Dr. Mel Steely: 00:00:09 I'm Dr. Mel Steely, Director of the Georgia Political Heritage Program at the University of West Georgia. Today is December 14, 2006, and we are interviewing Secretary of State, Cathy Cox. Ms. Cox, you were born, I believe it was 1958, in Bainbridge, Georgia. Would you tell us a little bit about your family and what it was like to grow up in a small southwest Georgia town.

Cathy Cox: 00:00:39 Well, growing up in Bainbridge was very much a storybook sort of childhood of what I believe would be typical small town, rural, south Georgia. I was born into a family of four girls. I'm the oldest daughter. My parents, Mary and Walter Cox, were the world's best parents. My dad was a funeral director and my mother, who's still living, is an artist, and we as children lived in the funeral home. Lived upstairs in the funeral home and I guess that's the only thing you could say that was not typical about my childhood.

Cathy Cox: 00:01:20 But when you're born and raised there, you don't really know there's anything odd about it except that none of your girlfriends ever want to spend the night with you. We found that out pretty early, but we were the first urban dwellers, I guess, in small town terms because the funeral home was a block off of the town's square. We didn't really have a yard at the funeral home. So, the town square was our yard and the county library was another block away.

Cathy Cox: 00:01:46 So, we spent afternoons either playing in the park, at the town square or going to story hour at the library and spending lots of time checking out books to read in the library because reading at least was one of those activities that would keep children quiet when they lived in the funeral home, which was important. Looking back, I think it was a blessing to grow up in that kind of environment, because you learn so much about dealing with people at their most vulnerable time and watching my dad interact with grieving families and understanding at an early age about the process of life and death and how it affects families.

Cathy Cox: 00:02:28 My dad was involved in politics from my earliest recollections. He ran for city council in Bainbridge when I was in elementary school and ultimately ran for mayor when I was about fifth grade, I think. Fifth or sixth grade. Served as mayor for a term
and then ran for the state legislature and was elected to eight separate terms in the Georgia House of Representatives. So, I'm very much a child of Georgia politics. I have the defective genes that put me on this path, I think, without question. But it was a blessing to have that kind of experience as a child.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:03:07 What outside activities were you involved in like church or clubs or things of that nature or did your world revolve pretty much around school?

Cathy Cox: 00:03:17 Well, in a small town you're involved in everything and church is probably at the top of the list. I was born into the Baptist church and baptized in the Baptist church and then I saw the light and became a Methodist. But my dad and his parents were Baptists and there was not a Sunday in my childhood when we were not up. Not matter how much we might have complained or fuss or whine, we were in Sunday school every Sunday of our childhood. Even as real small children, my grandparents lived just around the block from the First Baptist Church.

Cathy Cox: 00:03:51 We were always in Sunday schools and sometimes then we'd go over to their house, walk with my grandad around the block to their house after Sunday school and then be picked up by my parents after church. But when I got into about junior high, middle school age, the Baptist church went through a lot of the splits that sadly a lot of Baptist churches go through with fights over the pastor and some of the youth programs fell to the wayside.

Cathy Cox: 00:04:19 The church had already become such an important part of my life that I just went down the street with my friends to the Methodist church. By high school, I was involved in everything that happened at the Methodist church. Even though I wasn't really even a member, I was elected as a student representative to serve on the administrative board, I was teaching Sunday school, I was singing in the choir. All of my social life except for high school band activities really revolved around the church and everything I did in the United Methodist Youth Programs.

Cathy Cox: 00:04:52 It had a huge impact in shaping my worldview about our obligations as humans to look after our neighbors.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:05:04 Hillary Clinton says about the same thing, doesn't she?

Cathy Cox: 00:05:06 She does.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:05:07 Talking about the Methodist church.
Cathy Cox: 00:05:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:05:09 Mm-hmm (affirmative) that shaped her. You went to Bainbridge high school or ...?

Cathy Cox: 00:05:16 Only one high school in the county, that's Bainbridge high school.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:05:19 All right and what year did you graduate?

Cathy Cox: 00:05:21 I graduated in the bicentennial year 1976.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:05:28 What do you remember about there? What impressed you about your school or your high school? Anything or depressed you maybe.

Cathy Cox: 00:05:33 No, no, no. I loved high school and was involved in everything. I was the student government president, I was the junior class president. I had those government genes even in high school. Very involved in the Y Clubs of the affiliates of the state YMCA of Georgia and particularly their Youth Assembly Program. The state YMCA has at this point now, for almost 60 years sponsored the annual youth assembly where students from all over the state come to the state capital and hold a youth legislature, a mark legislature and introduce bills and debate.

Cathy Cox: 00:06:14 Then I actually participated in the Youth Assembly Program before my dad was elected to the legislature, and I fell in love with legislative politics. I loved the give and take of it. I remember one of my first trips and they assigned you a bill that you had to take the pro or cons side of. I was assigned a bill about whether Georgia should allow sixteen-foot-wide mobile homes. So, on my trip from Bainbridge to Atlanta, when we got right outside of the town, I had my advisor stop the car. I had a tape measure and we got out and we measured the road. The little two lane road leading out of Bainbridge.

Cathy Cox: 00:06:52 It was maybe only eleven or twelve feet wide and I said, “Well, that settles it. I've got the perfect argument about why we can't have sixteen-foot-wide mobile homes. So, I'm going to go up there and really win the argument on this.” And I got up here and found out there were lots of arguments I hadn't thought about. About how you could limit the hours, the mobile homes would be transported, you could have cars with lights in front and behind, how many jobs would be created if we would expand the width of mobile homes.
Cathy Cox: I of course lost the argument and then in real life, the next year too, they did eventually allow sixteen-foot-wide modular homes in Georgia. But it was such an awakening for me as a high school student to appreciate that I rarely had all the facts and arguments. There was a lot for me to learn by listening to people, but it just drew me into this legislative process. So, for all of my dad's career, I was the political daughter. We read the paper together every morning and read all the stories about the legislature and then he would tell me the scoop of what really was happening and what the agendas were of the people who were described in the stories.

Cathy Cox: Well, they're saying this, but here's what they're really trying to get or this is just posturing because here's what they're really after. They'll compromise on this. I learned the people and the players and the process from him and just had this front row view of the Georgia General Assembly throughout all of my high school and college years. In my senior year at the University of Georgia, I took a quarter off to be a legislative intern and the first day that I was here, they decided since my dad was in the house, they would assign me to a Senate committee so I'd have a different experience.

Cathy Cox: The first day of the session, a senator complained that I would be a spy for the House. So, they jerked me off of the committee and at the time, this was in 1980 legislative session, they had a Joint House on Tax Reform commission. So, they said, “Well, she'll be safe there.” So, they assigned me as the aide to the Tax Reform Commission, which again was probably a blessing in disguise because I met a lot of people from the house and senate side. Wrote my independent study paper on revenue sharing measures that were then going away in the federal government.

Cathy Cox: Learned a lot about Georgia's tax and revenue structure. The committee, ultimately produced a report about this thick. None of which was adopted by the legislature. We're still talking about tax reform that hadn't been done since 1980, but it was a great, great experience.

Dr. Mel Steely: After you graduated from high school in the bicentenntial, you went from there to ABAC, Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. But moved on fairly quickly to University of Georgia in journalism. Why would you go to an agricultural school if you [crosstalk 00:09:45] journalism?

Cathy Cox: Well, because my first major was agriculture.
I had a very difficult time deciding on what I wanted to major in, in college because I liked so many different things. I thought about being an art major. My mother was an artist and we all, my sisters and I had doubled in art and enjoyed art and appreciated it. Of course my mother said, "No, you need to major in something where you can make a living." And I enjoyed working with plants. Both of my grandmothers were big gardeners and I'd spent lots and lots of my childhood with them in their garden, learning about growing plants. So, I had decided by my senior year that I wanted to be a horticulture major and work with plants.

Maybe own my own plant nursery. I'd worked summer jobs in Bainbridge at a local plant nursery. Maybe get in to research or something like that. So, my two year degree was in horticulture, which was actually an agriculture associate of science degree. While I was at ABAC, I spent a summer internship at Callaway Gardens, in their horticulture program. A great experience working in beautiful surroundings, but I decided ... I think somewhere after one day of pulling weeds beside somebody with a PhD in botany in 105 degree weather, that having a job in the air conditioning wouldn't be an altogether bad thing.

So, I decided to change my major. I knew that working with plants would always be pretty much my avocation, but I decided to change my major. So, I went back to scratch. "Well, what is it I really like to do?" Well, I like to write and I looked back and I said, "You know, I've written." I wrote on the student newspaper in high school. I edited the year book at ABAC, I really enjoyed writing and felt like I had some skills there. So, I took a summer internship at the newspaper in Bainbridge before I transferred to Georgia and loved that. I jumped into the journalism school when I got into Georgia and took it from there.

When you did your internship, was Marvin Griffin still active?

He was. He was still living.

He and Cheney are legendary.

Oh yes.

You had a chance to watch him up close.
Cathy Cox: 00:12:01 Oh yeah.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:12:01 Talk about him for a minute or two here.

Cathy Cox: 00:12:02 Well, when I was a student in journalism school, Marvin Griffin was still living. His son Sam was of course by then the publisher of the Bainbridge Post Searchlight, but Marvin still wrote a weekly column. So, you could count on it, clock work. About every Tuesday, Marvin came in to the paper to bring his column and as he was all of his life, he couldn't walk through a room without stopping to talk to everybody and tell stories and was to this day still probably the most charismatic speaking storyteller that ever was in Georgia politics. He was that way until the day of his death.

Cathy Cox: 00:12:44 I had a chance to really work around him, but actually, several years later after I got my journalism degree went to work for a newspaper in Gainesville, Georgia. Then decided to go to law school. I needed to save some money for law school and had decided to move home for a year to save money and get ready for law school and by then Marvin Griffin had died. So, his son Sam hired me for that year to do a little bit of work on the newspaper, but mostly to do research on Marvin's political career and gather all of his papers and writings. I traveled around the state interviewing his associates and political enemies then still living with the idea that Sam and I would write a book together about Marvin's career.

Cathy Cox: 00:13:35 I had a wonderful opportunity during that year to really absorb myself into Georgia's political era of the 40s and 50s to get a handle on Marvin Griffin's most colorful career and collect all of his works and papers for his son.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:13:56 After reading all of these, what was your judgment on Governor Griffin? Was he an evil crook?

