Well, the first day—I remember—because I got elected on April’s Fools Day in 1980. Dot Padgett said, “When you get over there on your first day, there’s been another young man down in south Georgia by the name of Paul Trulock that’s been elected to the senate.” She said, “You look him up, I think y’all be great friends, comrades.” So that was the first day I got over here and went over to introduce myself to Paul, that’s been thirty years ago and we to this day talk two or three times a week. We have our mountain cabins are within a mile of each other; we’ve been all over the world together with our wives.

I guess that first day is where I met Trulock and began to meet some other members of the senate. Sat there and I still kind of scratching head as how did I get from 992 Carr Street to the senate; then shortly after that, I realized that everybody there was about the same, everybody had all their different stories. Then I made friends with Paul, and then Roy Barnes and I had been friends even prior to that; his neighbor Jerry Landers helped me. Roy, I used to call him for advice; one of the big issues back then was the ratification of the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment. My opponent was for that and I didn’t even know what it was, and I asked Roy, “What’s this ERA stuff?” So he kind of told me, he said—I said, “Well my opponent’s for it, I guess maybe I ought to be against it.” I said, “If you’ve got any good reasons why I could be against it.” So Roy, he didn’t care what side I was, he gave me a list of things that was—and that ended up sort of being the conservative, right philosophy. So I met Roy and Peter—

SHORT: The Gang of Five.

GARNER: Gang of Five. And that was Trulock, and then that was in the later years, it was Ed Hine—Ed Hine, Pierre Howard, Roy Barnes, myself and Trulock. The press dubbed us the gang of five; we were the young Turks. And we spent an entire summer crafting legislation, sort of populist like campaign finance disclosure, just on and on and on, and we had stack of it. And we introduced it on the first day of that session, and it was promptly all defeated and killed in

committee. Interestingly enough, all of them—everything we proposed became law within six or seven years just under different names.

As you begin to look at what you do with leftover campaign funds—that was one of the proposals from the Gang of Five and we said you either give it back or you give it to a charity; you can't declare it income because you remember back those days you could. I remember congressmen, when they changed that law, a lot of them didn't run that year because they had half a million dollars in the campaign account that they could declare as income. And that was one of the things; other thing was like retirement bills. We had a piece of legislation that says—this wasn't law then, but it's law now—that a retirement bill can't pass in one year. You got to introduce it one year and pass it the second because, as you recall, those retirement bills that come out of committee and on the last night of the session, they really could get some strange amendments put to them. So that's now law; that was something the Gang of five proposed. Campaign finance disclosures now law; that was something the Gang of Five proposed and several other things.

SHORT: You know the rumor at the time was that the Gang of Five ran into Hugh Gillis.

GARNER: We ran into Hugh Gillis and Hugh—and I think Zell dispatched Hugh to kill all that because Hugh was quoted in the paper, said, "It's been taken care of."

SHORT: Tell us about Senator Gillis.

GARNER: He was quite a character, I really got to know, and respect, and like Hugh. He sat in front of Culver and myself and we would all huddle. There were generational differences because I was twenty-eight and Hugh had been up here longer than I had been living, but we got along well; liked him. If you sit next to somebody or in the same room for somebody for forty days, you really get to know that person. I sat next to Render Hill before they made me go sit next to Culver and we just became wonderful friends. Through that experience, I think back on the—I don't guess there's a county that I don't know somebody. And I get calls living in Carrollton, living across the street from the University of West Georgia, a lot of children around the state and lot of people call and say, "Wayne"—just like last year I got a call early one morning from Trip Martin. His son was in a fraternity out there and they had—one of the fraternity brothers had gotten killed in an automobile accident that night. And he woke me up and said, "Will you go out there and be with him?" So I called our preacher—it's just that kind of relationship all over this state that you enjoy having just served with those folks. I sat next to Judge Quillian Baldwin and—one thing I tell my son who's started his own governmental affairs, he's worked with Zell in Washington for the whole time he was there, he said, "Well, Dad, do you got any pointers?" I said, "the only pointer I can give you is you treat everybody fair and be respectful because you never know—number one it's the right thing to do—but you never know where they'll wind up." And he learned that lesson last year. We had a piece of legislation we were working on and David Ralston was coming to carry it for us. We had to walk forty miles over here to find David after he had then defeated the Speaker. And two weeks later, he was Speaker of the House.

SHORT: You never know.

GARNER: You never know.

SHORT: That's right. Do you remember the first bill you introduced?

