Okay. We're rolling.

Today is September 22, 2003. I'm Mel Steely with the Georgia Political Heritage program for the History Department at the University of West Georgia. And today we're interviewing former Senator and Ambassador Wyche Fowler. Senator Fowler, would you tell us a little bit about your early life? I know you were born in Atlanta on October 6, 1940. Don't know much about your parents or your grandparents. So talk to us a little about your family.

Thank you, Mel. I was born in Atlanta. I'm a sixth-generation Georgian, which is why I think I look so English. At least when I'm in the pubs of London, they think I'm the most English-looking fellow in the place. But we, I come from sort of a rural, though I was born in Atlanta as you know, Georgia background. My grandfather on my mother's side died when she was very, very young, of course, so I never knew him.

My father is from Warren County, still one of the smallest and most rural counties in Georgia. My mother originally from Albany, though she spent the early years and met my father when she was teaching school in Wilkes County.

What was her last name?

Her maiden name was Barbre, B-A-R-B-E. Emily Barbre.

Emily Barbre. And your dad's full name?

He's-

Wyche Fowler, senior.

William Wyche Fowler, senior.

William Wyche, okay.

My father, my grandfather, his father and his father all in Warren County. They came, earliest we can, some Fowlers coming down from the hills from Virginia. But he farmed in
Warren County, and then about in his forties started a little insurance agency. And he and my grandmother both lived until they died in Warrenton.

Wyche Fowler: 00:03:54 My grandfather actually went to Mercer. He was the first in our family, I think on either side, to go to college. And then my father followed his footsteps. And when he got out of the Navy he went- he was in the Navy during the Second World War of course, and then he went to Mercer. I disappointed them greatly by this Baptist heritage and two generations of Mercerians by choosing to go to Davidson College in North Carolina, which of course is a Presbyterian school.

Wyche Fowler: 00:04:28 But my father, I didn't realize it until much later life, that I've always thought that people thought that I was very much like my mother, who was very lively and very witty, I must say, and had a various, as the Irish said, was stinking with charm. But my father was a very fine student athlete at Mercer. He won the oratorical contest his junior and his senior year. Made a lot of friends all during my, and taught as you probably know at in Carrollton for a couple of years and taught Latin there and history and was the coach of all the teams as you did during that time. So whenever I'm in that part of the state, especially many people remember my father.

Wyche Fowler: 00:05:28 They both passed away within a couple of years of each other. Five, six years ago.

Mel Steely: 00:05:35 What business was he in? Was he a farmer?

Wyche Fowler: 00:05:37 Well, he let, no. He taught school. He was, initially, and he was in those days-

Mel Steely: 00:05:45 I remember that.

Wyche Fowler: 00:05:45 ... very young. And he then became principal. He was principal in Tennille, which is down near Warrenton, and then I think in the high school in Carrollton before he switched over and taught at the college.

Mel Steely: 00:05:58 I believe that's true.

Wyche Fowler: 00:05:59 But then about thirty, after myself and my only sister, the two of us were born, he, I guess like so many just didn't think he could raise a family on his school teacher's salary, so he came to Atlanta initially to work for the World Book Company selling encyclopedias, but very soon went to work with Travelers. And
he was with Travelers for thirty years, until his retirement as the regional life insurance manager here in Atlanta.

Wyche Fowler: **00:06:35** So I had the most, I guess, normal traditional public school upbringing. We lived on Howell Mill Road, Woodley and then Howell Mill. The first exit going out 75 now. I went to Morris Brandon, which is still there of course. And then to Northside High School, which I was about the third year after it opened. I graduated in 1958. That's a magnet school now. We buried the Northside Tiger and put it in a time capsule about ten years ago.

Mel Steely: **00:07:13** You didn't know an old boy by the name of Ed Nutting?

Wyche Fowler: **00:07:15** Oh, of course. He was in my class. Ed was in my class. He was the champion shot putter.

Mel Steely: **00:07:21** He was a hell of a football player. They played Cedartown where I played.

Wyche Fowler: **00:07:25** Right.

Mel Steely: **00:07:25** And I remember Ed in the championship game, we were in division championship and they were playing for it, and we had an old boy named Bear Beecham. Great big old monster of a man. And I remember old Ed reached over and he grabbed Bear and he picked him up and shook him and threw him away.

Wyche Fowler: **00:07:40** Goodness.

Mel Steely: **00:07:40** And then the coach told me to go in to replace him. And that was one of the most horrifying moments of my life, to have to face Ed Nutting.

Wyche Fowler: **00:07:49** I'll tell him you said that. I'm sure you've told him.

Mel Steely: **00:07:51** Oh my goodness.

Wyche Fowler: **00:07:52** Yeah. I saw him-

Mel Steely: **00:07:53** He was something else.

Wyche Fowler: **00:07:53** I saw him at a high school reunion last Christmas.

Mel Steely: **00:07:57** Yeah. This was back in the mid, I guess '55, 6, 7, somewhere in there. '56 maybe.
Wyche Fowler: 00:08:02 Yeah, no, he was ... actually, now that I think about it, I think he was one year older than I. He probably graduated in '57.

Mel Steely: 00:08:10 That's right. He and I, I graduated in '57. I was a year ahead of him. We're one year's difference in there. But what was it like in postwar Atlanta during that period? Post World War II?

Wyche Fowler: 00:08:22 In trying to think back and not doing an extensive interviews, but first of all, these were pre-civil rights days, so we didn't have any black students. Although, ironically, I had a lot of black friends in the country and I, my first, my earliest days the, when I'd, we'd spend our summers in Washington, Georgia, with my mother's sister, whose husband for a certain period of time was the mayor of the town, a prominent citizen. And they had of course a yard man or a yard boy as he was called then, that was my age, twelve years old. Well ten, eleven, twelve. We were friends during that time. And they had this little all-black team. It wasn't organized formally, Little League, but they'd play these teams from other towns. And we became friends and played a little stick ball and things like that together. But anyway, their team did very well in that little youth league.

Wyche Fowler: 00:09:36 And he broke his leg when, either eleven or twelve. I've forgotten. So I had to ask permission. My parents and my aunts and uncles and everything, but I took over and I was the center field of this all-black baseball team.

Mel Steely: 00:09:54 So you integrated them.

Wyche Fowler: 00:09:55 I integrated them. I integrated them. I played for two summers. But meantime in Atlanta, my parents, well, what shall we say, trusted me. I had a lot of room to roam. And I'd get on on Saturday with two or three friends when I was seven years old and ride the Howell Mill bus down Howell Mill at Peachtree and go to the Paramount and Strand. Ten cents you know, for the movies. Double feature on Saturday, get you about three Krystals and a Coke for another twelve, fourteen cents and never was, nobody ever worried about being chaperoned or looked after.

