

**Harry Geisinger interviewed by Bob Short**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**  
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**Reflections on Georgia Politics**

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BOB SHORT: I'm Bob Short. This is Reflections on Georgia Politics, sponsored by Young Harris College and the Richard Russell Library at the University of Georgia. Our guest today is State Representative Harry Geisinger. Welcome, Harry.

HARRY GEISINGER: Thank you, Bob, for having me.

SHORT: With your permission, Harry, we would like to sort of divide our conversation into two or three parts. First of all your early life and then your interest in running for public office. And finally, that second career you started about what six or eight years ago when you ran for a second career in state government. So before we get to your political career, let's talk a little bit about your early life.

GEISINGER: Well, I was born in the Yankee. I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and spent my earlier years—we moved to Chicago in 1941, just before the war broke out, and so I lived up there all through my formative years and went to high school there and then went off to college. And after my first year of college, they were still drafting in those days as you recall, and I was concerned because some of my friends had been drafted into the army and the last thing I wanted to do was to go into the army even though I was in college. So I went ahead, having a deferment, which looking back on it now is sort of crazy, I went ahead and enlisted in the navy, and I spent my next four years in navigation and travelled the world. It turned out to be one of the best things I ever did because I had a 17,000-ton yacht, the U.S.S. Roanoke, and we showed the flag. So I made two trips to the Mediterranean of six months each. And then we were deployed over into—the Korean War broke out and was at the time just before I went in—so we were deployed to the Pacific. So I spent eight months over in the Pacific, and did get to Inchon where one of our Georgians became a famous individual, Howard Bo Callaway, who was I think at the time a young lieutenant or stormed the beaches of Inchon and set the beach head up, and you can go in history and read all about all that. But then came back and after the service I went back to college and finished up at first Lincoln College and then went on to the University of Cincinnati. And then came south because this is where the business was at the time or at least I was working with my father's consulting firm and we felt it was a good area to open up and Atlanta was the place to be. But what I found when I got down here was that the businesses at that time, which were basically the textile mills and most of the businesses, were family businesses and the owners were basically older. And the bottom line was is that they were either going to shut it down or the money from Texas was coming into Georgia and they came in and made total changes. So I didn't stay in that business forever. I finally got out of it and I had a wife and daughter to feed so I went into the radio business, and worked at WGST for a few years and then went on to WKLS. About the time that I went into politics, I was over at WKLS and at the same time, I started my own advertising agency. And... but.

SHORT: How did you get interested in politics?

GEISINGER: Well, I had a father that really was very strong conservative individual and I was sort of weaned on what FDR had done, and Harry Truman, and where we were as a nation. So I sort of gravitated—I came to Georgia as a Republican, I've always been a Republican. I think by comparison to some of the Republicans we have, I may be a little bit more moderate than they are but not that much. I'm not rabid about it because I know that for us to work as a party, legislatively, we've got to work with the Democrats whether they're conservative Democrats or liberal Democrats. And that's what I've done over the years

SHORT: Tell us about your first campaign.

GEISINGER: Interesting campaign. First, the way I got involved was is that I was a precinct leader out in Doraville; I built a house out there and got involved. And got involved in, if you remember, Roscoe Pickett running against Mr. Davis, I believe it was, a congressman at the time who represented Atlanta and DeKalb. James C. Davis?

SHORT: James C. Davis, Judge Davis.

GEISINGER: Judge Davis. And those were sort of funny times because Roscoe had enough money to go ahead and buy a half hour. And he would get on television—and of course everything was live—and he would get on television and I can vividly remember the day that he was there trying to explain to people where they lived, by that he wanted to make sure the people that lived in the fourth district knew they were in the fourth district. And had this big map and went through this big description of the fourth district. Needless to say, Judge Davis won. But when Judge Davis retired, Jimmy Mackay was the congressman, and that's when I got involved, in 19—this was after the Goldwater campaign, which was '64. In '66, Ben Blackburn chose to run against Jimmy Mackay. And Jimmy had a, he had a ACA rating, which was the rating—you had an ADA and ACA—he had an ACA rating, a conservative rating, of zero and a liberal rating of one hundred. And what's so interesting is because in those days I had been detailing doctors for five years. And in those days, what happened was the doctors were most upset because they were worried about socialized medicine. When you think about how far back all this goes and how much concern they had at the time about the government coming in and telling you how to run, and they said it was going to happen if we don't get the right people elected. So they got behind Ben Blackburn and I managed that campaign.

I quit my job with [indiscernible] Laboratories, which was a subsidiary of Union Carbide, and I managed his campaign. I'd never done it before. His only condition was that I managed it since he's going to run because he had said three times to the AJC, "No I'm not going to run." So I put together one day over lunch with him—in those days we used to eat downtown, everything was downtown—and I put together a scenario with him. I said, "Well, look, you're a man that could win Congress. Let me give you a scenario. How much money would you need in the bank for you to say 'yes, I'll run?'" And he said, "\$40,000." Well, this is for the United States Congress, today that—my first house district rate was \$52,000, but in those days \$40,000, you could run in a big district.

So I went back to the doctors that day and said, "Hey, you have a candidate. You just have to

raise \$40,000.” And that’s how I got started. But it was good; he had run for the state house and lost. And he turned out to be an excellent congressman; he’d stay there for I believe ten years and then left. That district over the years has changed greatly because in those days it really turned to be a Republican conservative district after the Goldwater years.

SHORT: Let’s talk about the Goldwater year for a minute. 1964, Senator Goldwater was defeated by President Johnson but that’s the year that Bo Callaway was elected to the Congress, the first one in what a 137 years. Don’t you think that was really the turning point in the growth of the Republican Party in Georgia?

GIESINGER: Well, I do because—yes, I think Barry Goldwater was a standard barrier for us. He did get Georgians to understand they could vote for Republican. You’ve got to remember Barry Goldwater only carried six states and Georgia was one of them. And he was an excellent candidate; he would have made a great president. And as you say, Howard Bo Callaway won that election, served if I recall just one term, and then came home to run for governor. And of course, we were all involved in this politics trying to make things happen and of course, one of the problems that we had, as you can appreciate, was that we would have a difficult time in most cases winning statewide even though Barry Goldwater had won in ’64. But Bo Callaway got the most votes.