GARNER: I'm trying to recall. I think the first thing I introduced was a resolution honoring and commending Senator Duncan and had his family up and all that sort of stuff. I remember the first—I don't think I introduced a bill the first year—I did the second year; I introduced the first bill and it dealt with a criminal issue. We had a young girl that was killed in Carrollton by another teenager and the law prevented his name being in the paper because you couldn't print the name of juvenile offenders, but it didn't apply to victims. So her name was in the paper, it was not best set of circumstances, and it really hurt the family. So I put a bill in there that if you are going to exclude the criminal you should not be able to identify the victim. I passed it in the senate and it got over into the House Judiciary Committee. And I had to go before the House Judiciary Committee. And one infamous Representative, Mr. Denmark Groover from Macon, got my bill and looked at it. And he said, "Young man, you'd to be commended." Said, "It would take a genius to get a bill this unconstitutional half-way through a legislature." Said, "But it stops here." So I just—okay, I tried. But then Denny and I from that got to be—I got to meet him, and know and love him, and learn of all his goings on—

SHORT: Grooverising.

GARNER: Grooverising, yes. He could read a bill and just tell you everything was in it in just a second.

SHORT: Senator, you served with three Georgia governors if I'm not mistaken.

GARNER: Governor Busbee.

SHORT: Joe Frank Harris.

GARNER: Joe Frank.

SHORT: And Governor Miller.

GARNER: And Governor Barnes.

SHORT: And Governor Barnes. So that's four.

GARNER: Four. Yeah, I stayed—because I had planned to leave when Senator Miller left because of the job he had me in you had to have a strong support system. And I'd go to war with Zell, but after I was ready to leave. And I told Governor Barnes, I said, "I'm going to cut out of here," and he said, "Well, how about staying through the session." So I did and then left after that.

SHORT: Tell us about George Busbee.

GARNER: I think the most embarrassed I've ever been, but it tells you what kind of guy George Busbee, was—my son who is now thirty-two was—let's see he was born in '77—he was three when I got elected. And Tom Daniel invited us, I knew Tom and met him in another way, but he invited us to come over, and when we got sworn-in to come and meet with Governor Busbee. Well, that was, that's huge when you're twenty-eight years old and you're about to go meet the governor. Well, I had Griffin, and my wife, and we get to the door and knock on it, and Busbee open the door, and Griffin looked up at him and said, "Hello, Dummy," and took a flip—just did a flip right over in the office. Well, I nearly—I was mortified and my wife started—she nearly cried. And Busbee just howled and picked Griffin up and they played because he had grandchildren and they got to be buddies and so they—even when I'd bring Griffin over Busbee would want to see him, but he was—I really liked him.

He had a good way about it; somebody described him "a guy with an iron fist with a velvet glove on it." He could be tough. I remember Trulock—we were—had the budget before the senate, you know you never really fool with the budget, and they were trying to buy this parking lot over in front of the railroad depot. Paul and I thought that wasn't a good way to spend any money so we put in a floor amendment to take it out. People like Culver, who loved to get into any kind of fight, they joined with us; and Paul got up in the well and said he smelled a rat. That there's something wrong with it, we didn't need to be buying that parking lot. Well, we passed the amendment, unbelievable. Well, it wasn't about an hour; Governor Busbee called the two of us down there. And, I mean in no uncertain terms, he told us that was his project and that was his parking lot, and he didn't give a damn how we got it undone but we had better get it undone. And I don't know how we got it, we got the bill back up before—he scared us to death and we got that amendment put back in and that's how the depot parking lot got purchased.

And then another time—but one of the real interestingly things about Busbee is—Paul Brown, you remember the old Paul Brown? When Jimmy Carter got defeated and was coming home to Plains, the senate was going to take people down and on various planes. And Paul Brown was in charge of getting up everybody to go down there. And, well, he ran out—he told me I could go, then somebody senior to me wanted to go and he just came, said, "You're off the list. You can't go; you haven't been here long enough. Somebody else is going." Well, it made me mad and I called Tom Daniel; and I said, "You know how I might get down to Plains and see the President come home? You all got a plane going, or a bus, or something?" He said, "Sure." He said, "Governor Busbee is flying down there with him." And he said, "We're sending a plane to pick Governor up," said, "You just ride down there with him and you can ride back with the Governor." So I went down on the Governor's plane and rode in with a trooper. It was raining after that was over and I was standing by Paul Brown. He said, "How'd you get down here?" I said, "I rode on the Governor's plane." And then this trooper pulled up and got me, left Paul in the rain, and Governor Busbee flew back. The weather was bad, and I remember Mrs. Mary Beth, she said, "George, I don't like this. I don't like this." But he had a state pilot up there and we got back. But just a neat guy.

I came up with this idea one time when he was governor to have the inmates refurbish school buses. And they're having a program in Texas, so I went out there and looked at that program. And they'd take a school bus at the end of its lifespan, send it to this prison garage, and for about \$12,000 make it brand new instead of buying another \$50,000. So anyway, I started working on that. And I got a message that Governor Busbee wanted to see me. So I go down there because I politically naïve and I walked in. He says, "How's your school bus project coming along?" I went to tell him all about it and he said, "Well, we're not going to do that." I said, "We're not?"