Wyche Fowler: 00:10:47 I was a pretty good student except for conduct, so I had an awful lot of whippings. My father still believed in whippings. And I can remember as early as age five going out to cut my own switch. It was always from either misbehaving seriously with my mother and talking back, or I'd always get Ds in conduct because I couldn't stay in my seat. Sometimes I was a little irreverent to my teachers. But I went through high school at Morris Brandon and then I went to Northside High School.
And I guess what might be interesting to you is I always thought, well always, but somewhere along the way, ten, earlier than that, eight or nine, I decided that I wanted to go into the ministry. And I grew up at Second Ponce de Leon Baptist Church, corner of Peachtree and West Wesley. And Monroe Swilley was the great preacher there. And he was one of my real heroes, I guess you'd say. He took me under his wing.

But I had started speaking in through the those little community chest contests at Morris Brandon, and I won this, where you prepared a five-minute talk on what the community chest meant to children, less fortunate. And I won some portion of that contest, so that I went around speaking at all these Rotary and Kiwanis clubs when I was nine, ten years old. And then that set sort of the stage for me speaking at Sunday school. And then when I was sixteen, I preached the eleven o'clock morning service at church.

Was that during youth week or whatever they called it?

Yeah, uh-huh.

I did the same thing.

Yeah.

Yeah.

But that's a big church. It was scary.

Much bigger than mine, I'm sure. I was at First Baptist in Cedartown. So they were much smaller.

But I guess Davidson, I always said Davidson, when I came out of there, it made me into a Presbyterian and really sort of shattered my childhood Sunday school faith, just sort of made up of memorizing inspirational verses. I knew my Bible very well, Bible stories and participated in all the Baptist conventions at Ridgecrest and everything. But then I was-

Why did you go to Davidson?

No good reason. My father took me on a tour of most of the schools up in that area, Carolina and Duke. And Washington and Lee I remember I liked very much. And Davidson was the last one I saw, and I did have three Atlantans were going there at that time. Bob Young, a friend of mine, Barry Branch, others.
But I didn't know who was applying where. It just turned out that way.

Wyche Fowler: **00:14:14** But I just, basically, I fell in love with Davidson as a small, beautiful campus. At that time it was all men, about eight hundred, and I just liked the smallness of the place. I was sort of, maybe I was still had my country roots, but I was sort of overwhelmed by the Carolinas and the Dukes. I didn't like big classes and that sort of thing.

Wyche Fowler: **00:14:42** And it turned out to be as good as it gets. It was tough for me. I'd always made straight A’s in high school. My parents would say by never opening a book, and as I say, they were both school teachers, so they were on me all the time to succeed. And they knew that I could make top grades if I-

Mel Steely: **00:15:04** Did you get a scholarship there?

Wyche Fowler: **00:15:06** No, no, I didn’t.

Mel Steely: **00:15:08** Your dad had to pay for it. That cost him a little bit.

Wyche Fowler: **00:15:09** No, he, my father called me in. He said, "Look, I got a deal. I'll either pay your way through school, but if you will pay your way then I'll never, I can save my money. I'll never ask you for any money when I retire." So I did. I hitchhiked out to Waitland, Washington the year before, and picked peas and canned peas for the Jolly Green Giant pea factory ten hours a day. That's probably the hardest work I've ever done.

Mel Steely: **00:15:49** Bad on the back, wasn't it?

Wyche Fowler: **00:15:50** Bad on everything. Raking these peas, I can still remember, I couldn't lift my arms the next day, to keep them from clogging up coming through. But also I would have ... I owe a great debt to one of my Sunday school teachers, Claude Shaw. Judge Claude Shaw also was very helpful and instrumental in the tenth and the eleventh grade. Between those two, I did two summers, I was sort of a bailiff, really an intern, but at the superior court.

Wyche Fowler: **00:16:23** And that's where I got interested in, really in the law and courtroom dramatics, if not, should we call them theatrics. And probably because of that experience, I always thought once I ... after the first couple of years at Davidson, I realized I hadn't really been called to ministry. Then I sort of set my sights on law school.
Mel Steely: 00:16:49 So you decided to go into pre-law? What was your major there?

Wyche Fowler: 00:16:52 Well, we didn't know, my major was English. We're very heavy on a minor in philosophy and a lot of, it wasn't a lot, but Bible courses. I still retain that very strong interest in theology, biblical archeology. Going back to the, memorizing maps, the Holy Land, knowing where these places are.

Wyche Fowler: 00:17:20 I went to Iraq, just to jump way forward. I'd always wanted to get into Iraq. And when I was in the Congress, when I first went to Congress in 1977 was about the beginning of the Iraqi-Iranian war that went on, as you know, for eight years. But as soon as that wound down, I was on the phone to Tariq Aziz, who was then the Iraqi Ambassador to the United Nations, to... Actually, I just been elected to the Senate in '86, to ask him if I could go to the, to all the old biblical places or of the Chaldees where Abraham supposedly was born, as well as to the Euphrates and the headwaters of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates, where some say the Garden of Eden was.

Wyche Fowler: 00:18:20 And so I took, I went two trips and took Charles Weltner, who was then... The judge by then.

Mel Steely: 00:18:28 The judge by then.

Wyche Fowler: 00:18:29 Then on the Supreme Court. We spent two, he only went with me once, but I did, I went twice. So all of that early Sunday school training. Then studying basically theology, even though it was undergraduate, has really been a, what's the right, avocation. An interest of mine that has always continued and therefore made my experience in Saudi Arabia so much richer. To have this experience with the third of the world's three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Mel Steely: 00:19:17 You graduated from Davidson in '62. Is that right?

Wyche Fowler: 00:19:21 Yes.

Mel Steely: 00:19:22 And did you go immediately into the army or drafted or how did that work?

Wyche Fowler: 00:19:29 I was in ROTC, in order to make that twenty-five dollars a month more than being the best soldier. But no, I went, I was supposed to go immediately and wanted to go immediately. But I was by hook or crook, somehow we had to take all the tests. I was put in army intelligence, which was then only a branch, a subset. It wasn't its own service. So you go to infantry school at Fort
Benning and do twelve weeks there. And then I sent to Fort Holabird, which is no longer there, but that was the intelligence school in Baltimore. But I think that what they told me was that the intelligence classes were too full. So they delayed me twice. And rather than going in, as I had hoped, the summer of ’62, I didn't go in for about eighteen months. And in between that time I went to New York and worked for Citibank.

Wyche Fowler: 00:20:44 I wanted to be in New York and I got a job in their management training program and that was a tremendous experience. I liked all the people. I learned a lot. And then it's basically ’64 and ’65, I got out early to go to work, three months early. I was in three months short of three years. But I did, I went to Columbus to Fort Benning and then to Holabird. That was four months, and then I was an intelligence analyst at the Pentagon for my year and a half that was left, living in Washington and doing really interesting stuff.

Mel Steely: 00:21:34 That was an interesting period, because Vietnam was just starting to heat up good.