SHORT: He did.

GIESINGER: And unfortunately, Ellis Arnall was a write in candidate and I want to say he had six thousand but I think I recently read it was thirty-six thousand votes. Is that right?

SHORT: Yes, somewhere in that vicinity. Enough to—

GIESINGER: Enough to keep Bo from having fifty percent plus one vote.

SHORT: Right.

GIESINGER: And that was the unfortunate part. What’s interesting, we’re talking about Elliott Levitas a minute ago, he was in the house at the time, and when the Georgia House made the decision as to who was going to be the next governor, Elliott voted for Howard Bo Callaway, and his explanation was "is my people, in my district, voted for Bo Callaway. I’m going to vote for Bo Callaway.” And I think if many of the members had done that, Bo probably would have been governor and things would have been much different for the Republicans, much earlier than they are today.

SHORT: Well, you took your seat and that was after the first reapportionment was it not?

GIESINGER: Yes, it was after the one man and one vote too.

SHORT: And so it did away with the county unit system.

GIESINGER: Right.

SHORT: Which totally really brought Georgia politics into a modern era.

GIESINGER: Yes.

SHORT: The one man, one vote. So you go to the legislature. What was your legislative agenda?

GIESINGER: Well, it's interesting when you look back on it because we talked about, many times, problems that people were having back home. And one of the things that we did as Republicans, because we ran as a group in DeKalb County, we would go and do coffees at people's homes and of course, all the candidates would be there. Well one of the things that we learned early on is that we were boring people to death; we couldn't get some of our candidates to talk for two minutes, they'd talk for twenty minutes. We wanted to get up and leave. So what we finally did is we started something that's still in existence today, which I think is interesting. We had at the time running Bob Gould, and Jim Tysinger, and Stan Collins, and George W. Smith and a few others, and we would go and have a Saturday morning breakfast. And we would sit and we would only allow each member to have one subject that they would talk about. And that way, what we did is we made it pleasant for the people who had to sit and listen. But it made pleasant for us because one, we weren't there—it's just amazing when you're passionate about something, you find yourself talking about it incessantly, and we had all these incessantly inspired candidates who wanted to talk about their subject. So what we did is we isolated all the subjects; some talked about transportation problems, some talked about sewage problems now. You say well sewage that's a local issue. It is but as we know with the water issue today in Georgia, without water the sewage doesn't go very far.

But they were very basic and if you recall, and I don't remember the first year that the MARTA issue came to the forefront but I think it was before that period, and the other issue that we had is they were trying to put a property tax on homeowners to pay for MARTA. And the Republicans in DeKalb County killed it. We were against it, not that we were against MARTA, we were against the funding method because what you were doing is having people fund it that weren't necessarily going to use it. So then, when we did that, we went ahead and moved to the sales tax when they came back with it two years later. But they did call all of us in that were against it and said, "You know, you keep talking about sales tax. Will you support it?" And we said, "Sure, you do it with the sales tax and we'll support it." So it did pass in DeKalb County when they brought it back and it passed in Fulton County, but it didn't pass in the other three counties. And of course, at that time, the reason it didn't pass in Cobb County was because of segregation. And if you recall, I think they created the city of Colonial Hills or something—one-foot city wide, along the Chattahoochee River that said you can't cross this with your MARTA system or something.

SHORT: That proved to be a detriment to MARTA didn't it.

GIESINGER: Well it proved to be a detriment to the whole region because no one had the foresight to see that we were going to be this big. I mean what have we got now, about five and half, six million people here in the metro area. So MARTA went forty-four miles and if you go back and look at the original legislation, that's what it called for, was forty-four miles. That's all

it's got today, forty-four miles.

And for us to grow, transportation is going to be critical, but we got to think outside the box. We've got to think bigger than we think we can think, and we've got to be realistic about how we're going to raise the funds to make it happen. But this recession that we're in is not going to end tomorrow. We got budgets coming up this year, this coming year, and we're going to have to find and cut out of the budget, another projected budget, another one to two billion dollars. Now, the Constitution of Georgia says very clearly that you must pass a balanced budget; you cannot run a deficit. That doesn't mean that we can't bond and we do bonding for projects but we cannot have a budget that is out of balance. So a lot of things have happened and they furloughed everybody in government, including the legislators. Now, it's interesting, the legislators they couldn't furlough. What they did was ask us to voluntarily say, "Yes, you can go ahead and we'd be willing to have you take that one day furlough a month out of our salary." Another thing when you think about salaries over the years, when I first was elected we were paid \$4,200. That was forty years ago. Today it's \$16,500 and how the young families make it is beyond me because this year we were in session four months. The procedures you know is forty days but you're only counting days that you're in session; you're not counting committee days, you're not counting weekends, you're just counting the forty days. And if you go back—you were talking about the one man, one vote in those early days—that changed a lot of things. But the Georgia House in those days was 205 members and in my first year, we reduced it after the reapportionment, we reduced it to 180 under George L. Smith, who to me was Mr. Speaker. And what's important about George L. was is that when Lester Maddox was elected governor—and you know because you were there in these days—when Lester Maddox was elected governor in the old days, prior to Lester, the governor selected who the Speaker was. There's no question as a matter of who's close to the governor. That wasn't what happened after...the members elected their own Speaker and George L. was the Speaker, and he was a great man because he didn't care about Democrats and Republicans. No, admittedly, we weren't a threat numerically, but that wasn't the point. He had these members that he—he put us to work. He had me running the intern program that is the college intern program, the second and third year of its existence. And that was just after I was elected whip—I take it back, the second year I'd been elected whip, which would have been my third year there. And I said, after the first year, I said, "Mr. Speaker," I said, "I can't do this, I'm the whip. I've got other things to do." Well, in retrospect that's sort of a joke because I only had two dozen people to whip into line. And I didn't need deputy whips, I did it all myself. It wasn't that difficult because it's not like today when we have 105 members and the whip has deputies and the deputy will check to see how the vote is going. Most people don't realize that many times a bill is not brought up simply because you've counted the noses and you know that even in your own caucus you don't have enough votes to get it passed. And it is critical whipping the vote to see in fact how many people do we have that believe in this and would be willing to vote for it. This is either before or after you've tried to convince them. But once you get it out of committee and on the floor, you don't want it to go down in flames, which they do from time to time.