I said, "It sure does make a lot of sense." He said, "No, we're not going to do that." Said, "You probably don't know. You ever heard of the Luces?" I said, "Yes, sir, I think I have." He said, "Well, they make school buses down in south Georgia and said they don't like this." And he said, "They've been good supporters of mine." I said, "Okay." So that ended the school bus refurbishing. But always just a gentleman.

SHORT: Very progressive governor.

GARNER: Very progressive governor. Smart; he knew the budget. Just a delight to be around. I remember the great nights at the mansion; he and the Speaker would get up and sing and it was—it wasn't so mean spirited back then. And it was very impressionable for somebody twenty-eight, twenty-nine years old to be in those circles.

SHORT: Joe Frank Harris.

GARNER: Great, wonderful man. Like I told you, way before I ever thought about being in politics I got to know Joe Frank Harris. And stayed up with him. And when he ran for governor, went all over the state for him, working; we had fly-arounds for him. Then when he got elected, just did a lot of great stuff and we were good friends. And I got mad at him because I thought I should have been his assistant floor leader and he named Nathan Dean the floor leader and—we'll get back to a story about that in a minute. Worked well with him, I think he was very quiet, laid back, just strong, great guy. A lot of people say his administration might have been a little boring; he did not have a lot of fanfare about it. One of my great Joe Frank stories is Carlton Colwell—you remember Carlton?

SHORT: See him every day.

GARNER: Well, you can ask him about this. When Joe Frank was running, Tom Perdue sent me down to the Parole—I believe it was the Probation Convention, I believe, at Jekyll Island, to be on a panel with the gubernatorial candidates. And it was Bo Ginn, and I'm trying to remember who all was in it, Norman Underwood; and they really wanted to nail Norman Underwood, they'd mad at him about something. So we get down there, and there's an act in Georgia called the Police Indemnification Act and that's if a police officer gets killed in the line of duty, the state at that time gave them \$50,000. The probation officers and the parole officers were excluded from that. So I told Carlton, "We'll tear old Norman Underwood up." I said, "We'll just say Joe Frank's late, we'll just make a little promise that we'll bring them under that act." So they all made the speech and I got up to represent Joe Frank and I said, "I'm glad to let you know that Representative Harris said one of the main things he's going to do if he gets elected is he's going to bring the probation officers under the Police Indemnification." Oh, they just went wild and applauded and Norman got mad and said I didn't have the authority to promise that—to make a long story short, Joe Frank got elected.

And Carlton Colwell, and myself, and Governor Harris, he asked us to fly with him down to Savannah to some meeting. We thought we were just being rewarded so we get on the plane. And Carlton had a newspaper, he was just kind of looking at it, and Joe Frank looked at me and said, "I want to know about this Police indemnification Act and how the probation officers, their association, has come to me and said that I'd promise that if I was elected I'd do that." He said,

“Can you tell me how that came about?” Well, Carlton just took that paper, put it up; I said, “Well Governor,” I said, “Perdue sent me down there to represent you at that convention and I thought we had to come up with something, some real good deal for them to support you. And I asked Carlton, I said, ‘Carlton, we need to promise these people something,’ and Carlton said, ‘Promise them anything. He’s going to get the hell beat out of him anyway.’” So Carlton threw the paper down on the plane. He said, “Now, Governor! Now, Governor! Now, Governor! You know I never told him any such a thing!” Joe Frank just died laughing. He said, “Well, the reason I got you guys on this plane,” said, “have y’all promised anything else that I need to know about it?” But he had a good sense of humor. That was my best remembrance of Joe Frank.

SHORT: Q.B.E.

GARNER: Quality Basic Education.

SHORT: That was his bacon.

GARNER: And I guess still portions of it is in effect, but then Roy Barnes was his floor leader. For some reason, one of the interesting behind the scenes things about that is Joe Frank wanted that bill to pass unanimous in both houses. And we worked hard and we had fifty-five votes in the senate; the hold, out of all things, was Hodge Timmons from Blakely, Jimmie Hodge, who was an educator by profession. As usual, when you reform an education, most of the time the teachers are—some in educational groups are against it and there was some against some portions of that. And I kept telling Roy, I said, “Hodge not going to vote for it.” And he said, “Well,” so. Finally, I think Roy went down to see Joe Frank. Said, “Hodge is not going to vote for it.” Joe Frank—and this is way out of character for him—he said, “Send him down here to see me.” So Hodge goes in, and he says everything twice, says, “Governor, Governor, Governor. How you doing? How you doing?” He says, “Hodge I’m fine. Sit down.” Says, “I hear you’re not going to vote for Q.B.E.” “Well, Governor, Governor, Governor,” says, “you’re right. I’m not; I just can’t get that in my crawl.” And Joe Frank says, “Well, Hodge I’m going to tell you something. If you vote against that bill, I’m going to line item veto every dime in your district. Not only this year, but every year I’m here. You will not get another penny. Do we understand each other?” Hodge flew out of that office, and came back up and sat down, and I said, “Well Hodge, what you going to do on Q.B.E.?” He said, “When that thing comes up, my hand’s going to be like weeds behind the outhouse.” Said, “I’m for every bit of it.” Said, “I didn’t understand it until I had it explained to me a while ago.” So we called the vote and the bill passed fifty-six to nothing and that’s how—that was one of the few times that Joe Frank really ever strong armed anybody but he got Hodge’s attention. From then on, we laughed about it from time to time you’d get a bill explained to you.