Wyche Fowler: 00:21:42 It was just a little early. I actually, at Fort Holabird, when you went in, they ask where, would you like an overseas assignment? And I immediately said yes. And then where? Well, the one place I didn't want to go was Korea. They weren't fighting. They were just sitting. That was all over. And I didn't want to fight either, but we just had advisers in Vietnam then and really hadn't gotten into trouble by ’64. Came a couple of years later. So I put down Vietnam first and then Europe sort of generally and maybe a third. But they sent me to the Pentagon.

Mel Steely: 00:22:22 If you'd put it first, you'd have gone someplace else, probably.

Wyche Fowler: 00:22:24 That's probably right. That's probably right. But it was wonderful because that got me started in Washington and led to the story of my life, meeting Charles Weltner.

Mel Steely: 00:22:34 Well you came out of there and went to law school. Did you meet Weltner before you went to law school?

Wyche Fowler: 00:22:42 I went to, I did the army just to get it in your mind, Mel. I did my two and a half years in the army. Then Weltner for only about eighteen months before he resigned in ’96. Then I went to a year in London trying to figure out what I was going to do next for, to the London School of Economics, and I wanted to be in London. But I had taken the law boards back in college and had been accepted in a lot of places, including Emory. And what I
really decided to do, that it all sort of came together, that I'd been away from Atlanta for ten years when you're counting college, four years there, the army, almost two years in New York. And I didn't, I hadn't figured out whether I was too big for my britches. Whether Atlanta was going to be too, too tame for me.

Wyche Fowler: **00:23:46** So I said, well, here is the perfect way to do it. I go to law school at Emory. I'd be back in Atlanta with my friends and my parents. And they also had a quarter system, so I went straight through in two years and three months. So I've got, I did that quickly. But that's the order of things.

Mel Steely: **00:24:04** Okay. Then you weren't with Weltner before?

Wyche Fowler: **00:24:06** Before I went to law school.

Mel Steely: **00:24:07** To law school. Well now, how did you meet him?

Wyche Fowler: **00:24:11** Well, that's the most interesting of my tales. I was sitting, I was there in my office, and it was on pretty high level. There were nothing but colonels in this office that I worked as a junior analyst, but it was sensitive stuff. But we didn't work that hard. And I was sitting and reading all the newspapers. And I read that, well, I'd heard on the news, but where these four little girls were bombed in this church in Birmingham.

Wyche Fowler: **00:24:44** And the next morning, in the one minute speeches, this young Congressman that I probably had heard of, but I'd certainly never met him. Of course, I hadn't been in Atlanta. But from Atlanta named Charles Weltner took the floor and made this, just this brief statement that this kind of terrible thing occurs when those who have been elected to lead have failed to lead, and that we all share the blame for this. And they put it on the front page of the Post because it was extraordinary at that time. A southerner. His great-grandfather, grandfather or great-grandfather, was a Confederate general.

Mel Steely: **00:25:36** Longstreet.

Wyche Fowler: **00:25:36** Longstreet. And so I guess people say I'm, I was sort of born with confidence. I picked up the phone and called him, and simply said to introduce myself. I'm a 22-year-old lieutenant over here, guess I was older than that, twenty-four or five. And I'm proud of you. And of course he invited me to come over and have a cup of coffee.
Mel Steely: 00:26:08 So you did.

Wyche Fowler: 00:26:11 So we got to be friends. I'd go over and talk to him sometime in the afternoon and then three or four months after that, Jerry Horton, who was his first AA, came back to go to the chamber, and I got to be good friends with Jerry after meeting the staff. So Jerry and Charles, I guess, decided that I was the one to be the-

Mel Steely: 00:26:39 Take his place.

Wyche Fowler: 00:26:40 Take his place. So they asked me. And I, if you could, if you have a job that is time sensitive, you get out of the army as much as three months early. So I got out of the army on December 31, and on January the second I became his AA.

Mel Steely: 00:26:58 Then Gerald went back to Georgia and went into the state legislature.

Wyche Fowler: 00:27:02 Later. He went back to take the job at the state chamber, I think, or the Atlanta chamber, we'll say after two to three years, but later he served for about ten years. Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:27:11 That's where I knew him, when he was in the legislature there.

Wyche Fowler: 00:27:14 Yeah. He's still a very good friend of mine.

Mel Steely: 00:27:18 Well now, Weltner wasn't there all that long, but made one heck of an impression. And probably the thing that stands out was the speech you mentioned and his decision not to run again because in '66, because he'd have to run in support of Lester Maddox, as all Democrats were required to do at that time in Georgia, because they were afraid they would split their ballot, so they had to make pledges. He refused to do it. Tell us, were you involved in that discussion about what he should do or not do?

Wyche Fowler: 00:27:49 No. No. None whatsoever. I'm sure ... I know what I would've recommended. That was in August of 1966. He had ... I wasn't with him in his first term. And I went to work at the beginning of his second term, as I just said, at the beginning of '65. He was running for re-election with, I think there were a couple of guys, always are, in the primary. But the oath that you referred to. I have never, I ought to know, never done my own research, but I think it was sort of a throwback to the all-white primary. As far as candidates were concerned, it was just another document of about forty that you had to sign to qualify when you paid your
fee. You had to sign your residency requirement. You had to sign that you’d never been a member of the communist party. You had to sign that you'd never had been convicted of felony. All of those things. Then you come around to a paper. It says you promise to support all nominees of the Democratic Party. I mean nobody has, as I say, had ever even thought anything about that.

**Wyche Fowler:** 00:09:11 Well, Charles, his background of a strict Calvin mother and a very principled statesman of a father who held every kind of office and saved Oglethorpe during the depression, working without pay as its president for ten years, and just known throughout the state as a very fine man.

**Mel Steely:** 00:09:36 Board of Regents.

**Wyche Fowler:** 00:09:37 Board of Regents. Anyway, nobody in the state. Well, had to be some people because they all voted for him, but nobody that we knew in our crowd thought that Lester Maddox had a chance. Everybody thought he was a clown as well as a racist. Didn't have to think that. He proclaimed that. He was very proud of his belief in separation of the races. But you all know that story. But woke up the next morning, Charles, who had token opposition. He won his primary. But Lester Maddox won the Democratic primary and was the Democrats’ gubernatorial nominee to run against Callaway run on the other side.

**Mel Steely:** 00:10:28 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Wyche Fowler:** 00:10:29 So Charles, we had a little celebration, but we knew we were going to- wasn’t any contest in primary. So everybody went home by eleven o'clock that night, about eight o'clock next morning, Charles called me and told me to call a press conference at eleven o'clock. I didn't even ask him why. I assumed he’s going to go out there and talk to the press about his victory.

**Mel Steely:** 00:11:02 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Wyche Fowler:** 00:11:02 And he didn't tell anybody. He walked out there, handwritten statement and resigned because he said, "I cannot violate my oath and yet I cannot support Lester Maddox whom I fought in his policies, all my adult and political life. And I cannot violate my oath. So I have no choice but to resign."