Cathy Cox: 00:14:03 No, no. He was absolutely not an evil crook, but I suspect he was one of the most trusting individuals ever to come down the pipeline. Knowing what I knew about him and what I knew about his son, my sense of it is that Marvin would never have thought that any of his friends or associates would do anything corrupt. So, he didn't check up on them and some of them were stealing the state blind, right behind his back. But he trusted people and his son Sam is very much like that. Trusts them even when people are telling you, this person is doing something wrong. No, they're loyal to the core, until the evidence just becomes way overwhelming far down the road. I think that was a lot of what happened in the Griffin administration. I don't
think he was corrupt, I don't think he intended anything to go wrong, but I think a lot of people took advantage of his friendship.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:15:16 Did you get to visit with Cheney very much?

Cathy Cox: 00:15:18 Cheney only died a couple of years ago. He was not around the paper as much because he didn't have a formal affiliation with the paper, but he was definitely the town character. Even until recent years and certainly when I was in the legislature, every time I went to the post office to get my mail, Cheney would come in to check his post office box. So, you had to stop and talk and hear stories. He was always around the Thursday night fish fry to tell stories and had gusto until he drew his last breath.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:15:59 I tried to interview him and Sam was kind of the caretaker and he just would not permit an interview.

Cathy Cox: 00:16:05 Well, Sam had a bad experience as you know.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:16:09 A fellow wrote the book about it and was not very objective, I'm afraid.

Cathy Cox: 00:16:17 No, and that really put Sam particularly into a very defensive mode of trusting people particularly in academic community who were probably trying to do the right thing because they had that bad experience early on.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:16:30 Yeah, which was a shame. I would like to have interviewed Cheney. He was the last link to that era and all the governors, many lieutenant governors I've interviewed I've asked about fundraising and up until most recently they very much opposed all the reforms that too place and that sort of thing. They didn't see anything wrong with taking money. If I gave you $100, you ought to be able to put it in your pocket and spend it on the campaign like you wanted to. So, there was a lot of talk about that and about integration. They agreed on putting much on that. That era is just gone and those people aren't around anymore.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:17:17 You went on to ABAC and then to Georgia, University. You went from there into reporting in Gainesville. What do you remember about your years at the university in journalism? Any important professors or events that really struck you, anything?

Cathy Cox: 00:17:38 Well, then and now, I think University of Georgia has such a fabulous journalism program and it really was a great
educational experience for me. I had my staff members here in the Secretary of State’s office still call me the editor from hell because I’m so obsessive about editing and writing and having it just like I want it to be. I attribute that to some very good training at Georgia where you got red marks when you did things the wrong way. But I still remember and as I get ready to teach my own class at the University of Georgia Law School, the most memorable class I had was from a visiting professor who came in, who was a retired editor from the Philadelphia Inquirer.

Cathy Cox: 00:18:33 They brought him in for a semester to teach editorial writing and because he wasn’t the typical professor, he didn’t have the traditional structure, but he had us read newspaper editorials for every class and had us take topics and write both sides of an issue. He would ask us how we felt about an issue and then he would make us write an editorial taking the opposite position and it was the best class I had in undergraduate school to really teach me how to think and to advocate in writing. I hope that I can bring some of that ability to learn how you think into the work that I’m planning to do at Georgia Law School.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:19:21 If you can teach them how to think, you’ll be doing a good job.

Cathy Cox: 00:19:24 Yes. Well, if I can just help a few young lawyers come out of that not as ...

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:19:31 A lot of times, these clerks, they don’t get good training in high school.

Cathy Cox: 00:19:35 No, they don’t. I wish that our high schools put a lot more emphasis on debate, debate societies and things where you really could do some critical thinking. I see it a lot even in members of the legislature today who never enter the process with an open mind and if you don’t agree with them, then you’re evil as opposed to just saying, let’s compromise. Let’s learn something from this person with a different position because they really have never learned that critical thought process. That’s really what to me law school was all about.

Cathy Cox: 00:20:14 You learned where to find the law and you learned how to apply the law, you learned how to advocate, but more than anything, you learned how to think and to know that wherever you go in a process, there’s going to be another side to the story that you have to be prepared for and prepare to argue against or defend against. I went to law school never thinking I would practice law and certainly not understanding that, that’s really what I was going to learn from law school, but it changed my life.
Dr. Mel Steely: 00:20:49 Once you got out of the law school, and that was at Mercer, not at Georgia.

Cathy Cox: 00:20:57 Right.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:20:59 You practiced law actually for the better part of a decade, didn't you?

Cathy Cox: 00:21:05 That's right.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:21:05 You came to Atlanta first and then went home.

Cathy Cox: 00:21:07 Right.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:21:08 Okay, tell us about that, those years practicing law.

Cathy Cox: 00:21:12 Well, I never intended to practice law. There are no lawyers in my family, nobody was pushing me to go to law school because that was the family heritage. But when I got into journalism, I was the new kid on the block and most newspapers assign the police beat because nobody wants to live and breathe the hours required of a police beat reporter where you've got to get up all hours of the night, go take pictures at a fire or a murder scene or a car wreck or whatever. So, the new kid on the block gets that assignment.

Cathy Cox: 00:21:44 I became the police beat reporter in Gainesville and loved it. Really loved it. I slept with a portable scanner and learned the tones in my sleep to know whether it was an ambulance going out or a fire truck going out or something worthy of not getting up to go traipse twenty miles down the road in the middle of the night. But I covered everything from the crime scene to the trial and I did have not a clue about what was going on in the court room. I didn't know what the lawyers were talking about, I didn't know what the judges were saying, and so I decided to go back to law school with the idea that I would get a legal education and go back to a larger newspaper and write about legal issues.

Cathy Cox: 00:22:26 I'd never been inside a lawyer's office, so I didn't even know anything about private practice. I was putting myself through school, so I had to get summer jobs at law firms and found out much to my surprise that a great proportion of practicing law is writing. That's what I felt like I was good at and I did well in my grades in law school, because most of your exams are written. It was like writing on a deadline. Condense your thoughts into an organized fashion and do well in your grades. So, I did well. I
was editor in chief of the Law Review and got offered a job, a summer job after my second year at one of the big law firms in Atlanta.

Cathy Cox: Had never planned to live in Atlanta. I had very much the small town phobia about Atlanta, but I said, "Hey, it's a summer job. It pays well, what the heck." So, I came to work at the time for Hansel and Post and absolutely fell in love with downtown Atlanta. You could walk around at lunch and it was safe and clean and people were nice. It changed my perspective on Atlanta. The firm offered me a permanent job when I graduated. So, I came back here to practice. Did litigation work, cutting-edge law. They were paying you a great salary, but you were a worker bee in many respects. I ultimately decided ... My dad then was diagnosed with cancer, that I wanted to go back home.

Cathy Cox: So, in 1988, I made the decision to go back to Bainbridge and practice, but there were none and had never been any female attorneys in Decatur County. In fact in the two judicial circuits down there, eleven counties, there were not women lawyers. So, I had worked at a Bainbridge firm with two younger partners that were more my contemporary reason age and they were open to the idea of bringing a woman lawyer into the firm. The senior partner who was my dad's contemporary had to be convinced that Bainbridge was ready for a woman lawyer.

Cathy Cox: They took me in a year later made me a partner. So, I became the first and only female attorney in the Pataula and South Georgia judicial circuits. It changed the nature of the practice I did, because in Atlanta I had done a lot of general commercial litigation and in Bainbridge particularly because I was the only female attorney, I was overwhelmed with domestic relations work with divorce, child support, child custody matters from women who wanted a female attorney. Then I had several very successful jury trials and then the men wanted to hire me before their wives would hire me.

Cathy Cox: So, I ended up doing a lot of divorce work, which I hope never ever in life to do again because it's very difficult and emotional when you're in a small town and you know both sides and one side is going to hate you forever and that kind of thing. I went back to Bainbridge to practice. My dad died the following winter. I had not been back in Bainbridge a year to meet the residency requirements to run for his seat in the legislature. A family friend decided to run. I'd baby sat for their son, so I would never have run against him, but two years later when reapportion came around in 1991, they redrew the districts.
Cathy Cox: 00:25:53 So, they drew me out of the district where my family friend had succeeded my dad, Kermit Bates, and I had the chance to run in another district against an incumbent from a neighboring county. So, in 1992 I bit the bullet and jumped into my first political race.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:26:13 You had been around politics for well over a decade, almost two, and finally got into it. Was it just the opportunity that pushed you into it or what?

Cathy Cox: 00:26:24 It goes back to my high school days and my dad's experience. I loved legislative politics. I loved the process, I loved the give and take of all the backgrounds and people involved and out of that process, when it's allowed to work, some good things generally come out of that. I knew I could be a good legislator. So, naively, at age 32, I jumped into a house race against a sixteen-year incumbent committee chairman, friend of the speaker. Everything that should have told me I didn't have a prior, never held office, but I outworked him on every front and beat him with about 64% of the vote.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:27:13 Remarkable. What did you learn from those early campaigns?

Cathy Cox: 00:27:19 Well, I learned that voters don't like anybody to take the position that they're entitled to elect a job.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:27:29 Carl Sanders learned that back in the '70s.

Cathy Cox: 00:27:32 Well, I ran against an incumbent who was a nice man. He was a farmer, no scandals or anything in his background, but he had the attitude that, I've been here. This is my job, my seat. I'm entitled to this and I don't have to work for it. I got out in the hot summers of South Georgia and went door to door and store to store and to every volunteer, fire department meeting. My sister stood out in the rain at shift change factories with shirts that said, "Vote for my sister."

Cathy Cox: 00:28:06 It became a real family thing and I found that voters appreciated seeing somebody work to earn that office. Voters also like something that's new and different. They will get enthused at the opportunity to vote for something different that gives them some additional hope about what can be accomplished through government. Those are lessons that I think still hold true today.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:28:33 When you were first thinking about running as I think almost anybody does, you have to consider the possibility you're not
going to get elected. For a lot of people, that concept of rejection is so overwhelming. They just won’t get into it. Rather than be rejected, they’d just rather not do it. Clearly you’re not the shy retiring type and you jumped right in with both feet. Did it ever concern you that ... What were your fears and you’ve talked about your hopes, why you would get into it. Where there any fears at all or did you just move right into it?