SHORT: Zell Miller.

GARNER: Zell Miller. My mentor, if I’ve got one that would be him. And he is; he’s been a great, dear friend to me for a long, long time. When he was lieutenant governor, we’d just get in fights, not he and I, but if he wanted to do something, we didn’t mind taking him on. We’d mix it. Now everything so—you can’t amend this bill if it’s got this on it and all that, but it was just free for all back in those days. So we didn’t always give him everything he wanted but he

enjoyed a good fight. When he first ran for governor, I supported Roy Barnes against him because Roy and I were just great friends. Well, Zell just beat the stew out of us. And I called him the next day, I called him, I said, "Well, I've sinned and come up short." He said, "Well, you can be redeemed for \$3,000" or whatever it was. So we took him with some campaign money and helped him. And then that was the year Peter got elected and I ran for Majority Leader. And got elected Majority Leader, but since I didn't support Zell, I didn't go to all the festivities. Once he got sworn-in, was in office, I made an appointment to go down there and see him. And it was an icy reception and I said, "Well, I've come down here to tell you something." I said, "I didn't do one single thing to help you become governor, in fact I tried to beat you, but you beat us. But what I'm down here to tell you is that I will do anything you need me to do to make you the best governor we've ever had." He just kind of coldly said, "Okay." I got up to leave and he said, "Wait a minute!" Turned around, he came over, shook my hand, and said, "You know, I cannot be governor and do like I used to do, and hold grudges, and be mad at folks." He said, "I appreciate you coming down here." And he said, "Now you've voted against my lottery." I said, "Well, I'll pass it for you, don't worry about it. We'll pass it." So everything that he wanted, and he and Pierre were close. All his fights were in the House, we took care of him in the senate. Whatever he needed and wanted passed, we passed the lottery and then we developed this friendship.

And then the flag—he called us all in, and going to change the flag, and I said, "Have you lost your mind?" And he said, "Well, are you going to help me?" I said, "Yeah, I'll help you." That thing just went off. You remember how bad it got. He got Pete Robinson and I—I was maybe president pro-tem at the time, Pete was Majority Leader so—for us to come up with a compromise on the flag bill. So Pete and I sat up all night one night trying to think of a compromise. We came up with this idea. Basically, it was a white flag and a black flag. We going to have the official state flag would be what Zell wanted and we would have a state commemorative flag, which was the existing flag, and you could fly either one of them; but if you came to the capitol to get a flag you would get this flag. And our logic was through attrition and over some span of time, the other flag would go away. But on state buildings and schools they said, "No, you have to fly the official state flag." So we took that down to him and he said, "Well, I like that; that might work."

So Pete and I floated that thing and it's really the first thing anybody out my way knew that I was for changing the flag; they were asking about it—. We floated that thing and in a few minutes, they sent a message from the governor's office. Said that the governor has dispatched a state patrol, Pete, to your home in Columbus and Wayne to your home in Carrollton. Said that there's threats that they going to burn them down. So I called my wife, I go into an anteroom, I called her and said, "Y'all alright?" She said, "We're fine, but can you tell me why the state troopers are in this house?" I said, "Feed them. Take care of them. Somebody wants to burn it down because I got tangled up in this damn flag."

Well, that went on for a while; we had protection for—the compromise got beat and we couldn't pass anything in the senate and then after that Zell dropped it. But shortly after that, I went to him and I said, "I'm about done. I've had about all this I want, I'm going to go do something else." And he said, "Well, instead of quitting," he said—this is like half-way through '93—was it '93?—so he was about to gear up to run against Miller. He said, "How about going over to parole board? I've got an opening over there and they saying I'm soft on crime, and this that, go over there and kind of beef that up a little bit. So that's what I did; that's how I left the senate. And then stayed there a couple of years.

SHORT: Appointed you Commissioner of Corrections. Let's talk about Corrections.