**Mel Steely:** 00:11:37 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Wyche Fowler: 00:31:29 And of course people—just totally flabbergasted. Nobody knew what to think or do or say.

Mel Steely: 00:31:37 You among them, huh?

Wyche Fowler: 00:31:38 And certainly me among them.

Mel Steely: 00:31:39 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:31:40 I also must say, I did have some flashes there of job security, my job, all of us were out. But it was the most extraordinary thing. This was before emails and faxes, anything like that. You had to either write a letter or a telegram. In the first week we got over 35,000 telegrams, nationwide. And most people said things like, well, one of them did say just this: "Yesterday, I'd never heard of you; now, I'll never forget you."

Mel Steely: 00:32:15 Wow, what a great telegram.

Wyche Fowler: 00:32:17 Because no tradition whatsoever in this country of resigning on a matter of principle. Still happens in Britain.

Mel Steely: 00:32:25 It happened over here once or twice, but-

Wyche Fowler: 00:32:27 A very-

Mel Steely: 00:32:27 William Jennings Bryan.

Wyche Fowler: 00:32:29 Oh yeah, no, no, going-

Mel Steely: 00:32:30 Very few.

Wyche Fowler: 00:32:31 Right? No, no. I realize I'm talking to a historian, a real historian, but in my lifetime.

Mel Steely: 00:32:37 Yeah, that's true.

Wyche Fowler: 00:32:38 Charles. I can't think of any Cabinet officer of a President or a member of Congress who ever resigned unless he was caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

Mel Steely: 00:32:52 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:32:53 So it was an extraordinary thing. It made all the Democrats furious. Nobody accepted it. Nobody questioned the fact that he thought he was going to lose in the general election.
Wyche Fowler: 00:33:12 But they just were totally left in the lurch. They were going to lose the seat. They scurried about and I was deemed a little, to tell you the truth, I didn't have any thought of running. It probably sounds strange in this day and time where a lot of staff, and then of course I eventually ran, but I was so shocked, it never even occurred to me. And they finally, as you might remember, took them about three weeks to find somebody that could run. They got Archie Lindsey, who was sort of in his last years as a Fulton County commissioner, and ran against Fletcher Thompson. That was his first run. Of course, Fletcher won.

Mel Steely: 00:33:54 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:33:56 But that had the most, that combination of my sort of growing up again, just ahead of before these civil rights battles. Charles had already voted, he had those two votes on the Civil Rights Act in his first term.

Mel Steely: 00:34:18 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 00:34:19 So, I came after that. I wasn't a part of that.

Mel Steely: 00:34:21 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:34:22 But once things settled down and I went to law school. It is now apparent to me and became quickly apparent within a couple of years after that, that when I was over there, it didn’t take me to after one quarter to realize that I had Charles Weltner’s mailing list and contributor list. I knew all his people and I had this free labor supply, called students.

Mel Steely: 00:34:57 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:34:58 So that when a city council seat became open, a city citywide one. Then I organized the students, had my list and ran the whole campaign against about eighteen people on less than $4,000 and won it.

Mel Steely: 00:35:14 Oh, boy.

Wyche Fowler: 00:35:16 All those events are in one way or another linked.

Mel Steely: 00:35:21 So you ran for council while you were still a student at Emory.

Wyche Fowler: 00:35:24 Mm-hmm (affirmative). My second term.

Mel Steely: 00:35:26 Ain't that something. And you got elected?
Well, I got elected, but I was a little older student. I was about twenty-nine then.

Yeah. Yeah.

Twenty-eight or twenty-nine, I forgotten when I was elected, but it was very funny. Because going down all of a sudden all these law firms, are very interested in me to hiring. Putting the city father in their law firm. Even though I...

And you did get into a law firm. Where did you go? You practiced law while you were on the city council? On what? It's called, the Board of Aldermen wasn't it?

It’s called the Board of Aldermen.

And then they switched to City Council while you were involved?

Right. Wrote a new charter, they had a charter commission and it came by night, changed.

And then you practiced law while that was going on?

I practiced law, but the whole time being only about eight or nine years before I was elected to Congress.

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

I was elected four years to the Board of Aldermen. Then it became the City Council.

That's when you were elected the President of the Council?

I was elected first-

Or Night Mayors. They used to call it.

First President of the City Council. Same time. Maynard Jackson was elected Mayor in ’72.

Okay. Did you enjoy practicing law?

Actually I did because I was a little older and I guess, because I could talk, as my friends say. But basically I tried cases that had already been developed over two or three years; finally court was inevitable. These not big cases.
Mel Steely: 00:37:02 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:37:04 But I tried thirty or forty cases, which was a lot in my seven, eight or nine years of practicing law and had good success.

Mel Steely: 00:37:17 What firm did you go with?

Wyche Fowler: 00:37:20 Initially when I went with it, it was called Smith, Cohen, Ringle, Kohler, Martin and Lowe, like all these law firms, it's split and-

Mel Steely: 00:37:28 Merged and-

Wyche Fowler: 00:37:29 Here and there, the senior members, It Cohen and Ben Kohler and old judge Sam Lowe, all been gone a long time now.

Mel Steely: 00:37:38 Okay. You stayed with them? Or they split up?

Wyche Fowler: 00:37:44 I stayed with them until I went to Congress.

Mel Steely: 00:37:46 Okay. Now, you were there-

Wyche Fowler: 00:37:50 Of course they were very helpful to me, all those people. And because I had a resource there, I had secretaries to help me and I was on the City Council, so I had more of a platform than it seemed because, guess I was thirty-five or something like that when I was elected.

Mel Steely: 00:38:05 Yeah. You were with two different mayors, you were with Sam Massell in that first period.

Wyche Fowler: 00:38:11 Right? He was mayor when I was-

Mel Steely: 00:38:13 And then with Maynard in his first term.

Wyche Fowler: 00:38:16 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:38:19 I mean that's a real transitional period in there.

Wyche Fowler: 00:38:23 It is.

Mel Steely: 00:38:24 In a whole bunch of ways. I mean, if you go back as sports is just now getting set, I mean by the time you got to be on the Aldermen’s’ board we had just gotten, or were getting, the Braves, and the Falcons, the Hawks, the Flames. All of them came about that time or during that period.

Wyche Fowler: 00:38:45 That's right.
Wyche Fowler: 00:38:46 When did the Braves come? Do you remember? When was that '66?

Mel Steely: 00:38:48 Braves came in '62 and '65 for the Falcons.

Mel Steely: 00:38:56 I believe that's right. They were there just right ahead of you. Just one step. They were just getting formed.

Wyche Fowler: 00:39:03 I remember I was very good friends with Ivan Allen, Senior. Because of Charles's friendship with him.

Mel Steely: 00:39:13 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 00:39:13 And because he was testifying on civil rights legislation. Bravely as the mayor. So I knew, and Sam was his vice mayor, not really, you run separately, you don't have anything to do. People don't realize.