Cathy Cox: 00:29:12 When I think back, it never occurred to me in that race in 1992 that I would lose. I knew I could do that job and I knew that I could win and I was going to work every minute from qualifying on to make it happen. There were very few times even during the campaign that I thought, "This is not going to work out." And it did. In subsequent races, especially when I started my Secretary of State races and statewide races, I’d grown up enough to know I could lose this. There are a lot of variables that may be beyond my control, but over the years I guess I came to the realization that you just have to be a risk taker in life to accomplish things that are important to you. And you decide, is this worth the risk? If it’s not, you don’t go there.

Cathy Cox: 00:30:08 But, I guess also having practiced law for a decade, by the time I ran for statewide office, I knew I had something to go back to if I lost an election. I was running because I wanted to do the job, but my life would not be over if I lost. My life didn't depend on having a political office. I was a successful as a practicing attorney, I enjoyed it, and I can go back to that. I think in my three statewide races, that gave me a good sense of balance that I sadly see lacking in some statewide candidates whose whole persona is wrapped up in having an office because they don’t really have anything to go back to. I was fortunate not to be in that position.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:31:00 When you first got in ...

PART 1 OF 4 ENDS [00:31:04]

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:31:00 Now, when you first got into politics, your legislative office was the first elective office that you held, and you came up here, I’m sure with some preconceived ideas of what it was going to be like, and what you were going to do, and who you were going to see, and all of that. Was the experience itself anything like what you thought it was going to be? Or had you been around enough with your dad that you had a pretty good grip on what was going to happen?

Cathy Cox: 00:31:30 It was largely what I expected. Between being around the process enough with my dad, and my internship, where I was
here on a day-to-day basis of a session, in committee meetings, following the chaos, I knew a lot of what it would be like, and of course this was only two, three years after my dad's death. Most of the membership was the same as my dad's tenure, especially in the leadership, so I knew the process, I knew the players. My dad had a good reputation among them, so many of them took me under their wing and opened a lot of doors for me because I was Walter's daughter. Now the flip side of that was the little bit of patronizing of, isn't she sweet, let's pat her on the head. She's Walter's daughter. And they did not expect me I think, to be as assertive as I was, even as a freshman legislator. My dad sat on the back row, with what they used to call the sawmill gang, either from the snoring that went on the back row, or whatever.

Cathy Cox: 00:32:45 But it was a great little group of collegial friends and I got a seat down front, and I began, even as a freshman, introducing bills, and taking an active stand. I was much more aggressive as a legislator than my dad had been. That caught some of the old guys by surprise, that I was Walter's daughter, but I wasn't Walter. But they also knew, and I had to prove myself I guess, in a way of I was going to always going to do my homework, like I had come to be in my law practice before I stood up before a judge, I was going to be prepared.

Cathy Cox: 00:33:25 And I approached the legislature in the same way. Before I went down to the well to speak on a bill, I was going to be prepared for every question and every argument, and of course I developed the reputation of going down to the well and speaking until people fell over in a dead faint because I could talk so long and felt the need to go over every detail, when many legislators just hit the high points and nobody asked questions and they go on down the road. But it turned out to be a better experience even than I had hoped.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:33:59 By the time you got there in the early '90s, we'd had a couple of decades of women in the legislature. So the gender thing was not that unique at that point. Being the daughter of a legislator, and a woman, was a unique experience. What committees did you get assigned to?

Cathy Cox: 00:34:22 Well, the speaker was very good to me, and I'm sure that was a benefit of being my dad's daughter. I really wanted to be on the judiciary committee, and loved that experience better than any other part of the legislature, but I also asked for and received appointments to Game, Fish and Parks, and State Institutions and Properties, because those committees were so important to my district. I come from a big hunting and sportsmens’ area
of the state, and game, fish and parks state laws and regulations are very important to people in that district. We had a state hospital, and other state facilities, so state institutions and properties were very important to my district. My dad had served on state institutions and properties, so I knew a lot about the work of that committee before I went in, but the judiciary was really my own personal interest as a lawyer and I was grateful that I got the appointments I asked for.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:35:25 Who was chairing at that time, Bubba McDonald, or ...

Cathy Cox: 00:35:29 Chairing?

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:35:30 Charles Thomas, the judiciary.

Cathy Cox: 00:35:31 The judiciary, Charles Thomas. Who I knew from my dad's tenure. I knew from 4-H circles, and mutual friendships and ...

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:35:44 We have his papers over at the university. Got a good interview with him ...

Cathy Cox: 00:35:49 We all still consider those early years on the judiciary committee as the golden years of the judiciary committee because we had Roy Barnes on the House judiciary committee, we had Denmark Groover, we had Tom Cauthorn, three super intellects. And I always found a way to sit right in the middle of them, because I wanted to absorb everything they said. It was like the best of everything in law school in terms of sitting around the table with these great intellects who had such institutional knowledge of how the law worked, and you’d talk about something and Denny Groover would say, "Well, we tried that back in 1963, and here's why it didn't work," but really jumping into the process. I found out that even as a freshman, sometimes we'd be in there at ten o'clock at night, and I would write an amendment on a piece of paper towel practically, and two hours later, that's adopted into the code. It was such a wonderful time to serve on that committee where nobody felt compelled to rush through any legal discussion. We were going to stay there and hash it out until we felt like it had been perfected and I vividly remember when my dad was here, he hated the judiciary committee, because he felt like they gutted every bill that he ever introduced.

Cathy Cox: 00:37:19 When I became a member, I understood that this group of lawyers felt a real sense of responsibility for perfecting legislation. My dad wasn't a lawyer. He learned the process eventually but he could never really understand I think, some of
the legal nuances that the lawyers would look at and how do we craft this very specific language to do what we all want it to do. It was as good an experience as any lawyer could ever, ever have.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:37:52 Having Denmark Groover on it was quite a benefit to you, I would think. As good a mind as there ever was in how to do it.

Cathy Cox: 00:38:01 I will always be the president of the Denmark Groover fan club. I've still got a picture of me with Denny in my bookcase.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:38:07 We did a great interview with him, and he spent the whole first hour talking about being a Marine pilot in World War II before we could get to the other part, but I loved it. And he was a very good interview. Was there anything that really surprised or shocked you about being with representatives and being involved in the process?

Cathy Cox: 00:38:37 Nothing shocked me, because I was so familiar with it, but I was frustrated as a young freshman junior member of the legislature, that the whole system in those days was purely seniority based. No matter how good you were, no matter how hard you worked, it was not a merit-based system. You rose through the ranks by longevity, not by real ability, and that was frustrating, and I think to some extent, that hurt the Democratic Party down the line by that process. I understand it, you want to reward the people who have great experience, but it doesn't, and it didn't necessarily always result in the best product of legislation.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:39:32 Some would say that most of the positive or the negative developments of that period could be laid at the doorstep of Tom Murphy. That a fair statement?

Cathy Cox: 00:39:45 Well, I certainly give him credit for the positive things. A lot of the folks on the outside would lay a lot of negative things at his feet that don't deserve to be there. Very few people understood how broad an image of Georgia Tom Murphy had. And that was a good lesson for me as a legislator, even over the years of discussing virtually every issue with my dad that was debated during his sixteen years of service. To really get in there and understand that Tom Murphy, even though he represented a small district in west Georgia, was doing the things to look after Atlanta. And the things that allowed Atlanta to grow, to build the World Congress Center, and the Georgia Dome, and the facilities and infrastructure that have been built in Atlanta, largely because Tom Murphy helped fund them, and provide
the planning for them, when they would not do anything to benefit his district.

Cathy Cox: 00:40:50 Or not anything that his constituents would easily see would benefit his district. And it was something I wish more legislators would appreciate today, that even though they get elected from a small district, they have responsibilities to be statesmen and stateswomen, and look after what's best for the state and not just their district. I also give enormous credit to Tom Murphy compared to a lot of what we see today, because he killed a lot of bad legislation. He took the bullet and could withstand it because his district was going to keep reelecting him for so long, because he knew that even though something sounded popular at the moment, and had a lot of media attention to them, that ultimately they were not going to be good things for the state, and he stepped in and never let them get to the floor. He took the bullet so that things didn't have to come up for a vote, and shouldn't have. I was in a debate when ... in a room when the Georgia House was going to have to decide whether they were going to take up the Constitutional amendment on gay marriage.

Cathy Cox: 00:42:07 And I said to the leadership. I said, "You all need to bite the bullet. This doesn't need to come to the floor. Because of all the controversy surrounding it, these members are going to have to vote in a certain way, but because you all had already passed a law in 1996 that defined marriage as between a man and a woman, you don't need to let this come to a vote." But the leadership in that room couldn't really appreciate what Tom Murphy would have done. I believe, would have said, "We're not going to let this thing get loose on the floor of the House," and he would have taken the hits for holding it back, knowing what fallout there would be because of that.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:42:53 They did that a lot.

Cathy Cox: 00:42:54 He did that a lot.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:42:56 Sometimes it was popular and sometimes it wasn't, but probably is pretty much what he thought was right. There were times when people would act in a way that you might not expect. Groups of people that you might think you could count on for support would disappoint you. That's what offended you. Did you ever have any of those old moments? That you want to talk about? And remember, we're holding this for ten years.

Cathy Cox: 00:43:24 No, I don't think about disappointments. I learned early on that as wide as I thought my position was often, that there would be
a lot of unintended consequences, and I got my life threatened several times while I was in the legislature. Once on the most ridiculous of issues, because I served on Game, Fish and Parks, the Department of Natural Resources asked me to handle a lot of their legislation. And so one year they had a bill that would update the state's wild animal list of prohibited wild animals. At the time there was a real problem out west with the Hanta virus in rodents, and so they wanted to update our list so that certain rodents were outlawed in Georgia. And that was our focus, was just to update the list. It hadn't been touched in a long time. But one byproduct of the bill was that it would formally outlaw wolf dog breeding. Who knew that especially up in the north Georgia mountains, wolf dog breeding was big business.

Cathy Cox: 00:44:37 And the problem with it is there's no effective vaccine for rabies in wolves or wolf breeds. So you don't want wolves to be bred with dogs and used as pets because you ultimately can't vaccinate them against rabies. But there's a big market about it with some interesting people who do this for hobbies or sidelines of business, and these people just unleashed on the Capitol and on me and threatened to do me in and hurt me and all this kind of stuff, and they finally called my secretary one day and said they were going to burn down my house because they knew where I lived in Decatur. Well then I knew I didn't have to worry, because they thought I lived in the city of Decatur, and I figured they didn't know where in heck Decatur County was, 250 miles down the road, so I was safe. But it became this big firestorm of all these wolf dog breeders who were after my hide for that session. Another session, when I got into child support legislation, I found out that this fathers' group very much didn't like what I was trying to do on child support issues.