**SHORT:** The Voters Rights Act has had an impact on politics in Georgia. How do you think that's affected the people?

**GIESINGER:** Well, if you recall because you were there at that time, we had—it's changed the structure today. In those days, we only had two ladies in the house. We had Mrs. Merritt, who

always wanted to change the flag, and I always said to Mrs. Merritt, “Well, how much is it going to cost the state?” I said, “You tell me how much it’s going to cost the state and I’ll sign it.” She could never get anybody to sign the bill. And we had Grace Hamilton. Grace was from Atlanta and she was a, the ladies’ lady; she was a wonderful lady. And from that time on, it changed. We ended up getting more and more female members and today I think we have thirty, thirty-five. The membership today is so different from what it was then. Today we have probably a dozen Hispanics. The Black Caucus is probably thirty-five or forty, fifty, and they are not all Democrats. People always say, “Well, if you’re black, you’re a Democrat.” No, that’s not true. African-Americans understand as well as anybody else that what is important is the end result so we have African-Americans on both sides of the aisle.

SHORT: How about the Urban Caucus?

GIESINGER: Great group. When we first came in is when it was formed, and it was formed by the Gerald Talmadge Hortons, the Sidney Marcuses, and the Red Athertons from Marietta. And it was Republican and Democrat because it was the city boys against the country boys. And we felt that we needed every vote we could get to help the metro area survive because as you know in those days, if you were—especially before the county unit system changed, the power was out there in the state, it wasn’t in here. In fact as I recall, we only were allowed—in Fulton County was only allowed three members with its population and even the smallest county in Georgia at the time with about three thousand people had one member, and he took all us little counties of one and two members. I think only DeKalb, and Fulton, and Chatham, and Macon—I forgot the county of Macon.

SHORT: Bibb.

GIESINGER: Bibb County. I think they all had more than one. It changed dramatically.

SHORT: After reapportionment, DeKalb went from three to fifteen.

GIESINGER: Yes.

SHORT: And the Republican Party, your party, won seven of those seats. That certainly was an indication of a growing strength of the Republican Party.

GIESINGER: Well not just the strength of the Republican Party but the strength of the population and where it was living. When you go from three to fourteen—

SHORT: Fifteen.

GIESINGER: Fifteen. When you go from three to fifteen, that’s a gigantic jump, that’s fivefold.

SHORT: Twelve votes.

GIESINGER: That’s right. It made a big difference and from that point on things began to move in the right direction. And of course, George L. was guiding—the Speaker George L.

Smith—was guiding us through those years, and did a marvelous job, and unfortunately, he died in office.

SHORT: And was succeeded by Tom Murphy.

GIESINGER: By Tom Murphy who had—when George L. was first elected Speaker, Maddox Hale was the Speaker pro tem. Maddox died in office and the floor leader for the governor, for Lester Maddox, was Tom Murphy. Tom Murphy became Speaker pro tem. When George L. died, then Tom Murphy moved up to Speaker and was there for thirty-three, thirty-two years, whatever.

SHORT: Long time,

GIESINGER: Long time. The longest serving Speaker in the United States.

SHORT: You served with George Busbee.

GIESINGER: Yes, I did.

SHORT: It's often been said that George Busbee turned down an opportunity to be Speaker to run for governor. Is that true?

GIESINGER: Well, you got to remember George was on the other side of the aisle. I don't know whether that's true or not. But what's interesting—and I've got some funny stories about George—as you know that year, I left the house in '74, and I ran for governor as a Republican. In fact, there were five of us in the Republican primary and needless to say, no I wasn't the nominee. But George and I were the only two—and there were eleven Democrats running that year—George and I were the only two that were currently in the house when we chose to run for governor. And in that race on his side of the aisle was Burt Lance, and Lester Maddox, and Harry Jackson from Columbus.

SHORT: Bobby Rowan.

GIESINGER: Bobby. Yes, how could I forget Bobby. Bless his heart, great guy. Bobby Rowan and others. But I think of all the people that ran that year, George Busbee was the most qualified. He really was; he was capable, he understood. But in the primary period, what they would do is set us up alphabetically, Republicans and Democrats, mix us all up at these debates. And I always had Harry Jackson sitting next to me and what I would do is—there was no way for me to attack George and there was no reason for me to attack George but I found a kindred soul in doing the attacking for me in Harry Jackson.

So what I would do sitting next to Harry is I would write notes with questions on them and say, “ask George,” and then fold it over, and slide it over to him. Well, he did that on two occasions and it would get him on the front page because I would have him ask a question that would just. And we were in Macon, on Law Day at Mercer University, and I did it again. And he pushed it back. And I said, “What are you doing?” And he says, “Oh, my staff tells me not to read your notes. You get me in trouble.” And I said, “No, I get you on the front page.” So the interesting



part is when I walked out, of course Busbee's all the way down at the end, he's b, and when I walked out, George was just in the back behind the stage just screaming at me, "What are you doing?" And I said, "George I'm not doing anything. I know what you're up to." But he was without a doubt the most qualified and I'm pleased that he did get elected because he did a wonderful job over those eight years.

And one of the problems that we tend to have, even more today than we did in those days, is it wasn't necessarily the most qualified today that gets elected. It's the one that can raise the money, get on television, and convince the people who are having other things to do whether it's playing golf, or taking the kids to soccer practice, or whatever. They can't take the time or don't have the time to focus on the issues and the candidates, and because they saw somebody on television or whatever, they vote for him and sometimes we don't always get the best. But the system still allows us to survive but we don't always end up with the most qualified.

SHORT: So you left the house, you didn't quite make it to the governor's office, what happened then?

GIESINGER: Well, I had a debt that—and you got to keep in mind in those days Republicans didn't have any money. I barely raised money during the campaign but I had borrowed money, and it took my nineteen years to pay that debt off. And it ended up as a second mortgage on my house, but I got it all paid off and took care of it. But if you remember, those were the Carter years and I was turning that debt every ninety days for a while. And that's when the interest rate went to twenty-two percent. And you go talk to a bank about—I need to borrow money on this debt or roll it, and I finally said this is crazy.