Mel Steely: 00:39:31 But they worked closely together.

Wyche Fowler: 00:39:32 But they work closely together even though they sort of came from, certainly different backgrounds. And Sam was the City Council President, call the President of the Board of Alderman. And I was a member and then trying to think when Allen, I've lost my train of thought, but Ivan Allen was a great help to me. He gave me legitimacy when I was running as a twenty-eight-year-old.

Mel Steely: 00:40:09 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:40:10 He endorsed me and he wrote letters on my behalf and that sort of thing.

Mel Steely: 00:40:13 Oh, that's good.

Wyche Fowler: 00:40:16 Oh, I know what we were talking about. All that was going on in those sports teams. But that was Ivan. He's the one that built the stadium on the faith that build it and they will come. And he's the one that was part of the group that negotiated the deal and convinced him to leave Milwaukee.

Mel Steely: 00:40:35 Carl Sanders was in about that time. Ivan Allen and Carl Sanders made a real team for the new Georgia, so to speak. New Atlanta.

Wyche Fowler: 00:40:44 Yes.
And they were, because they grew up alike. I don't think they
grew up together. Carl's from Augusta.

But, yes, they shared a vision of what was possible and how to
make Atlanta take it out of the Nashvilles and the Charlottes.

And of course, it was already becoming a hub because of our
head start with the airport.

Wyche Fowler: 00:41:14 Of bringing people from... My father going back when he was at
Travelers, they would, the home office is in Hartford and you
start in Hartford and then you went someplace. Your first
assignment as a branch manager or something. And then you
usually got to Atlanta on about your third or fourth stop. And
his biggest problem was that, I guess the headquarters people,
once they got to Atlanta, they didn't want to leave. They quit
rather than be transferred somewhere else because it was sort
of like it is now. It was a magnet for young people. It was
growing, sports teams were coming, regional headquarters for
all the Fortune 500's. That was the big period that put Atlanta
on the map.

Yeah, it really was. You got in as a City Alderman right as all that
was happening. It must have been a very exciting period.

Well, it's exciting. MARTA. I was very interested more so than
probably anybody on the Council in MARTA. Development of
MARTA, I don't know why I thought I was a transportation
planner, but I guess I talked myself into it. And I often tell
people that my proudest legislative accomplishment, including
certainly the Congress, was, there were huge fights at almost
every MARTA station where the location is going to be, whose
property, who's going to benefit, who's going to get the air
rights. Huge political decisions. But the one that dwarfed
everything was where the station was going to go at the airport.
Now I had been with others, I'd been to San Francisco, which
was built by the same firm, and they had built theirs just before
ours. But I'd been to Toronto and seen the new system there.
And of course we all visited the old New York, Boston,
Philadelphia. Try to not make mistakes.
Wyche Fowler: 00:43:28 But at that time on the council there were eighteen and I voted on, in case of a tie. And we won't name any names even though people probably be watching this long after I'm gone, but all of the premier developers in town had gone out and either had property or bought property around the airport and we're lobbying the members of council to vote for their site.

Wyche Fowler: 00:43:58 There were at least four different prominent sites with the top four Atlanta developers, but all within five to eight or nine minutes, go build a station. Then you're going to have to have a bus goes back and forth like it was in Washington DC, until it was just changed two years ago. Well, I just thought, and of course they all came to see me and they'd all been contributors of mine, all that, sort of stuff. And I just said, look, there is no, the only place, only way anybody's go ever use this thing is if it's in the station. I said, but not a lot of things I know. But if you go to get off the roads and beat the traffic, you got to have the train come in and get an escalator and go up and catch a plane.

Mel Steely: 00:44:43 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:44:44 So anyway-

Mel Steely: 00:44:45 BART has that don't they?

Wyche Fowler: 00:44:47 When today... Yes. Well no, no, BART didn't do that.

Mel Steely: 00:44:50 They didn't do that?

Wyche Fowler: 00:44:50 They just changed that too.

Mel Steely: 00:44:51 Oh.

Wyche Fowler: 00:44:52 Cost them, god knows probably, I was about to say a billion. It might cost them two billion.

Mel Steely: 00:44:57 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:44:57 Now, I was just out there. It's still- They extended the station, but it's still about a ten minute ride on one of those inner train connections.

Mel Steely: 00:45:09 Yeah. I was thinking that they had fixed it where they had it right in there. They don't though?

Wyche Fowler: 00:45:12 No.
Mel Steely: 00:45:12 Okay.

Wyche Fowler: 00:45:12 Atlanta is the only one really, it's just right there.

Mel Steely: 00:45:16 Frankfort.

Wyche Fowler: 00:45:16 So anyway, you know the end of the story, we had a series of votes with each proposal, couldn't get the required majority, this developer's proposal and this and this. And finally, since I sort of thought a lot about it, maneuvered the way the questions were asked till finally it got down to, we had to have it where everybody's proposal got a vote.

Mel Steely: 00:45:44 Right?

Wyche Fowler: 00:45:45 But then it was set up in the sequencing of the votes to the putting it in the station, was the last one and it was a 9-9 tie. And I voted, put it in the airport. And that's why it's there.

Mel Steely: 00:46:01 Good.

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:02 And as I say, I-

Mel Steely: 00:46:06 Take some pride in that, huh?

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:07 Take some pride in that because most things in the legislative process, you don't really, ten thousand cooks and you might take credit that this is the...

Mel Steely: 00:46:15 Yeah. On that one, you made the difference.

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:17 Sarbanes-Oxley. I did make the difference and I've made the difference because it was a strategy from day one.

Mel Steely: 00:46:26 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:27 But I never knew. I was afraid, money would talk and somebody else's would prevail.

Mel Steely: 00:46:35 That did happen on occasion too?

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:37 That happened on occasion.

Mel Steely: 00:46:38 Yeah, and I can remember-

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:40 We lost, my first year, an alderman then, again named Pete Petri, went to jail. Remember Joel Stokes?
Mel Steely: 00:46:50 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:46:52 Who was part of Good Government Atlanta, very highly educated black man, got caught on a zoning bribe and went to jail. And then there was a third, I’ll think of him in a minute. So we were not a purest of hearts.

Mel Steely: 00:47:11 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:47:11 All united in public service.

Mel Steely: 00:47:16 And I’m sure they had different views on what public service entailed and its rewards and so forth.

Wyche Fowler: 00:47:22 Maybe they did.

Mel Steely: 00:47:23 Yeah, I found people can justify most anything in their own mind when they want to do something.

Wyche Fowler: 00:47:31 It’s the strangest thing, while I’m on the subject. In all of my eight years on the City Council, nobody ever tried to bribe me, but because zoning, again you had this exploding city, it was highly competitive and as always the zoning is tied in with political contributions to try to get your project through when it requires a governmental body to approve it.