Cathy Cox: 00:45:45 And a lot of my experience had come out of practice with parents who were really struggling to make ends meet on child support and they threatened my life to the extent that the GBI had to assign agents to stay with me around the clock, basically around the Capitol and stand behind me in committee meetings where these people were getting angry and hostile and it was a surreal experience to think that people were going to get that mad that they'd start threatening your life over legislation, but it's probably good I had that experience at an early age and never had any serious problems.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:46:26 What did your husband think about all of that?

Cathy Cox: 00:46:26 I wasn't married at the time.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:46:26 Oh, you weren't married at that time.
Cathy Cox: 00:46:26 So it was mainly my mother who was worried about me, and way up here in the foreign land of Atlanta by myself.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:46:33 Going up there in that sin city.

Cathy Cox: 00:46:33 Right.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:46:39 People can get very emotional very quick about things that you say, that you might not think were at all ... probably the thing that was as emotional as anything while you were in the legislature was the flag issue. That was just developing when you were there, wasn't it? Of course it blew up under Barnes. Let's see, you were in secretary of state's office by that time, by the time that all blew up, weren't you?

Cathy Cox: 00:47:07 Yes.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:47:09 Were you aware of how hot an issue that was going to be?

Cathy Cox: 00:47:11 I was aware, because it did come up in my first legislative race in 1992, because Zell Miller had started talking about changing the flag in 1991, and so I was asked constantly on the campaign trail, what I was going to do about the flag. I had what I think was a good answer, and in a real hostile crowd one night of pretty good old working boys in one of the counties where I was running, and they asked me what I was going to do about the flag, and so I told them a story about a plant, an industry over in Bainbridge that had been bought out by a Texas company in just the last couple of years before my election. They knew there was something controversial about our flag at the time, and so they polled their employees and found out that a lot of the employees were really troubled by the flag, and so they did their homework and found out that it was legal to fly any flag that Georgia had ever had. So they started flying the pre-1956 flag at this business in Bainbridge that employed a couple hundred people.

Cathy Cox: 00:48:22 And so I said to this group of guys, I said, "You know, we need jobs in southwest Georgia. Wouldn't you agree?" They agreed. I said, "I don't want anything to stand in our way of bringing jobs to the state." I told them the story of this business in Bainbridge, and I said, "If it takes changing the flag to bring more jobs here, then I'm going to vote to change the flag." I obviously didn't get a round of applause from that answer, but I got a call from some of them the next day, and they said, "You actually said something we hadn't thought about. And we're going to support you." They were my supporters from then to
this day, because I didn't get uppity with them and look down on them and that kind of thing, but it gave them a reason not to say you all are all racist and whatever. I put it in a context of economic development and it made sense to them.

Cathy Cox: 00:49:18 But I knew how hot they were about it, and of course, Zell, my first I guess governor state of the state speech in 1992, he hammered on the legislature about the flag and the need to change the flag, and basically told all of us we were racist, and I had some of the same reaction that probably those guys would have had, had I said that to them. I got my back up. I'm not a racist. But by golly, you're not going to force me to do X, Y, Z. And ultimately, it didn't come up. It never got to the point of a vote in 1992 under Zell's administration, and he backed away from it. Had to deal with it in his reelection. But everybody knew just prior to Governor Barnes dealing with the flag issue, that it was hot. That it was still very much simmering around the state. I don't know that anybody could had anticipated a lot of fallout about the way it happened, and the quickness with which it happened, but I think most people around here believe it could not have happened other than the way it did.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:50:27 Senator Barnes of course, gets credit for doing that, and when he actually pushed it, I guess you were already in the secretary of state's office. You had already come over. And of course, she's the one that handled flags. Were you all involved in drawing up the flag? We you personally involved in it?

Cathy Cox: 00:50:50 No, not the first flag.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:50:53 The blue flag.

Cathy Cox: 00:50:54 The blue Barnes flag.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:50:55 What did they call it, the ... I forget now. Some kind of a Denny's...

Cathy Cox: 00:51:02 Some people referred to it as the Denny's placemat.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:51:05 Denny's placemat. That was iy.

Cathy Cox: 00:51:07 Because it was this menu of things to choose from, but I knew it was being discussed. I didn't know it was being discussed as seriously as it was, but I remembered reading something that Cecil Alexander had written, and that he had drawn up this flag, which was very much like the ultimate version, and I was on a plane flying somewhere with Governor Barnes, and when you're
on the state plane, it's a great opportunity to buttonhole the governor and talk to him about whatever you want to talk to him about, and we got to talking about the flag, and this picture that I'd seen of Cecil Alexander's flag, and it looked like an interesting version, and I remember Governor Barnes saying, "Yeah, it is kind of interesting." He didn't let on that he was seriously thinking about taking on that task, and ultimately that's what they came up with.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:52:04 It was hot then, but you got out before the great sweep began, and Roy, Governor Barnes, and what was the guy's name that was his right-hand man?

Cathy Cox: 00:52:20 Bobby Kahn.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:52:22 Kahn, yeah. They ended up getting blamed for doing the Democratic Party in, and I remember talking to Mr. Murphy about that time. It was shortly before then, and he was concerned because the feeling was the governor gets up every morning and looks in the mirror and says, who can I alienate today? It really bothered him because Murphy felt that he had worked for two decades to keep the Democratic Party in power, change the voting, change this, change that, do what you need to do to stay here. Then it was all going down the drain very quickly. Was there any sense of that? Or were you so focused in the House, and then later in the secretary of state's office as an assistant secretary, that you knew this was coming? I have to wonder why you left the House, and went over to the secretary of state's office as an assistant secretary of state.

Cathy Cox: 00:53:20 It didn't have anything to do with that. It was really a matter of ... by 1996, driving back and forth from Bainbridge, Georgia to Atlanta, all during the legislative session, and every time you had to be here for committee meetings, and I had appointed to lots of study committees and things like that. It was killing me, personally in my law practice. And my partners weren't happy with it, and I had pretty much decided I've either got to find a way to do public service full time, or I've got to get out of it and devote myself to my law practice. And I really hadn't decided how I might go down that path, when in 1995, end of '95, Max Cleland resigned as Secretary of State to run for the US Senate, Zell Miller appointed Lewis Massey as secretary of state. A mutual friend, Lewis and I knew each other but we were not particularly good friends. He was working for Pierre Howard in the Senate. A friend suggested that I might be interested in being his chief assistant. His assistant secretary of state, so Lewis called me.
It was just one of those things that struck me at the right time, at the right place, as the leap of faith I needed to take, and so I gave up my seat in the House, and moved back to Atlanta to work in the secretary of state's office full time. Not knowing at all that a year, just barely a year later, and year and a half later, in 1997, the front-runners for governor were Pierre Howard and Mike Bowers. Then the whole landscape changed. Pierre drops out of the race, scandals broke about Mike Bowers, and then Lewis Massey decides, I'm going to jump in the governor's race. Like a day after Roy Barnes decided, because he had started the governor's race, and gone back to the lieutenant governor's race, then Pierre drops out and Roy jumps back to the governor's race, and a day later Lewis Massey announces for the governor's race.

So I said, "Well, who's going to run for secretary of state? Might as well be me." And I had a little bit of the 1992 naivety of saying, "I know I can be the best secretary of state. I know I can do this job better than anybody else." But I also knew by that point, I'm not known statewide, I don't have any personal wealth or money to do this, and no woman has ever been elected to this office. But I did it anyway, and made it.

Yeah, you did. This was much like what happens in some other areas where an opportunity presents itself and you have to decide. Like what's his name now. Obama running for president. In your position, all of a sudden, there's an opening, I think I can do that. If I let it go by, there might not be another chance. Was that a sense of what you had?

Absolutely.

And a good bit of ambition, wouldn't you say?

You have to have ambition to ...

I'm not taking it as negative. I think it has to be ...

... to do it, and think you can convince people to support you in doing it, and particularly in convincing people to give you the money, you need to do it, when you don't have the personal wealth to finance a campaign. I dove in, and at that time, the secretary of state's office was not as perhaps prominent and publicly in view as it is today, and I had good relations, enough good relationships with the other powers around the Capitol, that no other Democrat challenged me. And because I had been in the office, I had a little bit of a leg up in understanding it, and
I know Republican legislators who were recruited to run against me and said, "No, we like her." And so I had a pretty clear field fortunately in 1998 to run and win without having to fight a primary.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:57:24 Was there any point where the Republicans tried to get you to switch over?

Cathy Cox: 00:57:28 No, not seriously. I've had such good friendships with Republican legislators over the years. There have been frequent times when they would come into this office and say, "We sure wish you'd join us." Sort of facetiously, but more from a friendship standpoint than anything seriously.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:57:48 What was Lewis Massey like to work with?

Cathy Cox: 00:57:51 Lewis was great. Lewis was great, and he like me, had grown up with a dad who was always involved in politics and he knew the process like I did, so we were on parallel tracks of coming into an office but being very familiar with the people and the landscape in this building. Lewis, I think, never fully got his hands around the office, and maybe because I said, "Let me, let me," he really let me as the chief operations person, really run the office. That was of a great benefit when I ran for secretary of state, but he didn't dive into the nuts and bolts and day-to-day operation as much as I did when I was elected.

Dr. Mel Steely: 00:58:47 Why did he make the decision not to go for governor?

Cathy Cox: 00:58:51 We had a lot of discussions about that. In that just day or two period, when out of the blue, he didn't know that Pierre, as close as he was to Pierre Howard, he didn't know that Pierre was going to drop out. He might have known the day before, but he didn't have any more advance notice than that. He had been so close to Pierre Howard in the Senate, as sort of Pierre's chief aide, he felt like he'd already been in the lieutenant governor's office. I know the public didn't see it that way, because he wasn't the office holder, but he felt like, I've been there, I've done that, I'm ready to take on the responsibilities of the governor's office.

Cathy Cox: 00:59:35 We talked a lot about Ellis Arnall, whose statue is right outside this window, and how young he was as a governor and how many innovative things he did as a governor in the '40s, and Lewis take to that model, that he could be the Ellis Arnall of the 21st century, and that people would ... he was very popular from day one as secretary of state, very attractive person and
candidate, and he felt like he could do it. And that he'd already been in the lieutenant governor's office and it was one of those things where in his gut, that was the moment to try it.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:00:14 Yeah, there is that moment in politics.

Cathy Cox: 01:00:30 No doubt about that.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:00:39 All right, Mr. Massey finally made the decision not to run for governor, and you made the decision to run for secretary of state, did you ever regret it?