GARNER: All right. Let me back up just a minute. A little known secret of how I got to be Commissioner of Corrections and this has never been told publically. But I had a little farm down in Heard County, and I was down there one afternoon, and got a call that the governor wanted to see me the next day, which would have been like a Thursday. So I go up to his office and walked in. He said, "Garner, you want to be Secretary of State?" That's when Max Cleland had resigned to run. I said, "Well, I never really thought about that." He said, "They are several who want it," said, "I don't owe them anything." Said, "But you've been loyal to me and worked hard." Said, "If you want it, you can have it." Probably biggest mistake I ever made in my life because I didn't think it was enough action for me. And I said, "I don't know. Let me think about it over the weekend," instead of a fool and just saying, "Absolutely, I want to be secretary of state." He said, "Well, you let me know. And if you want it, you can have it." So I go home and told Jerri—this is about Thursday, Friday—and we kind of made up our mind; on Monday, I'd go back tell him. Sunday morning, the phone rung at the house, and it was Governor Miller. He said, "Forget Secretary of State, you got to go to Corrections." Said, "Allen Ault called me yesterday and resigned." So that's how I got to Corrections.

SHORT: But you had been chairman of that committee in the senate for a long time.

GARNER: Long time. Had been chairman of that committee a long time, and I was on the parole board at that time, had been there about three years. Allen and Zell just didn't get along. Allen, doesn't where he's right or wrong, but he had a very liberal philosophy on how you run prisons and how you—to Zell he did. He insisted that inmates be called clients and not inmates, and that was rubbing raw on Miller. So finally, Allen decided he needed to leave. So I told him on Sunday, "Absolutely, if that's what you want me to do, I'll do it." He said, "Well, come over here in the morning, let's talk about it." So we talked about, he told me what he wanted to do. Because, if you recall, the year prior to that we had two riots in two prisons in the state, millions of dollars' worth of damages, injuries; just horrible, kind of messed up. He said, "We're going to straighten this out." Said, "We going to make a prison a prison." I said, "Okay, that's what we're going to do, that's what we'll do."

So I got sworn-in and then on Pearl Harbor Day—I don't know why all my appointments hit on crazy days; I was elected on April's Fools Day and sent to Corrections on Pearl Harbor Day, December the 7th, 1995. And I began to put my team together. Paul Melvin, who is still in state government, was the deputy commissioner. Gerry Thomas, A.G. Thomas, who had been a lifelong time career employee with Corrections was warden at Jackson, we brought him in over facilities. We put together a great legal team headed by Christopher Hamilton, who had been legal at Parole, and just put a good group together. My first day on the job, I got a call early in the morning said, "Commissioner, you need to go to Lee Arrendale. There's been an inmate killed up there; 17 year old boy." So we all go up there, begin to try to figure out what happened; he'd been shanked. And I got there, they hadn't moved him, he was still lying in a pool of blood where he died, and I told—I said, "This is the last one on my watch. This not going to happen. It's going to be rough getting to be where we need to be, but this crap's going to stop." So I look at Jerry and I said, "Jerry, I don't need any of this." I said, "How do you stop this?" He said, "Well, you have to go through every prison with your tactical teams, search

every cell, get all the contraband out.” He said, “That hadn’t been done in years.” He said, “You will be amazed what we’re going to find.” I said, “Well, let’s start today.”

So we brought the tactile team in and shook down Lee Arrendale; we hauled out knives, tattoo machines, hooch-making apparatus, and cleaned all that up. Limited it to what they could have. And Allen had stratified the prisons differently. He and a lot of people believed that if you’ve got a group of good inmates, basically behaved, you can put a few bad ones in there and they’ll modify their behavior to good. Well it doesn’t work that way. The bad modified the good behavior to bad. So we restratified all the prisons; took all the meanest of the mean and put them into several intuitions, and those that wanted to finish their sentence, mind their own business, we did that.

Then we begin systematically going through all the—caught hell about it. Got sued everyday by the Southern Center for Human Rights. But we went through all the prison facilities, cleaned them all out. When we’d find a lot of stuff at a prison, we’d fire that warden and put another warden in, and said this is how this is going to be run. It’s not rocket science. You dealing with forty thousand people that read at a fifth grade level and about seventy-five percent of them are mean. So that’s what we begin to do and, as a result, for the five years that we was there, my first day was the only day that an inmate was killed. And we caught uncharted hell about the haze shake down, but it finally got settled. But through those five years, at the end of my tenure, pretty much at the end of my tenure, I ordered a forensic audit from PEAT Marwick. They came in and audited the prison, up and down, compared it around the country, and interviewed Judge Tony Alaimo—he and I got to be great friends during all that—and he said we had modeled and developed one of the best prison systems in the country. Now, Cynthia Tucker didn’t think that at the AJC, but that’s what we did.

SHORT: I read that, looked at that audit, and it said, and I’m quoting here, “that you built a prison system without peer in the Southeast.”

GARNER: Well, I think we did.

SHORT: And that’s something to be proud of because Georgia has been known over the years nationally as a chain gang state.