SHORT: Did you go back to your career in radio?

GIESINGER: Yes and no. What I did is I spent more time in the advertising of my ad agency, which I had developed while I was in the house, and at the same time, I opened two more businesses. I went into the coal brokerage business for five years and went all up through the coal lit regions and contracting for coal. And sold coal, which you had to bid, it wasn't—and sold coal. And then I also opened a consumer buying service up in Tennessee. And so I was keeping three businesses going at one time.

SHORT: Until 1980.

GIESINGER: Yes. Then in 1980, of course what happened is I had been involved in the Mattingly campaign. And Ronald Reagan was elected. And they asked me if I wanted to be Administrator of Southeastern Power, and I said, "Sure." So I did that for eight years and it was the—in fact, the cheapest power the TVA bought, they bought it from us—but it was the twenty-two hydro facilities east of the Mississippi. And it was an exciting time.

SHORT: Did that include Tennessee Valley Authority?

GIESINGER: No, but we supplied the TVA with power. Up there on the Cumberland River, there are eight projects that were part of the Southeastern Power administrations. In fact, recently there was a bad flood up there and a lot of that would have been worse had those dams

not been there, but it was horrendous. I happened to be up there on business at the time and couldn't believe—the Grand Ole Opry Hotel flooded out. I don't know whether you—have you been there with all the gardens and everything?

SHORT: Yes.

GIESINGER: Frightening. But nobody complained; those folks all pulled together and made things work.

SHORT: Let's talk about that 1980 senatorial election. Senator Talmadge was in the race and was eventually defeated, but there was a gangbusters Democratic primary between Talmadge, and Zell Miller, and Norman Underwood, and Dawson Mathis—Congressman Mathis—and others. What do you remember about all that?

GIESINGER: Well, of course, I was involved on the Mattingly side and by then, because we tend to make little niches of specialties in life, I had taken on ballot security. And the particular day of the election, one of our Republicans and I went to South Fulton to—and we covered about thirty-eight, forty precincts, and what we would do is we would go around and let them know who we were, that we were ballot security people. In fact, in the early hours, what we'd do is take some boxes of donuts with us and leave them with them, but they knew that we would be coming back. And then we would split it up in half and go our own way through the late morning and the rest until they closed the boxes that evening.

What was interesting about that is I had a school—and this was important because we were concerned about how the vote was going to go—and there was a school in South Fulton that we had been to and we always made a note of how many people had voted. And I went back there two and half-hours later, and walking through the school, there were no voters, nobody. In fact, I asked the principal, I said, "How's it been? How's the traffic been?" He says, "I don't think there's ever been anybody in here lately." And yet, when I checked the numbers, there were about 280 people that had voted while I was gone.

So what I found out later, yes, they had stolen them. What they were doing is having the employees that were working the precinct go—and they know who wasn't going to show up—and they would go and vote those people and fill out the forms and go through all of it. So nothing happened to those folks and when I found out later was that they had actually—were really concerned about a local race more than they were about the Mattingly race; they couldn't care less about the Mattingly race. They were fighting among themselves, but they were stealing—they stole about 280 votes. And we have caught them over the years doing that. They even did that during Paul Coverdell's race; they bused students from some of the local colleges downtown in and paid them to go in there and vote. They arrived about ten minutes before the poll was to close, and our poll watcher, who had left about an hour earlier, wasn't there. And when you look at the numbers—because Paul I think only got, in that election, he only got six or eight votes in that precinct, and then in the run-off he got four but his opponent got a tenth of what he'd gotten before. So because we had it covered—most people don't want to steal, most people don't. It's the politicals, the power brokers, who think that we can steal this election. It's extremely difficult today to do that but in those days, it wasn't that difficult.

SHORT: So you think our modern elections are secure.

GIESINGER: Well, yes and no. They're electronic, as we know. You can't steal like you could before, although you could probably let somebody vote that shouldn't if you don't keep the records correct. But one of my concerns—you remember the old vote-a-matics that we had for years?

SHORT: Mmhmm.

GIESINGER: Which was nothing more than a punch card.

SHORT: Yeah.

GEISINGER: My concern about the vote-a-matic was is that they would always—the operator would put—oh, first they would run a test program. And there would be somebody from the two parties there who knew about computers, or determining the elections, and they would run a test. And it would say “yes,” and then at the end they would run the test. They never—and I tried and tried for years to get them to stop the election in the middle and run the test again unannounced. And of course, nobody wanted to do that because the last thing they wanted was to slow down the process; it was slow enough as it was but they didn't want to slow it down anymore. And when you realize that the attendant to the machines and the ballots put a header card in there to identify the precinct on the printout, he could just as easily put a card in there that says you get every third of my votes, you get one of them, or fifth, or whatever you decide is the number. And we never proved that because no one would ever stop and do it. But the electronic is probably as secure. My concern is that if you're going to have a question in the electronic, we don't have a ballot, we don't have anything in paper to go back and actually look at. So the paper ballot, and some counties have used it over the years, is about the size of a bed sheet and you run it into this scanner but the ballot falls into the bottom. And all you have to do then if there's some question is pull them out and physically count them. And you can do that or count them through the machine or through another machine.

SHORT: What is your opinion of the voter id law?

GIESINGER: Well, I think it's important that we do that because we have—we shouldn't have people who are not eligible to vote voting. The law makes it very very clear who is eligible and who is not. And voter id just clarifies that. When we went to motor voter, which was nothing more than when you went to get your driver's license renewed or initially, they automatically registered you to vote. Well, we've got a lot of illegal people on the rolls that are voting that shouldn't be and we have to tighten that up. But it's in the—in most cases the laws are there. It's in the physical operation that we haven't justified it.

SHORT: So in 19—I'm sorry in 2004.

GIESINGER: Yes.

SHORT: You came back to the legislature. How had it changed?