Cathy Cox: 01:00:56 Oh no, no.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:00:58 You’ve enjoyed it.

Cathy Cox: 01:00:59 I have loved it. Loved it, and I often tell students, when they say, how did you get into politics, how do you prepare yourself to be secretary of state or whatever. I certainly did not grow up thinking I wanted to be secretary of state. But what I had learned over the course of life, is if you'll just follow paths until you see the next thing that grabs your interest, and then take a turn. There's nothing in the world wrong with taking a detour this way or that way, because it can lead you to so many interesting places. People thought I’d lost my mind in 1996 when I gave up my seat in the legislature to take a bureaucrat’s job as assistant secretary of state. But I ultimately make my decisions based on what I think is right, and I think God speaks to me in my gut, and it was just one of those things I was very at peace that I was doing the right thing.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [01:02:04]

Cathy Cox: 01:02:00 ... thing.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:02:04 When you look back on your ... Well, two periods. One, the first period would be your job as assistant secretary and you were involved in a lot of stuff then. What people might define as reformist or whatever. All the corporate work that you ... That was pretty much your baby, wasn’t it?

Cathy Cox: 01:02:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:02:25 They just dropped that on you and this leads to a considerable amount of reform when you get to be secretary. But, talk to us for just a minute about the assistant secretary and what you were doing there and the changes you were making.
Well, in 1996 when Lewis Massey and I came into the office, we found an office that needed some attention. Max Cleland is the great big picture guy. You know, Max loved to give speeches and talk about vision and patriotism and all the things that we love Max for. But, Max was not particularly interested in managing the day-to-day nuts-and-bolts of the Secretary of State's office. And so, we found in 1996 an office that kind of ran itself and was not particularly focused on doing the jobs that it was supposed to do and definitely not focused on customer service. And coming from a law practice that had to interact with the Secretary of State's office a lot, I had my share of frustrations about, for example, how long it took to form a corporation.

It would take six to eight weeks to form a basic corporation and if you were ever in a hurry from a business standpoint or a client standpoint, it was just like dealing with this big bureaucratic mess here in Atlanta. Call them on the phone, it would take thirty minutes for somebody to even answer the phone. I mean, lawyers joked about it being routine. You put the Secretary of State's office on your speaker phone and walked around for thirty minutes until they finally answered the phone. And then you might get the right answer, you wanted to reserve a corporate name. You would have to wait a couple weeks until they'd send you an approval. It was ridiculous. And we had some staff people that had just been told, "Go do your own thing." There was not a lot of accountability and when we started saying, "Well, we've got to do this better. We've got to be quicker. We've got to pay more attention to our customer needs," we ran into some people that said, "It's always been done this way." My least favorite phrase. And those people were pretty quickly weeded out of here.

And we brought in staff and moved staff around, who really got Lewis’s and my focus on customer service and how important it was that we answered the phones and we’re nice to people and even here in the front office of the Capitol where we get a lot of the generic calls from people who don’t know who else to call in government, if they would call and say, "I'm really having problems with my driver's license, the standard answer at that time was, "Sorry, we don't do that," and they'd hang up on them. And I thought that was completely unacceptable and we have developed a culture of saying, whatever your question is, we'll get you to the right place. We're sort of the all-purpose referral agency. But we had to have a real culture shift and put into the performance evaluations of every employee, an element of customer service so that if we got repeated complaints about how rude you were to our customers, you
were going to be out the door and we would have documentation to show it.

Cathy Cox: 01:05:48 But, we also gave our employees a lot of chances to improve and offered them classes on telephone skills and dealing with the public and dealing with hostile customers and giving them the ability to meet our expectations. But, some people rose to the challenge and some people didn't and we made a lot of staff changes in those early years to get things running on the track we wanted to. Lewis Massey, more so than me, was really into technology and said, "We've got to have a website," and in 1996, we started developing a website for the Secretary of State's office. We were one of the first state agencies to actually have a functional website. I remember going around to civic clubs saying, "We're going to have this thing called a website and you will be able to interact with us over this other thing called the internet," and in 1996, you could see glazed faces in the audience of business people who did not know what you were talking about. "What do you mean? I'm not going to have to call your office? I'm not going to have to go to Atlanta?" And that's how quickly technology has changed everything we do.

Cathy Cox: 01:07:01 I'm happy to say that leaving office in another couple of weeks, you can now completely go through the process of incorporating a business online. Don't have to send us a shred of paper ever again.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:07:18 Just your credit card number.

Cathy Cox: 01:07:19 Just a credit card number and get it done. And we have revolutionized how the business community and the legal community really use and interact in our office by putting information on the web for them to use whenever they need it to, to make our services as readily available on the internet as people have come to expect from the business world and it's been wonderful and it's been probably the most popular thing that we've done and helped the business community in Georgia, as much as anything that's happened in state government in ages.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:07:50 You've also been involved in consumer protection and in the various licensing commissions and all of that stuff and in the decentralization of the office of Secretary of State. Now, did you start in that before you became secretary or did you wait until you actually got elected to decentralize?

Cathy Cox: 01:08:13 No, actually, our professional licensing board section which licenses nurses and dentists and architects and dozens and
dozens of occupations and professions had been located about two blocks from the state capitol on the other side of Atlanta City Hall in a building that was just a dump. I mean, it had everything from HVAC to termite problems and everything in-between and the state had not done a good job of maintaining it. And, after my ultimate election in November of 1998, the state building authority said, "We're going to sell that building and you've got to get out," and so between November and January, I had to start thinking about what we were going to do with that part of my office and I decided first, maybe out of necessity, because they said, "There's no room in the Twin Towers Complex. There's no other room on Capitol Hill for you to move. Go find some space."

Cathy Cox: 01:09:11 Office space in Atlanta is costly. So, I said, "Why do we have to be in Atlanta? Let's move out of Atlanta." And so the first decision that I made as Secretary of State in 1999 was to move the professional licensing section out of downtown Atlanta, down to Macon. When I decided to do that, Tom Murphy sat me down and I'll tell you exactly what he said, almost quoting, he said, "Little lady, this is going to get you beat when you run for reelection." He thought it was a horrible idea to move a state office out of Atlanta. I said, "Well, Mr. Speaker, it'll actually be easier for your constituents to get from Bremen to Macon, than to get into downtown Atlanta traffic." "I don't see how it's going to work. You're going to be sorry you did this," but the Speaker also didn't understand technology and he didn't understand how the location, the physical location of a state office was going to become more and more irrelevant to the services we provide.

Cathy Cox: 01:10:16 So, we moved to Macon. We worked out a great deal with the city of Macon to renovate a building that an industry had vacated. It was a win-win situation. The city wanted a good tenant in that building. It was across the street from their Coliseum Centreplex complex. We ultimately worked at a building and the first year we were there, we saved over $200,000 in rent over what we would have paid if there had been space for us in the Twin Towers state-owned office building.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:10:45 I'll be darned.

Cathy Cox: 01:10:46 So, it was a great move for the taxpayers, but technology made if feasible with fax and phone and computer lines, people really didn't care where we were. There were less and less reasons they had to go to our office, but it's been, I think, a really good
model that now with technology could work for virtually any state agency.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:11:06 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, you've had some pretty good experiences before you decided you were going to run for Secretary of State. You'd been well-exposed to just about all the major problems that were there. You jumped into the race and had been very successful in a House Representatives race, but now you're running statewide. Big leap, isn't it? Tell us about your reaction to trying to put together a statewide campaign.

Cathy Cox: 01:11:41 Well, we did it on a shoestring, you know? You quickly find out that not a lot of people are real interested in the Secretary of State's office. You don't get to make appointments to anything. You don't have money and grants to hand out. You really rely on people who are interested in good government. Maybe the people who are licensed by this office and the legal community that wants to make sure it's well run, but it is not a high-profile office. But, again, I loved the office. I knew I could do the job well, so I just jumped in, put together a very young skimpy staff and got on the telephone and started raising money. And in both of my races for Secretary of State, the legal community was definitely my biggest source of support. In 1998, they already were seeing improvements we were making, particularly in the corporation segment and were happy to support my candidacy.

Cathy Cox: 01:12:51 Then, and in all future races, they knew I was about making changes and improvements that very much benefited them and their client base. When you're born and raised in Bainbridge, Georgia, you know this is a big state because you have to drive a long way to get anywhere and the magnitude of traveling the state was not that much of a surprise as it is for some candidates from Atlanta, who never get outside the perimeter. But, people were very generous. You learn as a statewide candidate, you go through the anxiety of raising money and you learn that it's your own anxiety. When you call people and ask for money, if they can give it, they will and they're very generous. If they can't, they'll tell you and it's not personal and you have to learn, I think particularly female candidates have a hard time with that. You have to learn you can't take it personally. If they can't give you money or if they don't want to give you money, thank them and you move on.

Cathy Cox: 01:13:52 But, we raised about $650,000, I think, in my first race. We were able to do a couple of weeks of TV advertising. I got lots of support from my friends in the legislature and that gave me a really good network to work from, more so than somebody else
just kind of starting out from scratch trying to run a statewide campaign.

Dr. Mel Steely: **01:14:13** Mm-hmm (affirmative). Who was your Republican opponent in the November election?

Cathy Cox: **01:14:17** Of 1998?

Dr. Mel Steely: **01:14:20** Yeah.

Cathy Cox: **01:14:21** It was a young man named McCallum. His last name was McCallum. He was a very nice young Republican. I'm just grateful I didn't have to run against his wife, who was a former Miss America. She was the former Miss America, Heather Whitestone from Alabama, who had a hearing problem, who was just a real princess of a young lady and very well-known and well-liked and her husband was a nice guy, but it didn't end up being a terrible race, but I didn't know at the time. Both of them had a lot of national Republican contacts. I think he had interned some with Newt Gingrich. She had done some work with Bob Dole and they were putting big national Republican names on a lot of fundraising invitations. But, in the end, I had the better network.

Dr. Mel Steely: **01:15:18** Yeah. Now, you run a second race and won and then you got into the governor's race, all statewide. What groups did you turn to for support that came through for you and which ones did you think would that didn't?

Cathy Cox: **01:15:38** Well, in all three statewide races, the legal community was my biggest source of support. In the Secretary of State's office because that was one group that really knew it was important to have the office run well. They had to interact with it all the time from corporations, from securities, from a lot of other areas and they were willing to put up a lot of money to support me as a candidate in those races. In the governor's race, I had the benefit both of the legal community knowing that I had done a good job as Secretary of State, knowing that I had been a practicing attorney for a decade. I also had the benefit of having a wide circle of friends in the Atlanta legal community and in rural Georgia, because I had practiced in both places and had been involved enough in the state bar and in other legal circles to have lots of friendships in the legal community.