GARNER: Right. We didn’t support chain gang. One of the thing we caught real grief on, Bob, is that we fired all the prison teachers. If you think about that, you think how stupid. Well, I talked to Governor Miller about it. I said, “You know, we’re teaching”—we had, I think, I’m trying to remember how many we had, maybe like a 150, something like that prison teachers—averaging salary was about \$50,000 a year. And prisons are designed to move very slow; you get up, you got to open this door to get here, that door to get there, then you eat, then this door to get back. So they were only teaching about three hours a day, not any fault of theirs. So we decided we were going to start, number one, teaching the GED. We issued more GEDs in that five years than in history of the prison system and we stopped teaching so much vocational technical. We were of the opinion that if you can get these guys a GED, it’s almost like a mini-liberal arts degree, then when they get out, they can decide what they want to do. So we started tele teaching; we’d find the best person in the world to teach GE, and we’d put 30 inmates in a room, one correctional office and pipe it in. And we started having these graduations, and they started getting their GEDs, and then they went on to do other things so that was important. And

the stratification was important; people thought we were being mean spirited going around beating hell out of these inmates, that wasn't the case at all. If you look through that PEAT Marwick audit—and another thing, they didn't know that we had opened channels of communication with Judge Alaimo. We ran everything by him because he was not only—his heart in the right place; he gave us good advice. So we weren't just willy-nilly going around the state; we talked to him. And he began to look at the incidents of inmate on inmate assault were just at rock bottom, inmate on staff assaults were at rock bottom because we had those mean guys off dealing with them and the other folks that wanted to get a GED and try and do better could do it. But the notion of entering these prisons in the middle of the night, shaking them down, I guess had a lot of editorial romanticism so they wrote about it. But Judge Alaimo was a huge help to us. So we went five years without an inmate death. Plus, in '95 when I went there our budget was \$600 million, when I left in 2000, our budget was \$600 million. We never increased the budget in five years.

SHORT: They could use you over there now.

GARNER: Yeah, we could figure something out.

SHORT: When we were talking about Governors we didn't get quite get around to Roy Barnes. Let's talk about him for a minute.

GARNER: Roy Barnes, I tell about him, he could call me right now and convince me to jump out that window, just headfirst. We have just been best friends a long time. He's brilliant and he just tried to do too much, I think, that first term. And I told him about that, I said, "Don't fool with reapportionment. The courts are going to draw that. Don't fool with the flag, do that in your second term if you feel like you just have to." He just created a perfect storm to get beat, and, I think, the perfect storm may be created for him to come back. We'll see; we will know in a few months. With Busbee, and Harris, and Miller, there was a generational difference. Roy and I more of the same generation and there's not that—when Zell Miller told me to do something I did it, Roy tell me to do something I might argue with him for a little bit about it. Just one of my best friends I made during the senate. I remember when my son had his head injury when he was ten, Roy and Marie stayed with us at Egleston all night long. We lost our child in December; they were first ones at the house. You don't back up on people like that. Just good folks.

SHORT: Speaking of Zell Miller, the constant feuding between him when he was lieutenant governor and Tom Murphy, two powerful men, is legendary. What do you think about that? Was that good or bad for the state?

GARNER: I think it was good for the state. I think it was good for the state. Those are two different guys but they just like to fight. They didn't really give a dang gun what the topic was because somebody asked me one time about—Murphy and Miller was in a big fight and it was in Governor Miller's second term. They said, "Why don't you talk to Zell? Get him to just relax and have some fun." And I said, "He is having fun." I said, "That's what those two old war horses do." I know Terry Coleman and I was on a conference committee and the Senate and House Budget Conference Committees, they would get all lock down on something; Miller and

Murphy, and they'd all get to fighting. Peter would be on one end of it—Terry and I, we'd get into those conference committees and be sniping at each other. Finally, we stopped the meeting and went outside, and I said, "We don't need to do this. We can't settle a thing." And I said, "You know generals don't get killed in war, lieutenants do." So I said, "Let's just shut up 'til they decide what they want to do."

And in the end, they would come around. Because I know when we fired those prison teachers, Mr. Murphy had a fit because all of them enjoyed some constituency in the legislator with—and he called me, I remember, and he was with the Green Door Committee and he said, "I'm about to put—" I don't know—" \$25 million back in your budget to hire those prisons teachers." I said, "Don't put it in. I'm not going to hire them back." I said, "You've got the wrong number." I said, "You need to call the man on the second floor." I said, "Because I'm not." Because when we took them out, the governor made it clear to me, said, "You better not cut a deal and put them back in, or I'll have your hide." I said, "You're talking to the wrong one." He said, "You mean, you're telling the Green Door Committee you're not going—you won't spend that money?" I said, "No, sir. Not going to spend it." I said, "You've got the wrong number." I said, "You need to call the governor."