Mel Steely: 00:48:03 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:48:06 And nobody even, I mean I wasn’t naive, I don’t think. I’d worked at the Congress and had that background. It wasn’t like I was some twenty-five year old just off the streets in the City Council. But even campaigned, because they just weren’t by any hints. I was very sensitive to that and I don’t know what that means since two of them were caught accepting bribes. I guess either I was naive and didn’t know I was being solicited the wrong way, or else people are going to do it and can figure out the weaker links.

Mel Steely: 00:48:47 I’ve always had a... I remember about after I got divorced, good friend of mine told me, so you won’t have any trouble getting dates with people. A world of semi-beautiful women out there. They’re going to be looking and all you got to do is just let them know you’re interested. And I said, well, how do you do that? And he said, well, you don’t really have to do much. Just be available and talk with them, be friendly. And I’ve often thought, same thing had to do with bribing people. That if you don’t let the drawbridge down, they’re not going to try to come
in and seize the castle. You got to give them some kind of hint, go into their meetings, getting friendly, opening the door with your own conversation. Even subconsciously, they've got a feel of something. Unless they're terribly desperate.

Wyche Fowler: 00:49:34 That's probably right.

Mel Steely: 00:49:35 And, I don't know.

Wyche Fowler: 00:49:38 Anyway, I enjoyed my City Council days.

Mel Steely: 00:49:41 Did that hold true? Incidentally, in your congressional years, nobody ever tried to bribe you and all the public service?

Wyche Fowler: 00:49:46 No, never.

Mel Steely: 00:49:48 That is interesting.

Wyche Fowler: 00:49:51 I mean.

Mel Steely: 00:49:53 When I worked for Newt, we had, nobody ever, well one did one time. And we did have a guy who took bribes and solicited bribes. He worked on the staff and fired him as soon as we found out about. Herman Russell called us, said is this is this supposed to be the way it's working. I don't mind paying, but someone said no, please don't pay anything. You don't do that. So we got rid of him real quick. So it does go on.

Wyche Fowler: 00:50:19 Oh, of course it does.

Mel Steely: 00:50:20 Out there, but... Well tell me about the ideas that were developing under Maynard, when he first came in. That was such a shock. I can remember people talking about how City Hall had changed. I mean one of the legislators, an old acquaintance of yours, Culver Kidd, made the comment, “Oh go down there, it's like walking into Nairobi.” And the change that had taken place in City Hall and I pointed out, well when the Irish took over in Boston, it's like walking into Dublin. When you win, you bring your people with you. Oh, man. Was there any sense of that? On the City Council that all of a sudden there's a new team in town and they're going to run things now? Had the African American takeover been that dramatic, that fast?

Wyche Fowler: 00:51:16 That's a good question. I guess that's the purpose of our conversation. The first thing, we ought to go back, there was a huge fear initially about having a black mayor. Never had one before.
Mel Steely: 00:51:34 Right?

Wyche Fowler: 00:51:35 So there were meetings all over town with the powers that be, because this story initially involves me, what are we going to do?

Mel Steely: 00:51:46 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 00:51:48 If Maynard Jackson is elected, the town's going to go to hell. And, and Sam Massell has owned up to the fact, now publicly, that he regrets his campaign slogan. “Atlanta, the town too tough to die,” and these thinly veiled allusions to if he, Massell was not elected, we'd have a black and the whole place would fall apart.

Wyche Fowler: 00:52:22 All these guys were running for this new post, the City Council President. But three or four or five months before I decided to run.

Mel Steely: 00:52:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:52:34 So I got in. But even though I guess I had my supporters, nobody paid that much attention to it. And certainly when I went around to the business establishment, because I wasn't the most pro-business candidate on the... I was a little too tough on zoning, for one thing. Anyway, they weren't interested in me. The white power establishment, even though I, Atlantan, had a clean nose I guess, but they recruited Wade Mitchell, the picture book athlete, as he was known. Great All American quarterback at Georgia Tech, 4.0 average. Wonderful, one of the finest men I've known, but he and the way you look now, he was basically put in there by the establishment to win and to watch Maynard to be the break on Maynard.

Mel Steely: 00:53:30 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:53:34 When they put him in that brought in Hosea Williams to break up the “deal,” as he called it, and he called it right.

Mel Steely: 00:53:41 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:53:41 There was a deal of white money for black votes.

Mel Steely: 00:53:45 Mm-hmm (affirmative).
Wyche Fowler: 00:53:46 Votes for Wade and the money from Maynard, and that was going to be the unofficial team, even though they couldn't acknowledge it.

Mel Steely: 00:53:54 When he first used the slogan “Unbought and Unbound.”

Wyche Fowler: 00:53:56 Yeah, exactly. And he's called, “Break up this deal!” Well, he broke out the deal and that's what elected me. In fact, in the runoff I was way ahead, but Hosea beat Wade by about five hundred votes to make it into the runoff with me.

Mel Steely: 00:54:19 I didn't remember that.

Wyche Fowler: 00:54:20 You talking about the second most shocked man. The most shocked man I've ever seen in my life on election night was Sonny Perdue.

Mel Steely: 00:54:27 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:54:28 When he was elected. I mean he couldn't even talk. He didn't even have a talk prepared. He never thought in a million years he was going to win. That's my opinion. But Governor Perdue has not told me that.

Mel Steely: 00:54:39 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:54:40 But Hosea was just walking, he just couldn't believe it. Those days, television didn't come to you. You went to the television. We've gone around everything. Of course. We pledged this nice runoff and we were going to behave and have a quality campaign and I think Hosea quickly realized that I was going to win because I had gotten 35% to 40% of the black votes.

Mel Steely: 00:55:08 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:55:10 But we had a good time together. I got tales I could tell you now.

Mel Steely: 00:55:14 He's one of the most interesting people. Still the only man I know that ever got a ticket for drunk parking. He owned up to it, said yeah, he really did.

Wyche Fowler: 00:55:24 I drove him through that whole campaign. I swear all my stories come from. When I write my book I could do a whole, easily a chapter on him.
Mel Steely: 00:55:34 You really ought too. I’ve done a great interview with him and it was absolutely marvelous. Listen, I use it in my classes when we talk about what was race like right after World War II. I teach Georgia history and that’s one of the things I talk about and I’ll show a clip from him talking about coming home as a soldier, just getting out of the army and everything, wearing his uniform, getting beat up bad, things like that. It’s fascinating.

Wyche Fowler: 00:55:59 He is a smart man. Very smart man. Of course, a tremendous showman.

Mel Steely: 00:56:06 Yep.

Wyche Fowler: 00:56:06 When I was driving around, we had this interview, this local, these two women called Mickey and Sylvia. I don’t know where they are now. But they did topical interviews and this was something like the Thursday before the election on Tuesday, the runoff election. So I’ve been driving, he didn't have a driver's license. I’ve been driving him to all these events together. Where he got to get up on the stage and attack me. And I said eight o'clock in the morning, which was a little early for him. This is the biggest show in town. So I said, look, I'll be by at 7:15, I'll pick you up, but you be ready. I said, the thing goes on live at eight o'clock. I get there at 7:15, honked the horn and everything, he didn't. I go up and ring the doorbell, not soul there.