Cathy Cox: **01:16:39** Also, by the time I was running for governor, I was married and my husband, who is also a lawyer in DeKalb County, had lots and lots of his own friends in the legal community, which also
helped us a great deal. So, without question, the lawyers of the state have been my biggest source of support.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:16:59 How about the soccer moms, the women, the African-American community. Those were supposed to be the hard-core Democratic support groups. Did they stay with you?

Cathy Cox: 01:17:12 Well, the women were very excited about my candidacy for governor and I had lots of support from women and from women's groups. The Georgia WIN List is an organization that I have been involved with from the time they formed and their whole mission was to elect more Democratic women to office and they stepped out immediately upon my announcement of candidacy to support me and to help me raise money and to rally the troops for me. I think, in hindsight, my campaign consultants probably took women for granted too much, expected them to be there, didn't feel like we had to gear too much of our messaging toward women because they thought they'd be there with us and I think, in hindsight, that was probably a mistake. I'm confident I got the bulk of the women's vote, but I probably should have gotten more of it.

Cathy Cox: 01:18:12 But, women can be harder on other women than sometimes even men can be and, unfortunately, I think we're still at a stage in politics today where there's an expectation for women candidates that you have to be and do everything perfectly. There is no room for anything that is not perceived as perfect. With men candidates, you run down this laundry list of scandals and self-interest and the public kind of says, "Yeah, yeah, they all do this," but if there's any suggestion of imperfection on a woman candidate, they're much quicker to want to toss her out, where they just roll with it, with men. And that'll change over time. We've just to keep more women in the pipeline.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:19:04 How about the African-American vote?

Cathy Cox: 01:19:07 The African-American vote is obviously very important and we knew it would be in the Democratic primary and I had endorsements by a majority of the legislative black caucus in the governor's race, in the primary. At the end, my opponent put out some completely false information on the weekend before the election to almost every African-American household in the state that said I was re-instituting Jim Crow laws, that I was disenfranchising African-Americans. It was outrageous and it had a huge impact in the black community and I lost a lot of their votes because of it.
Not helpful. I guess not unexpected, in the end, but dirty politics.

Are you a little bitter about all that?

I guess I'm just realistic about it, you know? I knew I was running against a real hard-core machine that would do anything, anything, to win that election and they did. And I didn't have the money they did to counter it. Not that even money could have made a big difference when you're putting out trash on the Friday and the Monday before a primary election. I wish that voters had the savvy to understand that any attack you get, in any race, from any party, on the weekend before an election is almost 99% of the time going to be a lie, but they don't. You know, they digest it and act accordingly.

I'm afraid you're right. There's not that much, aside from the African-American community, there really is very little serious loyalty to a political party by anybody anymore. People switch back and forth. If you had gotten the nomination, you would have had the black vote in November, because whoever the Democrat was, was going to get it. But, can you think of any other group that is locked in?

Well, labor is very much committed to Democrats and labor is very much still male-dominated. The leadership is male-dominated. Their orientation is not supportive of women and I found out, just in recent weeks, that one of the few female leaders in the labor community, who was not particularly out front for me ... People knew she was my friend, she was instrumental in keeping the AFL-CIO from making an endorsement in the primary, but the day after the primary, she was fired from her job because they felt like she supported me and I was not the nominee. And that's just kind of the hardball that they played. It's grossly unfair. Had nothing to do with her job. Had to do with her supporting a female candidate over the good old boy system and I'm terribly sad for her that it happened, but it's, in a lot of ways, symbolic of some of the problems that are happening right now in the labor movement and some of the problems the Democratic Party of Georgia is having.

But, you're seeing a good bit of change in regard to the role women play. I mean, if you go back when you were a little girl and people were just pioneering as women and getting to be a vice-chairman of a committee was so important and now they chair committees, you've got you sitting here in the Secretary of State's office. You were considered a legitimate, good chance to
be governor, Hillary Clinton a good chance to be President. I mean, there have been a huge number of changes where women are accepted. Do you feel any of that? I mean, what I'm seeing is-

Cathy Cox: 01:23:08 Oh, yeah.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:23:09 ... you still see a lot of the old stuff. Is that going to die away with age or what?

Cathy Cox: 01:23:14 It will. It will die away with age and I think back even when I ran for Secretary of State in 1998, there had not been a woman candidate for Secretary of State. Had not been a woman as Secretary of State and every time I turned around in 1998, somebody would say, "I'm not sure a woman can do that job." They weren't shy about saying it to your face, you know? They might have ultimately voted for me, thinking I still wasn't going to win, but they just really had doubts about it. I never heard that in the governor's race, except when it was put out by my opponents, who were trying to persuade people that Georgia was not ready for a woman governor. So, I know, even in the span of eight years, public perception has changed tremendously. Like you say, that I even could be considered a serious candidate, that I raised almost exactly the same amount of money as my primary opponent, I was in there until the very end in that primary and even though I didn't prevail, that's going to move things a step higher for the next woman that comes along.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:24:26 Mm-hmm (affirmative), I think there's a good bit to that. I've just seen so many changes for women. My granddaughters can come along now with full expectation that they could run for whatever they wanted to run for. Big discussions about private business and owing corporations and what they'll let you do and not do, but things have changed.

Cathy Cox: 01:24:50 They are changing. I had lunch today with a little sixth grade student who had a school auction. Her parents had allowed her to buy a lunch with me and so we were talking about women in office and I asked her if she would ever be interested in politics and she said, "I don't know. Maybe." And I told her the story about how people at first didn't think a woman could be Secretary of State. I said, "But guess what? The next Secretary of State is going to be a woman." And she said, "Oh, how cool. Two in a row." And, you know, that is going to change the perception of young girls and boys. The more they see women in those offices, nobody raised a question among Karen Handel
and Gail Butner. We had two women. The nominees for Secretary of State were both women and nobody blinked-

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:25:39  Never an issue.

Cathy Cox: 01:25:39  ... at all about that. Whereas, just eight years ago, they were doubting whether a woman could even do the job, much less win the job. So, I hope I've put that kind of thing to rest and other women will stay in the pipeline and it will die out over time because young people like this sixth grade girl are going to grow up in a world and say, "Sure, women can do anything."

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:26:05  Yeah, and I can remember when Max left office. The press, a lot of other people talked about this is the job that is reserved for cripples because you had before him, Ben Fortson in a wheelchair and then Max was in a wheelchair and there was this feeling that if you're crippled, you ought to go to the Secretary of State's office. We owe it to you, kind of thing.

Cathy Cox: 01:26:29  Well, and that is the downside. I don't want this to become pegged as the only office a woman can do.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:26:37  Well, that wasn't the only office a cripple could do, either, but people had that view.

Cathy Cox: 01:26:41  Mm-hmm (affirmative), sure.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:26:41  And I think they're going to begin thinking that here, but you've got ... There have been other women that have run for governor or lieutenant governor, but none have been seriously considered by the press or by the public, generally, as legitimate candidates and this person really has a chance to win, so I think there have been some real changes. Probably the most controversial thing you did as Secretary of State was the voting machine changes. Tell us about how that came about and walk through the whole thing. I had a woman who was a yellow dog Democrat say, "I'll never vote for that woman. She's the one that put those things in that's letting Bush steal our votes." And I said, "But she's a Democrat." And she said, "I don't care." Bam, that's it. That was about as strong a feeling ... Did you see a lot of that?

Cathy Cox: 01:27:43  No, there are not many people who feel that way and those who do, don't have any of the information about how the system works, but it came about because of the 2000 presidential election when all the world was focused on Florida and the recount process and all of the hideous aspects of
elections that nobody in this country had ever thought about. So, while all of that was going on in Florida, I started asking the questions, "Well, what happened on our watch?" And I actually had a staff member who kind of was a general assistant of mine here in the front office of the Capitol and who happened to be working on his Masters in Public Administration and I said ... You know, he's taking statistics courses and I said, "Let's take a look at our voting data and see what happened here?"

Cathy Cox: 01:28:37  And he dove into this and came back with the shocking news that we had lost almost 94,000 votes for President in Georgia. That was over 3.5% of our total votes which, ultimately, CalTech and MIT said was the second worst voting accuracy rate in the nation, worse proportionately than the votes that were lost in Florida. And we were so stunned and so surprised to start looking ... At the time we had almost half the counties were still voting on the 40-year-old lever machines, mechanical lever machines. We had dozens of counties that were using what they perceived to be better, the optical scan ballot, like a standardized test, you filled in a bubble or connected an arrow out beside a name. And then we had our biggest counties, Fulton County, Richmond County, Clayton County, DeKalb using punch cards that had been so prominent in the Florida problem. And, across the board, we saw all these error rates, but the highest error rates we really saw were on the optical scan system, the newer system.

Cathy Cox: 01:29:47  We found precincts that lost as much as 20% of their votes on optical can ballots. We had one county that gave their voters the wrong pencil and none of their votes would count at the end of the day because the machine wouldn't scan with that pencil. There's a process we put them through so the votes could be counted, but you could see how easy it would be for somebody to go in with their own fancy, Montblanc pen and fill out a ballot and never know that it didn't count. So, we did further analysis and found out that there was even a racial component to this voting problem. And, particularly with that optical scan ballot, there are black and white voters in the same county using that optical scan equipment, African-American voters would have four to six points higher error rates on that ballot than white voters in the same county using the same equipment. And I don't know enough to know why that was, a sociological issue, an educational experience issue with standardized testing or what, but there was a very definitive problem in every county that used optical scan equipment.

Cathy Cox: 01:31:02  But, across the board, we said, we've got to make a change. I'm Secretary of State now. I don't want to have to go through
another election cycle knowing that we have this kind of error rate. My Lord, we had had five statewide races in the previous 30 years that had been decided by less than 25,000 votes. So, you start saying, "I wonder who really won, if we're losing almost 100,000 votes in an election cycle?" So, I went to Governor Barnes with my data. I said, "We need to look at this immediately." Got legislative support to put a study committee together in 2001 and we went to work on finding out what could be better and how we could fix the problem. We looked at all the available options for voting around the nation and the committee ultimately came out with the unanimous recommendation that we should move into a statewide, uniform system of voting on an electronic platform.