GIESINGER: Good question. Physically, the chamber hadn't changed except where we used to have ashtrays, we now had plugs for our computers. Yeah. The voting system when I left before was an electronic system that George L. Smith had installed. And what's interesting about that is that basically none of it had changed. The chairs we're sitting in today are over a hundred years old. Physically, they've tried to keep the appearance. Physically, the chamber, if you recall, the fireplaces were covered up—I don't know who did that but that was before my time and I believe Tom Murphy—when they reworked it, they uncovered the fireplaces. And in the old old days, I am told, those were prime seats because in the wintertime you want to be close to the fire because that building had to be cold and drafty. Today it's cold but it's because the air conditioning is working well. And when you go in there the first thing in the morning, it is—I don't care what it is outside, it's really cold inside.

SHORT: Let's talk about some of the current problems that the state faces that will require legislation like—you mentioned the budget. Education is taking a big cut, is there something we could do to avoid that?

GIESINGER: Well, you know education has been the champion of everybody that's been running; we've always oh, we're going to do this for education. Many times to the detriment of the budget simply because we were doing things and throwing money at things to such an extent in Georgia, the administrative side is way out of balance in relation to the teaching side. And that's why we've concentrated in the last six years on saying the proportion has to get back to the dollars have to be in the classroom. And I've had, as you know, in what we did this year, we said that the school board can decide. Here's your budget and we're not going to dictate to you how you do it; if you have to make in your particular school system larger classrooms, that's your call. What we've done is made it possible for each school system to have a freer hand on how they operate within the dollars that they have. Is that going to get better? Not for a few years, I don't think so.

I had some legislation this year that designated money to the school system that is to the HOPE Scholarship and to the University of Georgia's vet school and ag school and that legislation was the horseracing. That legislation, I believe, will pass next year, this next session. I think we had the votes but there were so many important issues out there that the leadership felt that just we can't do that this year. And all I really wanted to do was put it on the ballot, that is because you have to change the state constitution to allow for pari-mutuel wagering, and I wanted wagering and it specifically says in the legislation for horses, not dogs, because they create jobs. Horses are very labor intensive. It will give the farmers an opportunity to grow crops. We'll have breeding in Georgia. When you realize that horses in Kentucky, just the horse portion, not the tourism portion, the horse portion is worth somewhere above four billion dollars and its worth between eighty and a hundred thousand jobs. That's monumental. We talk about getting thirty jobs; in the morning paper, it was talking about this wonderful thing, we were going to get thirty jobs. We're talking about the opportunity to raise revenues and do it not with your money and my money but with private money because the government doesn't go in and build the tracks. It becomes a true industry. Now we began to wonder—I had hearings last November and all the disciplines were notified, and I found that are about thirty-four horse disciplines in Georgia, everything from thoroughbreds to hoarder horses to trail horses to mules to everything. And people, they have their little thing that they like and that's fine. This would help all of them because the focus would be on what they're doing and if you go out and look at the Conyers

facility, they have over about two hundred events a year out there and that place is paid for.

SHORT: That's the Olympic.

GIESINGER: The old Olympic facility. And they have about fourteen hundred acres. Whoever build the track and wherever they build it, they're going to need about two hundred acres, they're going to spend somewhere between a hundred and two hundred million dollars. It's going to take about fifteen hundred construction people. When you begin to look at all of this and realize that the Churchill Downs of the world were paying attention to what I was doing from the beginning. And that's the beauty of today when you talk about changes. In the old days, we didn't have computers. And we had the ashtrays on the desk and we had a steno pool upstairs that would sit there and type and use carbon papers. And the steno pool was monstrous because they had all this legislation they had to type up. By today, you'd say that's so archaic; well, that's all we had. I think it was even before whiteout at the time; you had to tear it apart and put it back together or start over. Today, because of computers, things are done quickly. The legislative counsel's office—they don't sit down at a typewriter, they sit down at the computer—they can change a bill, they print them out; it's done. Now, what's happened is it's allowed us to reduce the number of people involved in that portion of government but by the same token what it's done is it's allowed us the freedom to be more interactive not only within our own state but all the states in the country. There are people in every state that sit there and pay attention to what's going on in other states legislatively, and you can go to every states' website and type in a subject and it will give you all the legislation. And if you're interested, you can pull up their bills and read them, and print them out, and do whatever you need to do. So what's so exciting about it today is it is we really are on top of things. But I start to tell you about this issue of knowing how many horses were passing through Georgia as an issue, okay. This money is going this way and this money is going that way. Well, I thought it was about twenty thousand horses a year would pass through Georgia. So I went over to the agriculture commissioner because he kept saying to me at a few of these receptions down at the Depot, he'd say, "Harry, what can I do to help you?" And I'd said, "Well, I'll find something for you." And finally, I thought, we don't keep track of it, Georgia has no idea, but Florida does. So I went over to see him one day and I said, "Would you call the Commissioner of Agriculture in Florida and see if he can give us those numbers?" And he did and he immediately said on—because he was on the speakerphone—immediately said, "Yeah, I'd be happy to help." Strangely enough, about a week later, we got the figures and for the fourteen months through the end of this February, the number of horses passing in and out of Florida was 177,000. And if they stop in Georgia for anything, it's for gas and lunch. And we know that the folks in Florida, the farms, the breeding, they're anxious to move into south Georgia and the reason they are is because Florida doesn't have an income tax but they have property taxes and you've got to make up for it somehow and their property taxes are terrible. And they would be happy to move their efforts across the border into Georgia. But what we've got to do is we've got to be horse friendly and we're not. Not at all.

SHORT: So you think your bill will pass next year.

GEISINGER: I think it will. I'll introduce it again. Churchill Downs is still interested in what we're doing.

SHORT: Are they in favor of it?

GEISINGER: Yes, oh, big time. Well, when you look at Churchill Downs, don't just think of Churchill Downs, think of—there's two major groups that own the tracks in the United States, and Churchill Downs in one of them. They own Arlington Park in Chicago and others that I know they do I just don't—I'm not aware of which ones. And then you have Frank Stronach of Magna. And fact Frank Stronach a number of years ago came to Georgia and he's made his money of the years in the auto parts business and he offered to—if we would have horse racing and let him build a track, he wanted to bring four of his plants here. He said they had to be close to the interstates. And he went straight to the top—he went to the governor at the time—and said, "Look, we'll end up spending a billion dollars here in Georgia." And the governor at the time said, "No." So he turned and left.