Wyche Fowler: 00:56:56 So I went onto the radio station and we'd go on live at 8:00 and they explained that Reverend Williams has been invited, but all of a sudden by 8:25, he's hearing it on the radio and driving in. Bust in to the thing. He says, you son of a bitch, you didn't pick me up.

Mel Steely: 00:57:20 He said that live on the radio.

Wyche Fowler: 00:57:21 Yeah, live on the air. I said, wait a minute, we going to call a spade a spade.

Mel Steely: 00:57:28 Bad choice of words.

Wyche Fowler: 00:57:28 He went like that. He said, I don't believe you said that. And then we both laugh the whole show.

Mel Steely: 00:57:34 Oh, God. He is funny. He was telling me about one of the times he was drunk and he drove up the off ramp there by the stadium where you come down on Windsor Street.
Wyche Fowler: 00:57:48 Uh-huh (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 00:57:49 And ran into a state patrol car coming down and the cop came over to see him and Hosea, he got out drunk and took the man's clipboard and hit him with it and then the guy tried to arrest him, accused him of being a racist and it wasn't till then he realized the guy was black.

Mel Steely: 00:58:07 He had more of those kinds of stories. It just absolutely wonderful guy to talk to.

Wyche Fowler: 00:58:12 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:58:12 And talking about his early days when he was working with the mafia and driving cars back and forth from the Florida line up to North Georgia for the chop shops. And taking that money and running the NAACP in Savannah with this. All on tape. He said the statute of limitations is long gone on that. So he just told everything like it really was, just absolutely fascinating interview with him. What you're talking about, that was reflective of the kind of spirit that was going on in Atlanta?

Wyche Fowler: 00:58:46 Well it-

Mel Steely: 00:58:46 At the time.

Wyche Fowler: 00:58:47 Yeah, it was very lively and what got us on that train, was how that saw the transition between a white establishment and a black establishment that for the first time it had power.

Mel Steely: 00:59:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:59:04 And yes, they filled, there were new faces all over at City Hall to the extent that they had appointments and that jobs opened up in the Civil Service.

Mel Steely: 00:59:15 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 00:59:16 And the vast majority of those jobs were black. Maynard also, though upset, and because he brought in people from outside of Atlanta.

Mel Steely: 00:59:26 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:59:27 To some blacks and whites. His first AA was a guy named Joel Sugarman who came from New York City who had worked for the mayor up there. He turned out to be an unfortunate choice
and they didn’t get along very well. He left after about a year and a half.

Mel Steely: 00:59:43 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 00:59:43 And Reggie Eaves, the police chief, came from Boston, I think. And there are a couple others like that. People nobody knew and it was assumed that they had their own, not necessarily a benign view of Atlanta and its white leadership. It took a little bit of a shakedown on that first year or year and a half. It was very rocky because before the white business establishment in their way figured out they had to make amends and get on the right side of the new mayor, even though they hadn’t supported him... though they were smart enough to have two or three people that had supported Maynard openly.

Mel Steely: 01:00:37 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:00:38 But then Maynard, as we have just reviewed here, with his untimely death two months ago, anything you can say about Maynard... Well, first of all, I'll say he was a real man of principle, in my opinion. In all of our dealings and in our eight years together, I can say that with conviction. But the most important thing about him as a leader was that he just didn't have a timid bone in his body. He was not afraid to immediately take on whatever power structure, if there was some public policy that he wanted to support for or that he was determined to do. The most famous example of that, of course, is the airport, that the same construction firms, the same real estate dealers, the same everybody, concessionaires had been working through city hall and whatever mayor, and the same people got the jobs.

Wyche Fowler: 01:01:46 He was just determined to break that system up so that blacks could participate. Therefore, he put these informal quotas on minority participation in every level of construction and expansion and concessions, and that stepped on a lot of toes because of the people, as I say, who thought they could just waltz in because they were the biggest or they were the most experienced and they’d done it before. But that was really his greatest cause, to make the city government and those positions or opportunities that came through the municipal structure, for that to be opened up to black Atlantans.

Mel Steely: 01:02:42 Did you support him in that endeavor?
Wyche Fowler: 01:02:44 Yes. There were times when I can't recall if I thought hard enough that... When we were talking about numbers and... I would work with him, or sometimes I would confront him publicly. We had some confrontations because I was known as being sort of headstrong too, where I couldn't go all the way. But basically we were on the same page. Basically we had the same philosophy. Basically I supported without question the opening up of the process and the insistence that minority contractors and minority small businessmen especially had equal opportunity at these affairs.

Mel Steely: 01:03:43 Well, you had been kind of committed to that since the Weltner period, hadn't you? This whole civil rights thing?

Wyche Fowler: 01:03:49 Yeah. It's hard to pinpoint it, but I think-

Mel Steely: 01:03:54 Or maybe even going back to your baseball days when you filled in on a black team.

Wyche Fowler: 01:03:59 Well-

Mel Steely: 01:04:00 I'm not sure you were thinking at that time about civil rights per se but-

Wyche Fowler: 01:04:04 No. But even though I was raised in the... and I went to school when it was still all segregated. I was certainly always taught that all people are alike and that you sort of ought to go out of your way to help a black person because of the fact that the system so discriminated against them, and they didn't have much chance anyway.

Mel Steely: 01:04:33 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:04:33 But that was like most of us just on an individual level. I never was involved in any kind of policy until I was... as a staff member with Weltner. That's right.

Mel Steely: 01:04:46 I would not-

Wyche Fowler: 01:04:46 We did the Voting Rights Act. Yeah. After the Civil Rights Act, I was involved with him during the year's debate and the ultimate passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Mel Steely: 01:04:59 During your career, you correct me if I'm wrong because I'm observing you when I'm saying this, you started up with that description you just gave me as being very paternalistic. We're the white folks. We've got to help these people. They don't
have a chance unless we help them. By the time you got into Congress, you'd shifted on that. The paternalism was gone. Is that a fair statement?

Wyche Fowler: 01:05:22 Well, I think it's a fair characterization of my statement, that that is the paternalistic attitude, because, as I said, I came just ahead of the civil rights activities, the push, the public push through its demonstrations for legislation to ensure civil rights, which characterized the Sixties. I'm talking about in my parents' upbringing, their teaching to me, and through high school where we had no blacks. Yes, the attitude would now be described as paternalistic. We didn't think of it in that-

Mel Steely: 01:06:07 Very progressive at the time but-

Wyche Fowler: 01:06:09 In that time. But my parents would just say it was Christian. But on that other end, because I graduated from college and then got right into politics through the staff side, but then had to run myself when I was only twenty-seven years old, I benefited enormously from the fact of the friends, the black friends that I had made, and the recognition about the way things... where things were wrong that came from studying the legislative process and examining those things that helped.. I made all these friends, and they, it was black people that really have always elected me.