Cathy Cox: 01:31:59 So, I went back to the legislature in 2002. By this time, Congress is beginning to already talk about what needs to be done in fixing the problems from 2000 but, as usual, Congress was dragging its feet, but I felt like there was such supporting Congress to do something that eventually there would be money for this, so with strong backing from Governor Roy Barnes, we introduced legislation in 2002 to move to a system of uniform electronic voting and to have the state issue bonds, almost $55 million in bonds to go ahead and buy electronic voting equipment for every county in the state, so it wasn't an unfunded mandate on the counties, everybody could benefit from the same experience and training. They gave me almost $5 million that I asked for, to do a massive educational program to help people make this transition to electronic voting and not be afraid of it and in the span of a few months, we got the bill passed, we got the funding in the budget, we put out a bid for-

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:33:04]

Cathy Cox: 01:33:00 The bill passed. We got the funding in the budget. We put out a bid for contract. We got a contract with the Diebold Company in about late April or May of 2002 and by November, every county in Georgia was voting on electronic equipment. We had a great experience, virtually no problems of any consequence. By 2004, we'd already used it in lots and lots of cities statewide, special elections. The next presidential election rolls around, Caltech and MIT come back and do the same analysis and find that Georgia has moved from the second worse accuracy rate to the second best accuracy rate in the nation, only a hair behind the state of Maryland which adopted the same exact kind of voting equipment that we bought.

Cathy Cox: 01:33:50 I'm very pleased at where we've gone. It hasn't been controversial with the general public. They like it. They know it's
easier to use. They know that it lessens the chance they'll make a mistake that will result in their vote not being counted. It's an interesting phenomenon with the computer. Folks forget that we had been voting with computers since the 1960s. The punch cards were counted by computers. The optical scan ballots were counted by computers, but the computer was in the back shop and the voter didn't see it. They also didn't appreciate there were virtually no safeguards or standards on how those computers were programmed or tested or if they were tested at all.

Cathy Cox: 01:34:38 When we moved the computer out front to the voter, we had a small group of people that just went nuts over it, despite not knowing all of the security we now have in place, all of the protocols we have in place for testing every machine before every election, all of the abilities we've come to acquire through setting up an election center at Kennesaw State University to help us program the ballots, to give us a great level of independence and a firewall from our vendor, if you believe a vendor was corrupt. They don't know how we program our ballots because they help us do this now with our staff at Kennesaw State. But the public doesn't understand all that.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:35:17 No, they really don't.

Cathy Cox: 01:35:18 There's been a group that has been able to tap into a lot of media attention and frenzy to make people skeptical of the voting system. When we bought this equipment in 2002, there was no paper component that you could buy. Now, the technology is evolving, just like in any other business. Now they're coming out with paper receipts and mechanisms. We did a pilot project November of 2006, this most recent election, to start testing this out. We asked voters in the three counties where we tested this, "Are you confident in the security of the voting system?" 87% said yes. "Would you be more confident if we had this paper component?" 89% said yes.

Cathy Cox: 01:36:07 So you start having to ask yourself, "How much money do you want to spend to maybe get a 2% increase in confidence?" Maybe it's worth it. In particularly, when you have a recount process and people don't understand the process for recounts with electronic voting. We're probably moving in that way, but the technology is still changing. I hope in the years to come that Congress is going to step up to the plate, before they mandate anything else, to come up with more funding to help the states do it, but that they're going to give the technology time to get to a stage of being real user friendly.
Cathy Cox: 01:36:44 What people see at a grocery store and at an ATM machine is the result of a lot more than five years of technological evolution, but that's all we have in voting, is about five to six years of improvements in voting technology. I think they still have a long way to go.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:37:03 Yeah, I think they do too. The voting booth has been kind of sacrosanct. We've had people that have felt this year though that outside forces were coming in, the Diebold Company that you mentioned. Has the rise of conspiracy theorists related to the election surprised you at all?

Cathy Cox: 01:37:33 Yes, it surprised me because the arguments that most of these people make are so specious and have no connection to reality. I've listened to some of these folks say, "Those smart students over at West Georgia, Georgia Tech, they could hack into this voting system and do anything they wanted to." Well, excuse me, but nothing in the system is ever connected to the internet. How do you hack into a system that is never connected to the internet? But those arguments get circulated on the internet and people believe it. The press repeats those kinds of arguments and people believe it when it doesn't have any connection to reality.

Cathy Cox: 01:38:14 I've been most frustrated at the media's willingness to repeat a lot of nonsense that makes the public doubt something they ought not to doubt. I'm fine with people questioning it. My staff and I have spent hours upon hours, week and months upon months, trying to talk to a lot of these groups that have questions. Ultimately, some of them will listen and some of them do not want to be bothered by the facts. They are living the limelight and they want to keep spewing nonsense and conspiracy theories and that kind of thing. Our vendor has not helped the process.

Cathy Cox: 01:38:58 The former president of our vendor company, Diebold, made statements back in the 2004 election, I guess leading up to that, that he was ready to deliver Ohio for George Bush. Well, how stupid can it be for a president of a voting equipment company to be involved in anybody's campaign? But he'd been involved in banking, in the cloistered banking environment for so long. I don't think he ever made the shift to the public world of voting and how the public and the media look at that. He's no longer with the company. But that set off more conspiracy theories than anything else ...

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:39:42 Oh, I remember.
Cathy Cox: 01:39:43 ... in the world. He regretted it. I've talked to him personally about how ridiculous it was. He knew the fallout from it but you couldn't take it back and you couldn't take back the impressions that people make. But that's where I have to explain to people at Kennesaw State, we have the experts now that program our ballots. Even if we had a corrupt vendor who wanted to rig machines for Republican benefit, they don't know how we program our ballots. Some other states contract with the company to program their ballots. If they don't know whether we put Republicans on top or bottom or left, they can't put in any kind of virus or worm or whatever that would flip votes over to another candidate, if you could do that.

Cathy Cox: 01:40:31 We have testing on every machine before every election to verify that there has been no kind of tampering of any byte of software in our machines. But people don't understand the exhaustive levels of security protocols we've put in place. I can't explain it in a five-second soundbite. I'm up against people who say, "Oh, it's all rigged." And I have to go into thirty minutes of why we're confident it's not and they get the sound byte.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:41:07 I think that probably did hurt a little bit during the campaign, but I don't think that was a crucial thing, the voting machine thing. There were people who were, as I mentioned, were very upset about it, but there had to be other issues. To what do you contribute your defeat in this race?

Cathy Cox: 01:41:28 Well, my opponent got more votes than I did.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:41:30 Well. Is it just the nastiness of last minute campaigning or ... 

Cathy Cox: 01:41:34 You beat yourself up a lot after any election loss like that. We ended up having one of the lowest turnouts in the 2006 primary that we've had in any primary in decades. A lot of that I think had to do with the nastiness of the campaign. That again goes to how people perceive a woman candidate. If we had not gone on the attack after being attacked, there are a lot of people who would have said, "She's too weak. She can't stand up for herself. She can't get in there and fight with the boys," and I would have lost them for that reason.

Cathy Cox: 01:42:18 Then there were others who's like, "She's not being nice." Anytime a woman ... I've encountered this certainly over the years of being a lawyer, if I'm cross-examining somebody on the stand and I'm tough on them, then I'm a B-I-T-C-H. Where a male lawyer will be, "Oh he was tough. He really got them." It's exactly the same way a lot of people treat candidates, you know? "Well, she's on the attack so she's a B-I-T-C-H." A male
candidate on the attack is just doing what you have to do in politics.

Cathy Cox: 01:42:46 I think overall, because it did get so nasty and there was so much undercurrent that my opponent was putting out under the airwaves, that really hurt me a lot in the black community that it ultimately panned out to be a loss. From a polling standpoint, we were neck and neck with him right up until the end. He got a big bounce when Andrew Young endorsed him. Huge impact in the African American community, but we bounced back from that. We got back up right even with him until the last week or two where he really gutted me in the African American community.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:43:35 I've had the theory that you also had counted on a lot of women voting for you who didn't bother to show up at all.

Cathy Cox: 01:43:40 Well, you have to assume that was true with the overall low turnout. It was just abysmal.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:43:48 There was nothing that really motivated them. In fact, it was a low turnout from African Americans, even with having them running in the labor and the attorney general office didn't get it going all that well. When the race was over, you did not jump in immediately to begin campaigning for your opponent against the Republican. You want to talk about that at all?

Cathy Cox: 01:44:15 On election night, when I made my concession speech, I told the world that I would be supporting him, that I wished him well, that it was time to put the meanness behind us and move on to do the right things for Georgia. I meant that and meant it all the way until Election Day. The one fallacy going on here is that the losing candidate, I can't point to any time in Georgia history, when the losing candidate got out and campaigned for the winning candidate. I think that was another gender related thing. They expected a woman to go be nice. 1990, Roy Barnes didn't get out and campaign for Zell Miller after he lost in the primary. Andy Young didn't get out and campaign for Zell Miller when he lost. Lewis Massey did not get out and campaign for Roy Barnes when he lost in the 1998 primary.

Cathy Cox: 01:45:16 All of a sudden, there was this group that thought I should get out and campaign for Mark Taylor. It didn't happen and it doesn't happen and it wasn't going to happen for me as Secretary of State because I don't campaign for anybody. I'm the Secretary of State and I still had an office where I had an obligation to be fair and impartial in the handling of elections. In fact, I had gotten the law changed in Georgia after the 2000
presidential election where I thought the Florida Secretary of State was in an incredibly bad position of having a ... She was the campaign chairman for George Bush in Florida. Everybody in the world felt like she was biased, well at least Democrats, felt like she was biased in her handling of that process because of her position in the campaign.

Cathy Cox: 01:46:05 I got the law changed in Georgia to say the Secretary of State could not be involved in campaigns that I have to certify. I harped on that and I said that in my debates with Mark Taylor when he asked if I was going to endorse him. I don't and have not endorsed any candidates ever since I've been Secretary of State after we got the law changed because I don't think the Secretary of State should do that. I wasn't going to make a formal endorsement. I wasn't going to campaign for him or anybody else, including my very best friends. I don't make contributions to them because I need the world, Republicans and Democrats, to feel like ultimately the outcome of elections is going to be fair and accurate, not partisanly manipulated.