Finally, they settled it, but I think it was good for the state. That's one of the things I look at now; how debate is limited in the legislature now and the rules that comes out of Rules Committee is structured or non-amendable or—that's not good. That's why to me, you've got 180 house members and 56 senators. You've put a bill out there; it's going to be a law of the land. You debate it, you argue about it, and at the end, you'll have a good product. Pierre Howard used to say that and I didn't agree with him a lot of time, benevolent dictator kind of leadership is what I like, but Peter always said, "If you put enough people at the table and be patient long enough you'll come out with a good solution." And I think that's why that was good. The Murphy and Miller form of government; you just hashed it out, you fought about it, you thought about it. And let's face it; politics is not for the faint of heart, it's a pugilistic job. That's why you do it; you like to fight and you like to argue but not be personal about it. A great example is Skin Edge. When I was Majority Leader, he was Minority Leader and we fought all week. But on many weekends, his wife and my wife and the two of us would go off to our mountain cabin and spend the weekend, and have dinner, sit there and read, and not bother each other and come back Monday and go back. We had a great respect and a friendship; we just saw things differently but there was no need to be hateful or mean spirited about it. My dad died in 1992, Skin Edge was one of the first ones at the funeral home. Just had that kind of relationship; I think we got a lot done. But I do think I like the old way of just battling it out every day. And Miller had a knack, Bob. He had liked this teacher thing. He'd come up with something before every session and throw it out there, and it was like a rabbit at a dog track. They'd just chase that thing, and raise hell, and fuse and fight; and it wasn't really anything he was interested in but they'd finally wear out about halfway through the session. And in the meantime, while they were chasing the rabbits—the teachers, whatever—he'd got all the stuff he wanted to do done. It was just, every year it was another—I remember this speech at the Eggs and Issues breakfast when he got up, just took the hide off Murphy, and called the House Murphy's Mausoleum. You remember that.

SHORT: I remember that.

GARNER: He said, "All my bills are entombed over there." Made Thomason mad, he didn't

talk for two weeks, but he got a lot of stuff done.

SHORT: You announced for lieutenant governor in 1990.

GARNER: That's right.

SHORT: Then changed your mind.

GARNER: Well, didn't change my mind. Announced in 1990, and begin campaigning all across the state, we doing good and raising money. And it was at that time that my son wrecked his go-kart on a Sunday afternoon and had a compressed skull fracture and a very serious head injury. He kind of got over that, and then went into a post-traumatic stress situation and we had to take care of him. He had to have counseling twice weekly for about a year and a half. So that's when we folded the tent and got out of the lieutenant governor's race and dealt with that. Then I supported Pierre when I got out of it, indicating my support for him, and as you know—I guess he and Joe—did he and Joe Kennedy get in a run-off?

SHORT: Yeah.

GARNER: That's right. And he didn't win it on the first ballot, got in a run-off with him, and he ultimately got elected.

SHORT: Let's talk for a minute about party politics. It seems at least to me that nowadays to be a Democrat is to be a liberal, and to be Republican is to be a conservative. That has not always been that way.

GARNER: No, it has not and I don't know how it got to that point. I guess maybe Washington, the national politics, has probably driven that agenda more than anything because I know people—my friends, who are a few mis-conservatives, say, "I can't believe you were a Democrat at one time." I said, "We were conservative." I said, "I was a Democrat and the Democrats controlled the state senate but let me give you an example. The Democrats in that body passed a bill one time to put the electric chair in a van and haul it county to county to electrocute people." I said, "Now how liberal is that?"

So I think that's what Miller found when he got to Washington; that a Georgia Democrat has no place in the national party. But that hasn't always been the case. But I think it's been, to me, it's just been driven in the ground that I think the public is tired of that; they don't care whether you're Democrat or Republican. They want this fighting and bickering to stop. I think they ought to change the law over there that if you want to run as an Independent just qualify as an Independent, and get away from all this party stuff because to me there's not a dime worth a difference in either party.

When the Republicans, and let's just face it, under Governor Perdue when they took the house and senate, not one single thing changed. It was spend, and spend, and campaign, raise money, and have these extravagant fundraisers, and it was all the same. And the Democrats did the same thing and it's gotten all about money. I think that's why people would never—somebody asked me, said, "Why don't you run for congress?" I said, "Hell, I'm afraid I might win." You spend your entire career up there raising money. The average congressman, I guess, has to raise

\$100,000 a month to be competitive. And even now, state senate seats are \$250,000; that's crazy. I wish we could get away from all the parties—suit me not to have any parties run. However you want to run, whoever gets the most votes win. I don't know, you got have I guess some structure to it, but I do think a lot of people would run. Interesting piece in the paper the other day about how difficult it is in Georgia to run as an Independent and how many signatures you have to get.

SHORT: It's almost impossible.