These are different times, they are hard times, and the people are looking for some hope, revenue, jobs, opportunities. It always amazes me when people say, "Well I'm all right," but our unemployment is above ten percent. Those people aren't paying taxes so our revenues with the state are down. In fact, the people that are still working are not spending as much for fear that that may be me someday. So, what we've got to do is we've got to change the attitude; we've got to look at the big picture. Several things are important to our future. We don't have the Rawson Havertys and the Ivan Allens that we once had in Atlanta. And they had great sway over the community. And MARTA and all the rest of it came out of their efforts.

But water, and transportation, and the improvement of our school systems are three big things that we've got to continually concentrate on and we've got to look at the big picture. We've got to quit worrying about what does my constituent down the road think totally and say well I'm going to act on his idea only because all he's thinking about is a few square acres. We've got to think about the whole state and its future. And if we don't have water, we're in bad trouble. And we keep growing; in the last ten years, we've grown by close to two million people. And I think the census will—in fact we should pick up one possibly two more congressional seats; we have thirteen now, we should be at fifteen. Course we have reapportionment coming up this year. We will have two sessions next year. We'll have the normal session and we'll do the reapportionment during the summer, and I guess in late summer we'll come back to have a quick session to pass the reapportionment.

SHORT: What do you think of four-year terms for members of the House of Representatives?

GEISINGER: Well, I've always been in favor. Fact is, I think, because I don't remember all of it, I think I even put a bill in once to make the senate four year terms and the house two because I've been a big believer and at one time I even flirted with the idea of limited terms. The states that have done that have found it's a disaster. And the reason is it's a disaster, they might have six or eight year limited terms, the people that are running those states are the staff, not the elected officials. And that's the last thing that you want. Now you rely heavily on your staffs but they are not the decision makers and shouldn't be. The people have elected you to make a decision and if it's wrong, by golly they will replace you quickly. And everybody keeps that in mind.

SHORT: Speaking of reapportionment, I believe you helped introduce a bill to create a commission on reapportionment rather than the way that it's done today.

GEISINGER: I did. Are you talking about the one we introduced this year to create the commission?

SHORT: Mmhmm.

GEISINGER: I did. Obviously, it didn't go anywhere but the idea was is that we would give another group an opportunity, that is citizens an opportunity to look at how they think—it didn't mean that we had to accept what they did, but it would put them out there on the front line. And there was provisions in there to reject it and have us rewrite it if we had to, but it would allow some new thinking. One of the things, the one thing that we as legislators understand, we don't have all the answers. We don't even have staff that has all the answers. There's a lot of people out there with great ideas, and we have to rely on using as many folks as we possibly can. And that's what that was all about.

SHORT: Immigration, big issue in Georgia.

GEISINGER: Well, it's a big issue in the nation, more so in some areas than others. And it isn't so much immigration because we're all basically from immigrant ancestors. It's about illegal immigration. They keep flirting with the idea that we need to put the fence up, and they put portions of it up, and we keep seeing pictures of them climbing over the fence. And basically, it seems to be drug related more than—because a lot of the folks that were here in Georgia, as an example, returned to Mexico. In fact, I understand that one of the problems they have when they go back is that the kids that they've had while they were here are not speaking Spanish in some cases, and they're having trouble in school because they can't speak Spanish. Well, we've had that reversed situation for years, where they'd come in, spoke only Spanish or other languages, and it made it difficult for us and it's more expensive to train somebody that doesn't speak the language than it is to train somebody that speaks the language, or teach them.

SHORT: Georgia has passed an illegal immigrant bill that is on the books now.

GEISINGER: Yes, in fact, at the time that we passed it, which was five years ago I think, may have been six now, it was the toughest illegal immigration bill in the country. And it didn't get the hype and whatever that's going on in Arizona today and yet Arizona's bill I don't think it's that much more stricter than ours. In fact, they've laid it out so you can't go out and just stop anybody on the street and say, "Show me that you're a U.S. citizen." In fact, other than our driver's licenses, what are you carrying that shows you're a U.S. citizen. My passport's locked up in the safe at home.

SHORT: I'd like to go back to 2005, following the 2004 election.

GEISINGER: Yes.

SHORT: When the Republican Party took over the Georgia House of Representatives, which gave them control of the entire General Assembly.

GEISINGER: Yes.

SHORT: How was that transition?

GEISINGER: You mean as far as Republican Democrat is concerned.

SHORT: Yeah, taking over the General Assembly from the Democrats.

GEISINGER: Well, it worked pretty smoothly. In fact, it worked smoother than I thought it would. Some of the Democrats resented it. But I've been on both sides of the aisle as far as serving in the majority and minority and yeah, the majority is a lot more fun. You have a tendency of knowing what's going on sooner, but there are no more necessarily perks for the majority than there are for the minority because there's not many perks out there anymore. Our whole ethics law has made it very very strict about what you can and can't do. Now to what extent somebody wanted us to be able to say, "A lobbyist can't spend more than five dollars on you." Can't buy a cup of coffee today at Starbucks for less than five dollars. It's just not doable. So you can't go and jump off the bridge just to say "Gee, we're the—." When we took over six years ago, we went from forty-eighth in ethics legislation, as the strictest, to seventh. That's a big jump; we're at the top of the heap right now. There was some effort to bring ethics legislation up and we did. We passed some but it didn't go as far as some people wanted it to go.

SHORT: Should we try to strengthen it?

GEISINGER: If we find that there are areas that it needs strengthening but probably not. Abuses will occur and usually in most cases when an abuse occurs, they're caught up with. We've had declaration of what's being spent both from the lobbyist viewpoint, and what we did is tighten that up this time, as well as the candidate. We have to file—and the beauty of it today is you file online, everything's online, and the moment you file, the world can look at it. In the old days, it wasn't like that. Nobody knew what was going on. Today they know everything that's going on. Sometimes I feel like they're complaining simply because they don't have anything to complain about. Let's make it tougher. Well, how tough do you want to make it?

SHORT: Harry, there is political unrest in the country as you know. What do you think about this Tea Party movement?