Cathy Cox: 01:46:50 I wasn't going to campaign for anybody. Be that as it may, the Taylor campaign did not help themselves because they had filed two lawsuits against me and my campaign staff during the primary. Immediately after I gave my concession speech in the days after the primary, I started asking, "Okay, are these lawsuits going to go away?" We got the message back, in no uncertain terms, that you don't mess around with Mark Taylor and that the lawsuits were not going to go away. We proceeded to go down the road and fight lawsuits for weeks after the primary. In fact, about a month after the primary, Taylor's lawyer was threatening to add me personally to one of the lawsuits.

Cathy Cox: 01:47:38 It was not until President Jimmy Carter saw me at an event in Columbus and asked, "Couldn't we get on board?" I told him about this lawsuit and he said, "Well, I'd like to help." He offered to get in and mediate a settlement of this lawsuit, which he did. He got on the phone the next morning, called the Taylor folks, called my folks, my husband, who is a lawyer, had stepped in to start basically representing my staff person who was the principle in this lawsuit to save me money, because we'd already had to pay out thousands of dollars in this lawsuit. We were running out of money rapidly. We just wanted the lawsuit dismissed. The Taylor campaign wanted to continue the lawsuit. They wanted to add me. They wanted to add other people. They wanted to sue the Savannah Morning News where some information was printed.
Because they wanted to continue the lawsuit, we were having to negotiate various kinds of dismissals with prejudice and settlement structures to make sure that we were protected. Ultimately, President Carter got everybody on the phone and got them to agree to virtually everything we had been trying to get for the previous six weeks. We got the lawsuit dismissed then on the terms that we wanted. The Taylor campaign then goes to the media and starts blasting my husband, saying he was the delay for all of this, which was an absolute lie and a slap at him and his integrity.

They just made it impossible for me to take any affirmative step further and help him. Even though I wasn't going to campaign for him actively and told him that from the beginning, but I felt like I did the best I could by trying to just be quiet and be neutral. I wasn't trying to hurt him. There was plenty I could have said at the time, but didn't. It was time for him to step up to the plate, make amends, which he didn't. The first time he ever apologized for anything was six days before the November election, when he called me and left a message on my answering machine saying, "If I've done anything to offend you, I'm sorry, but we sure would like your help in these final days." That's the long and short of it.

That's the time to go take a vacation, wasn't it?

Yes.

I remember Senator Russell spent an entire summer in Spain rather than have to campaign for Lyndon Johnson. He loved Lyndon but he just couldn't do it so he just stayed out of the country the whole time, investigating bases, air bases, in Spain or some such. You've worked with three governors in one capacity or another, with Zell, Zell Miller and Roy Barnes, and of course now Sonny Perdue. Would you take those three in order and just give us your assessment of them?

Zell was very much a larger than life kind of fixture because nobody much was close to Zell. To know Zell was kind of to be in awe of Zell and to be a little bit to step back from him. Zell just wasn't a warm and fuzzy kind of guy. He was always business, always matter of fact, but always focused. I felt like I worked well with him and supported virtually everything he brought up as governor.

He was tough and known for having a temper and going after people that crossed him and that kind of thing, but I had enormous respect for him and enormous respect for the fact
that he was always trying to push Georgia forward, that he had the vision singularly to come up with the HOPE Scholarship Program is still something that Georgia ought to be in awe of.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:51:52 Makes him one of the great governors.

Cathy Cox: 01:51:55 It absolutely did because it was his idea alone and the power of him in that office that got it passed and got it into the posture we have it today and that it's a model for everybody in the nation. From him, I learned that model of, in my view, a governor ought to always be pushing the state forward. When Roy Barnes was elected, I had a good close personal relationship with him because I'd been his colleague in the House. We'd been friends in the House Judiciary Committee. Roy and Zell could hardly be more different in personalities. Roy is like a modern day Marvin Griffin in terms of storytelling ability, charisma, to know Roy is to love Roy because he's so personable and so personably strong. He's such an effective and powerful communicator. I was always enthralled that Roy was always pushing the state forward and willing to take the risk like in changing the flag, when everybody was saying, "Wait for a second term. Play it safe. Don't tackle this." He said, "To hell with the risk. It needs to be done and I'm going to do it." He suffered a great loss largely because of that. He epitomized to me what a governor should be in terms of it's not about making it easy or to be reelected. It is about taking the public trust you're given in any term of office and doing as much with it as you possibly can. His weak link was in his ability to get people to buy into his big visions and to bring them to the table with him.

Cathy Cox: 01:53:57 He was always ten steps ahead of everybody in what he wanted to do and what results he could see. He had some staff people who were just alienating people with every step. If they didn't immediately jump on board, there was no hand holding, let's talk about this, we want you all on board. It was, "Okay, we don't need you." That wasn't Roy. That was Roy's staff. That was ultimately where lots of loyal Democratic booth groups, as we like to say, we had a big tent, but this group got thrown out of the tent. That group got thrown out of the tent. By reelection time, all these groups had left the tent because mainly staff people had alienated them and wouldn't give them access to Roy. I fully believe in 2002, if they had put Roy Barnes in a pickup truck from April to November and he didn't raise another dime and let him travel the state, he would have been reelected.

Cathy Cox: 01:54:53 They didn't let people get to Roy's strengths, which was Roy. To me, Roy was the best because he really, really wanted to move
the state forward. Perdue has gone back to being almost kind of an opposite. At every turn, let's play it safe. Some of that, I'm sure, is his philosophy that we shouldn't have big government and that kind of thing, but government has some basic functions that I think are critical to making life good in this state and to the economy of the state and to the wellness and betterness of the people in this state.

Cathy Cox: 01:55:31 But at every turn I felt like Perdue has been overly cautious and worried about reelection. Ultimately maybe that was the smart thing to do because he was reelected by such a landslide. I really felt like people want a governor who gives them somewhat of a challenge. Maybe not as much as Roy Barnes wanted to do but to challenge them to be better, to challenge them in a vision of how Georgia can be better. Governor Perdue seems much more comfortable to be a caretaker governor, not a visionary governor.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:56:16 You think you would have seen yourself as a visionary governor?

Cathy Cox: 01:56:19 Yeah. I would have been about big ideas.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:56:21 More like Roy?

Cathy Cox: 01:56:22 Yeah.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:56:25 We don't have a history of those people. Jimmy Carter probably is the only one I can think of. Well, Talmadge, Herman before him. Jimmy and then you have to go all the way to Roy to talk about really big change. Most governors have been interested in minor change at the fringes. Education programs that we'll set up but not fund. This kind of thing. You had a lot of that but huge changes, we go from Ellis Arnall to Herman to Jimmy to Roy.

Cathy Cox: 01:56:58 I felt that people were ready for ... Georgia is such a different state in 2006 than it was in the 1980s or 1990s when we were a one party state. Nobody was seriously ever going to challenge an incumbent. Almost everybody was a Democrat. You didn't have a genuine opposition party of strength to give you contrast and conflicting ideas.

Cathy Cox: 01:57:27 We have so many enormous problems right now in this state, with traffic congestion in Atlanta, with healthcare cost, with educational struggles where people want us to be so much better, we know our children need to be educated better than
they are to succeed in the future and I believe personally that Georgians want a governor who's going to address those problems. That's why I decided to challenge Governor Perdue because I did not feel like he was making any headway on any of those major fronts and that the public deserved it and was ready for it. Maybe I was wrong.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:58:11 We'll never know that one. Have to wait and see. Now one of the things that has developed is the changing face of the political structure itself, black versus white, rural versus urban. Just a whole series. Of course, Republican versus Democrat. Some have said that, in the Georgia legislature, you've got four parties, or four sectional groups. You've got the Democratic Party which is essentially divided black and white. You've got the Republican Party which is essentially divided religious right versus what you might call traditional Republicans. Anybody to be successful has to figure out how to get three of those four components to work with him. That's kind of a textbook thing but how does that fit with your view of things?

Cathy Cox: 01:59:06 That's pretty accurate. That's pretty accurate. I'm saddened to see a lot of the change in the Democratic structure around here because it has become, in any people's view, African American and urban whites. I'm saddened that a lot of the movement of rural Democrats, not all by any means, but some to the Republican Party, has been race based. I'm saddened that some of my colleagues are not bigger people than they are. That's largely where we are today.

Dr. Mel Steely: 01:59:48 It's been that way for about fifteen or so years. I can remember after the 2000, no it wasn't, it was the '94, '95, when they were redoing the electoral boundaries, revamping and remapping, redistricting the state. I was in a meeting with Lieutenant Governor Massey, not Massey, Howard, and Senator Gardner and I forget who all else. There was one of the senators who later became a senate majority leader. We came in, we sat down, made an agreement. All of us walked across the hall together, sat down, took the vote, and he voted the other way.

Dr. Mel Steely: 02:00:39 Just the opposite of what he agreed to less than ten minutes earlier. Of course Lieutenant Governor Howard and the others were very distressed because it cost them, what they were trying to do. I remember we asked him, "What's going on?" He said, "Well, I thought about it as I walked across there," and he said, "My people ain't going to let me do that." He said, "But it was the right thing to do." He said, "I don't have anything to do with it." By his people he didn't mean black voters. He meant there's a small group that he worked with that would not go
along with it. The same thing's probably true with labor, with various religious groups. You got small groups inside groups. It's very difficult to work with them now.

Cathy Cox: 02:01:30 It is. A lot of today's communication arms with technology make it worse. With the internet and the anonymity that comes with blogs and things like that. You get people up here in the legislature who are so afraid of their shadow and so afraid of not being reelected that they would do anything to appease these groups, even when they know in their heart they're not the right thing to do because they absolutely would just die if they couldn't be reelected to this little $16,000 a year job in the legislature. To too many of them, it's the only thing in their life that's ever made them a big person and they'll sell their soul to stay in that position. That's a cancer on politics.

Dr. Mel Steely: 02:02:27 Had you been a boy, you would have hung around football fields and watched these old guys who played for Bainbridge 20 years ago reliving that moment when they scored the touchdown ...

Cathy Cox: 02:02:38 Oh yeah.

Dr. Mel Steely: 02:02:38 ... because that's all they've got. Same thing here. Are we out of tape?

Speaker 1: 02:02:46 Yeah, I only got about fifteen, twenty seconds left.

Dr. Mel Steely: 02:02:46 Well, thank you Secretary Cox.

Cathy Cox: 02:02:49 Pretty good timing.

Dr. Mel Steely: 02:02:50 Appreciate it very much. We've run out just in time.

Cathy Cox: 02:02:51 Thank you.

Dr. Mel Steely: 02:02:52 I think one of the things that's happened is the press, in this 24 hour demand cycle, we've got to have something ...

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [02:03:04]