GARNER: It's almost impossible. And it should be just a matter of qualifying if you want to run as an Independent. Because I would—in this next governor's race, I think if you had a strong Independent candidate that said I don't give a—doesn't make any difference; we're going to do what's right for Georgia, and it's not going to be Democrat or Republican. I think one of the things that made Senator Miller so immensely popular is when Governor Barnes appointed him, and he said, "I'm going to Washington to serve neither party. I'm going to serve the people of Georgia." I think that put in place for him to be so effective. And when he got up there it was a breath of fresh air that he didn't—I went with him, this is a great story. As you recall, the election really didn't get decided until November, and I flew with Senator Miller out to Austin when he met with the President—my son and I did, went up there. Came back and I said, "Well, what was the meeting about?" He said, "It was education." I said, "Well, you going to help him?" He said, "Yeah, I told him I would help him. I said I told him I was for his tax bill too." And I think Bush was so taken aback that he couldn't believe it, but those things needed to be done. And Miller was there just making those right down the middle road decisions without consulting party—I mean, he didn't line up with the Democrats all the time.

SHORT: Wayne, we could go on for hours, but I'd like to close by asking you these personal questions.

GARNER: All right.

SHORT: First of all, if you had your career to go over again, what would you do differently?

GARNER: If I had my career to go over again, I would remember that very moment Zell Miller's office when he said, "Do you want to be Secretary of State?" I would have said yes and not let him back out. I think that's the biggest mistake that I've ever made.

SHORT: What was your proudest moment in politics?

GARNER: Let me think about that just a little bit. I enjoyed all of it so much. I just can't put my finger on the proudest—

SHORT: Accomplishment.

GARNER: My proudest accomplishments.

SHORT: You don't think it would be your tenure as Commissioner of Corrections.

GARNER: I think that was the most fun I've ever had for a five-year span, but my wife didn't think it was very much fun. I think we did a lot of good. Perhaps on the Parole Board when you'd give somebody an opportunity to get out and do better and they did it; that made you feel good. I think just the whole culmination of all of it. In that span of time, going to Russia with the lieutenant governor, getting to go to Israel and meet all these great, wonderful people that are now friends—I think the whole thing would be the proudest moment, but I can't really reach back and put one thing. I do think the creation and the helping Governor Miller create the HOPE scholarship probably, if you had to put a crown on something it would be that. We actually did something that has sustained itself and done very well, and has educated thousands upon thousands upon thousands of kids that wouldn't have had a chance. So I guess if you're going to put anything on that, it would be helping him create the HOPE.

SHORT: Your biggest disappointment? You've already said it.

GARNER: Yeah.

SHORT: You didn't take the job.

GARNER: I should've took the job. I should've took Cleland's job. I remember, I told him, I said, "That has to be like being a clerk of court somewhere." But I didn't make it; I got it snatched back on Sunday.

SHORT: Finally, Wayne, how would you like to be remembered?

GARNER: I'd like to be remembered as someone who came up here and did their job, and made a difference, and treated everybody the same. We didn't let all that stuff go to our head and so haughty and high and mighty.

SHORT: Did we miss anything?

GARNER: Bob, I believe we've covered it all.

SHORT: There's nothing that we—

GARNER: I'm trying to—

SHORT: There's nothing about Wayne Garner we've left out?

GARNER: I can't think of a single thing other than turning the airplane off on the lieutenant governor when he wouldn't help me with something. He got elected and he promised me he'd help be Majority Leader. And Pete Robinson—not Pete Robinson, Don Johnson got in the race. Well, Pierre was kind of hard and sometimes he'd be difficult to make a decision, and this was right before we about to have these elections. He called wanting me to fly him—I did some flying back then and had a friend of mine had a good plane. So we'd pick Pierre up, Lewis Massey, and Shannon Mayfield; flew to Cairo. The senator down there, I can't think of his name

at the time, he got on the wrong side; he was for Joe Kennedy so he was trying to make up, had a barbeque for Pierre. So we flew down there; Pierre never mentioned the Majority Leader's race. So coming back, I told Lester, he flew down, and I said, "Let me fly back." I said, "Don't pay any attention when I pull the power back on this plane." We took off; it was in the black dark of night coming out of Cairo. We got up about eight or nine thousand feet, we had these headsets on, and Pierre was sitting back there. I just reached up and turned the engine off. It was just this quiet. Pierre started just screaming in the headset, "What's wrong? What's wrong? What's wrong? What's wrong?" I said, "Can you hear me?" He said, "Hell yes I can hear you. What's wrong with the engine?" I said, "It's not running and it's not going to run until you tell me how we going to work out this Majority Leader's race." He said, "Turn it on!" I said, "You've got 7,000 feet." And he said, "I'll work it out, I'll work it out. It's done, it's done." So we put the power back in and landed it at Peachtree- DeKalb and he called Terrell Starr at one in the morning, fired him off the Appropriations Committee; gave Don Johnson Appropriations Committee; and cleared the way for me to be Majority Leader.

SHORT: Well it's been great having you.

GARNER: Thank you, Bob. I'm flattered that you'd ask me to come over and do this. It's been fun reminiscing and talking about all this cast of characters that's come through that capitol over there, you included.

SHORT: Great memories.

GARNER: Great memories. Well, thank you.

SHORT: Thank you Wayne.