GEISINGER: I've attended two of the Tea parties at the capitol. The first one that I attended I was amazed. I couldn't believe how many people were there. As far as the eye could see they ran all the way from the capitol down those side streets to Fulton County Courthouse, and they ran all the way over to Georgia State on one side, and all the way over to whatever those state buildings are couple of blocks over. I was just amazed. They had planned on this. They realized that they were going to have that kind of crowd so they had screens up with sound so that they could accommodate all those people. The only, cause I asked the local police and the capitol police, the only person that was rowdy and got out of hand was somebody on the



backside of the capitol that was back there trying to create havoc and finally they just had to hustle him off. But that was the only one. There were no nasty signs. There was not the things that you're going to be told, "Oh these people are terrible"; they're not terrible. Great many of them are Democrats, Republicans, blacks and whites.

SHORT: Which brings me to my next question. How do you think this movement is going to affect the individual parties, Democrat and Republican?

GEISINGER: I think it's going to make them more responsive to their constituents, I really do. And when I say constituents, I'm not worried about which party as much as I am about the fact that if—there is a whole group of people out there that's saying, "You're not performing so we're not—you're going to have to go." And the Republicans I think have learned that. The Democrats are making in my opinion some terrible mistakes in DC in their attitude and outlook on how things are going. Now, they get heady when they get in DC. Somebody said, "Why don't you go for higher office and go to DC?" I said, "Well, first, I think I could do more good down here. Secondly, I think the economy will survive only because of the states." And states like Georgia, who still have a triple-A bond rating, are doing it because we pay attention to what we're doing. Yes, it's going to be painful, but it's got to be done. We don't have printing presses to run so it's going to be beneficial to both parties. And as both parties are finding out, even in the primaries, some of the incumbents are finding that they're having some hard times this year because they have not either been responsive to their constituents or they've been on the wrong side of some issues that their constituents are concerned about, which is healthy.

SHORT: Harry, have we forgotten anything?

GEISINGER: Oh, we've forgotten a lot. One of the things I wanted to mention to you was back in the old days—the poorer days for the Republican Party when we were just beginning to make motions, which would have been back in the Nixon days—what we would do when we had an inauguration is we would go down to Callaway Gardens. And we would have a—and this was in the days when Paul Coverdell was playing—remember the Farkel family? They were on television.

SHORT: Oh, yes.

GEISINGER: The comedy group.

SHORT: Yeah.

GEISINGER: Well, we'd do skits. And Bob Shaw and I would do the Rowan and Martin Laughing Show. And we'd go down a day early and write all this out; of course, it pertained to the elections and everything else. And we'd do a comedy show the next night at the banquet, at the dinner. And of course, we couldn't afford to go to the inauguration because it was very expensive and you had to go to DC, but we could afford to go to Callaway Gardens. And that place, we'd fill it up. It's wonderful and that was in a lot of—the camaraderie was the basis for the Republican Party that caused it to build. Today, as I find, there are so many people out there

that have no idea whose shoulders they're standing on. And it's sad but that's life.

SHORT: Looking back over your career, what do you consider your greatest accomplishment?

GEISINGER: I'm not sure I've accomplished the greatest thing yet. I have two bills coming up that I'm going to reintroduce. One is the horseracing, which I think would be a great accomplishment for the state. Secondly, is another bill that I had all the way over into the senate; had good support for it, we ran out of time so to speak. But what it does, because we have been taxing—and I had a high ranking state employee yesterday mention to me about how some people are stealing money from the state and it's one of the things that we have found that is occurring—but what the bill did and will do is it will remove all sales tax from all sales of vehicles and remove your birthday tax, your ad valorem tax totally. And of course, the sales tax is seven percent and have a one-time ad valorem tax—I'm sorry, title tax, we've removed the ad valorem tax—one-time title tax at the time of the purchase of six and three-quarters percent. Now, your first thought is wait a minute that math doesn't add up. Well it does because in Georgia, casual sales—if I sell you my car, I buy yours—there is no sales tax, but you pay a birthday tax as long as you own that car. What's interesting about that is in the few states that are left that do it this way, about thirty-two, thirty-four percent of the sales are casual sales. Strangely, in 1969—I'm sorry in 2009, the sales in Georgia were sixty-two percent; it was close to a million sales that didn't pay any tax. Well what we've found, and the revenue department says they don't have enough employees to go after it, is that some people in the industry are selling cars without a license to sell—and if you sell over five cars you've got to have a license—and that's loss of revenue to the local community. But secondly is that when you talk about over nine hundred thousand cars not paying any sales tax, all of a sudden if they just pay a one-time title fee, you'll recapture—and it's basically a revenue neutral process and it had strong support. It had the head of the Motors Vehicles Committee work on it all this past summer and the head of Ways and Means working on it. And unfortunately, it died in the senate even though many of the folks over there were supporting us strongly.

SHORT: Never came to a vote.

GEISINGER: Wouldn't let it on the floor. Wouldn't let it—in fact I passed it the year before. I passed it out of the committee, the Finance Committee in the senate, without a dissenting vote and couldn't get it across the floor on the last night.

SHORT: Looking back over that same career, what has been your biggest disappointment?

GEISINGER: I try not to do that and the reason I say that is because if you think about the disappointments—I could tell you some business transactions that I should have gotten involved in that I didn't, that were extremely successful. You look back on it and you say “well gee you should be upset about it.” Why? I made the wrong judgment. Politically—and you have to do that when you get involved in politics—as much as you know that what you're doing is right, it may not make it.

It's like the horseracing. It should have been on this year's ballot. It will be next year, I think we've got them all lined up now, but it would have saved the state of Georgia and the citizens of

Georgia two years because we can't put it back on the ballot for two years. So what I'm going to try and do is go ahead and get both the enabling legislation passed and the constitutional amendment this coming session and then it will just sit there on the books for a year and then go on the ballot in '12. That's sad as far as I'm concerned in regards to the people of Georgia because here was an opportunity.

I had a doctor call me about three days before the end of the session from South Carolina. And he said, "Is your bill going to pass?" And I said, "I don't think so," and he said, "Why do you ask?" And he says, "Well, I breed horses." And then he says, "I'm tired of dragging my horses up and down the interstate to Kentucky and south Florida," and he says, "I would love to have tracks in Georgia." And he said, "I would go back to breeding," he says, "I'm going to quit breeding." Now, this is somebody out of state but that doesn't mean we wouldn't end up benefiting from his efforts because what you do is you have what they call in this case Georgia breed. Now his would be South Carolina breed. I'm sure what he would do is come over to Georgia and find somebody that would do the breeding and take them back to Aiken, South Carolina, and let them go through their pregnancy and then bring them back to Georgia to let them deliver. It's still money in our pockets here in Georgia.

There's just so many opportunities like that and that whole cycle takes—cause if you want to have a Georgia bred horse, and we don't breed that many in Georgia, your cycle is three years. Gestation is eleven months and four days. After that colt is born, you're not going to run it for two and a half years. Well, it's about the time that if we were able to pass that this year—because I know people that said I'll start breeding horses now so that when the track is up and ready to go I've got a Georgia bred horse, which is critical. You end up winning more money that way, that's what it's all about. But it's money in the pockets of the people in Georgia; its taxes to the state. And when you realize the billions of dollars that are involved in these auctions—you go to Kingsland where they have the horse auctions twice a year, the jets fly in from all over the world. Is Georgia getting anybody to come in from wherever? No. We're just not thinking about the big picture.

SHORT: Well, the people passed a lottery.

GEISINGER: They did. And how many people have jobs because of that?

SHORT: Many.

GEISINGER: Well, not that many. Thirty people up in—

SHORT: Oh, you're speaking of the—

GEISINGER: Physical, yeah. And the sad part of that is it's preying on those people that think they're going to get rich. I haven't played the lottery in probably a year—no, I take that back, about six months ago I did.

SHORT: That was for the big jackpot.

GEISINGER: No, it actually wasn't. It was a strange thing. I was out of town and my flight—no, my cab number, my limousine taking me to the airport was the same number as the tail

number on my airplane. And I called my daughter and said, “Buy me this number.” So she bought me five of them, nothing happened. What it’s worth to Georgia, as far as horses are concerned, is in the beginning it’s between ten and twenty thousand jobs. In Kentucky, it’s eighty to a hundred thousand jobs. Why should we pass this up? Did you realize we have a quarter of a million horses in Georgia today? It’s a big industry and people love their horses.

SHORT: Harry, when our great-great grandchildren go over to the Russell Library to research Harry Geisinger, how would you want to be remembered?

GEISINGER: Haven’t thought about that cause I—

SHORT: As the man who passed the horseracing bill?

GEISINGER: Well, that wouldn’t hurt. But as somebody who has helped the future of Georgia. You know the legislation for the water in the Tennessee River, the boundary dispute. I introduced it in the house. David Schaefer introduced an identical bill in the senate. And the only reason that we used his bill was because he had a harder time getting it out of the senate than I had getting it out of the house. I had 133 votes for that. What it simply said—and the governor signed it—is that the governor will take and sit down with the governor of Tennessee and the governor of North Carolina. Now what’s interesting is North Carolina never said a word about this. Tennessee, they were beating their breast about it because they know that where the mistake really is—the big part of the mistake—is up there at Nickajack, just west of Chattanooga. The line is 1.1 miles too far south. And if you go back to everything that’s ever been said since the creation of the state of Georgia—and Georgia at one time ran all the way to the Pacific Ocean—but very shortly ran just to the Mississippi River. And part of the agreement to give up the land to our west was that when they put the line in, it would run from the western bank of the Chattahoochee River at West Point, to the northern bank of the Tennessee River at Nickajack.

Well, when it was surveyed in 1818, because the settlers were beginning to settle up there and nobody really knew where the line really was, they put it in the wrong place. And we’re not sure whether they put it where they did because the river at the time was flooding. Or they were worried about the Cherokee Indians who were not happy with the settlers that were up there and they didn’t want to have harm come to themselves so they just said “This is a good place to put it” and that’s where they put it. But they missed it by 1.1 miles because with GPS today—and I did this—the Japanese public television came over and said “Would you do…” and I said “Sure.” So what I did is I took a hand-held Tom-Tom and went up there and, of course, it’ll tell you exactly where you are. And I went to the mark when they photographed all this, and it was 1.1 miles off. But we went around—now because we didn’t have a boat we couldn’t get into the river—but we went all the way to the 35th parallel north and you can look due east and see where the mark belongs. In fact, you can go on Google latitude and longitude and do it today. And see exactly where that mark belongs, and it’s right there in the middle of that lake. So, the dispute, and the reason that was all done was for the water rights. And if you look at the line, in those days they did two things for boundary lines: they used rivers and they used north and south, and east and west. Well, this doesn’t go north and south. If you look at the line, it goes to the west to Nickajack. If you look at a Georgia state roadmap you’ll see that the 35th parallel is up here, the line is down here, and it goes all the way. And when it gets over to

Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina, it's at the 35th parallel. And the piece of pie just keeps getting bigger, bigger and bigger as it goes over. None of that has been ratified by the states or the United States Congress, and that's what it has to be. So, it's still sitting there saying, "35th Parallel." That's what this issue is all about. It's water. We don't necessarily need those people. It's about fifty-six square miles. Most of it's national forest. We don't care. But what is important is that for the future of this state, we should have adequate water. And that is very critical. And without that water—and there is twenty-four billion gallons a day passing through Nickajack—that's a lot of water. And when they designed the Tenn-Tom River in Alabama—Tenn-Tom waterway, Tennessee Tom Bigbee—when they designed that it was designed to have eight billion gallons a day flow through it. That's how much they were assigned. They're only using about two billion gallons. Because they don't have any traffic. They spent billions of dollars to build that thing for Tom Bevill, who was the chairman of the Appropriations Committee through the eighties in the United States House. It was his boondoggle. They're not using it like they should.

SHORT: Well, Harry, it's been a great pleasure.

GEISINGER: Been my pleasure.

SHORT: To have you here and I want to thank you on behalf of Young Harris College and the Richard B. Russell Library at the University of Georgia for being our guest.

GEISINGER: Bob, thank you much, and don't hesitate to sit and chat again.

SHORT: I look forward to it.