Mel Steely: 01:07:04 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:07:08 My little place in the history book and the credit does not go to me. It goes to the black constituents of Atlanta and, to a certain extent, beyond Atlanta, is that in my ten years in the House, when I first was elected, it had just barely turned to be a black majority. I think officially it was about 51% or 52%, because Andy Young, who was the congressman for the two terms as my predecessor, he was elected, and it was still barely white. But then during that ten years, with the help of the federal courts twice, they took it up from 56%, 54% to 62% at one time and then 70% the last time I was elected. So I'm told that I, as a white man, have represented the highest percentage of blacks in the Congress in American history. I was apparently still the only white congressman elected to ever replace a black congressman. In other words, whenever a black seat goes black, it stays black. In my career, this biracial stuff was proven because I had to convince black people... I never had a dynasty. I never had a white opponent as a Democrat in my ten years in the Congress. I had Billy McKinney run against me and John Lewis run against me, and Julian Bond ran until the last minute and got out at qualifying after he’d been sort of coronated as
the next after they took it up to 70%. They did it for Julian. Then he did not qualify at the last minute. Decided I guess he's going to get beat, but-

Mel Steely: 01:09:15 Well, you did have very strong black support. No question about it. [crosstalk 01:09:18].

Wyche Fowler: 01:09:18 No. As I say, the credit goes to them and not me because they had an alternative. They could have voted for John Lewis.

Mel Steely: 01:09:25 Exactly.

Wyche Fowler: 01:09:26 They didn't do it.

Mel Steely: 01:09:30 Let me jump ahead to fit with this particular conversation. The story that I've heard is that in '84, your last congressional race, you met with the black leadership, and they told you it was time for you to do something else. They really wanted a black in that position, and even though they'd been loyal to you all along, the next time, they were going to have a black congressman, and you should consider something else because they did not want to run against you. Is that true, apocryphal, or what's the story?

Wyche Fowler: 01:10:03 Totally apocryphal.

Mel Steely: 01:10:04 Okay.

Wyche Fowler: 01:10:06 No. Never had a meeting. Again, there are a lot of things that people just won't believe. I guess that's why I got to write it.

Mel Steely: 01:10:13 That's why we're doing this, to let you tell your-

Wyche Fowler: 01:10:14 Yeah. Well, for one thing, there was a black establishment. A couple of them are still alive, Jesse Hill, Herman Russell. Most of the old, great sort of ward captain-type preachers to use... so you know what I'm talking about.

Mel Steely: 01:10:34 Preachers and undertakers.

Wyche Fowler: 01:10:35 Yeah. Most of them are gone now. Dr. Borders, William Holmes Borders, just died, and of course Daddy King is dead. Every once in a while, well, I'd just go see them as matter of course and have a chat. With the exception of the Martin Luther King holiday, I never had a black leader, quote unquote, ever ask me to do anything, much less say... except for the King holiday. They all called and said, "We really want you to support this." Well, I would have supported it anyway, whether anybody
asked me to or not. But I know I've heard that there was some discussion that I ran for the Senate because I was running out of time in my black constituency, but that never entered my... In fact, a lot of my life has been spontaneous.

Wyche Fowler: 01:11:35 I ran for the Senate. I love my House seat. I basically just campaigned on the weekends, going to churches and seeing people. I didn't have to run all over. That's when I learned the state. I missed my little House district. But what happened was about a year before, it was sort of like this Senate race that's going on now, where Zell Miller is retiring and there are no Democrats. Andy Young looks like he's going to run because nobody else... all the office holders, the younger people, the usual with experience have decided that for many reasons they're not going to run well. Well, what happened was Mattingly beat Talmadge.

Mel Steely: 01:12:17 In '80.

Wyche Fowler: 01:12:20 In '80. He was from Indiana. I was on the Ways and Means Committee in the House. He was on the Finance Committee. I'd sort of run into him at conference committees. And though I like Mack very much, and we've become... we like to see each other. I see him down at St. Simons. But to be honest, on this tape, he had sort of the reputation of our president, George W. Bush, that he lacked, sort of, intellectual curiosity, that he lacked either the willingness or the ability to delve deeply into a subject so that you knew he knew what he was talking about. Of course, on tax policy, that was essential at the end. I just was not impressed that he was the finest representative of Georgia, but he had, at that time, the Republicans had already... so pleased that he's the first Republican senator in the South.

Wyche Fowler: 01:13:34 They'd already raised him $7 million or $8 million. Nobody was going to run against him, and that just went so...

Mel Steely: 01:13:44 Tom Perdue, as I remember, went out and actively worked for Joe Frank Harris and cut an informal deal, that you won't...

Wyche Fowler: 01:13:50 That's exactly right.

Mel Steely: 01:13:52 ... and told... Who was it? I forget. Walker? Larry Walker and some of them in the legislature?

Wyche Fowler: 01:13:57 Exactly.
Mel Steely: 01:13:58 "We don't want you to run. Leave Mattingly alone. He's going to make sure that nobody runs against Joe Frank."

Wyche Fowler: 01:14:04 Exactly.

Mel Steely: 01:14:05 I think Guy Davis ran against...

Wyche Fowler: 01:14:09 Yeah. And I was coming to that. That's exactly right. Joe Frank wouldn't, as governor... We'd beat a Democratic rally with all the other candidates. Shipp will tell you this story over and over again when he traveled with me. He wouldn't even introduce me. He would not even acknowledge my presence. The Democratic governors...

Mel Steely: 01:14:26 That must have really ticked you off.

Wyche Fowler: 01:14:27 Well, it was just so astonishing.

Mel Steely: 01:14:31 Well, two years later, he left the state rather than be on the platform with Dukakis. You remember?

Wyche Fowler: 01:14:35 Yeah, that's right.

Mel Steely: 01:14:36 Maybe he was our-

Wyche Fowler: 01:14:38 But no. I knew a couple. That's the kind of thing that... Well, it became apparent, but I knew also that a deal had been made and that... I was told by people that I thought really knew. Then when Joe Frank treated me that way, as I was just a complete pariah when I was running for against the Republican senator then, that did confirm it.

Mel Steely: 01:15:06 Yeah. Both of those principles-

Wyche Fowler: 01:15:10 But the reason I got into it really was that had nothing, never even any... If you'd asked me at the time, I just never had a political problem in that district. Again, if even it would belie that they wouldn't... It doesn't work that way. They would never do it that way because they knew, the black leadership knew they got more done with a smart, white congressman than they would have just having a symbol in there. I think I would have had to some way get politically afoul for them to try to pressure me out just based on race.

Mel Steely: 01:15:54 Yeah.
Wyche Fowler: 01:15:55 But no, I just decided that if nobody else was going to go run against Mattingly, I'm a Georgian. I talked myself into the fact that I thought I could beat him.

Mel Steely: 01:16:06 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:16:08 I went out, but I sure didn't get any encouragement. You know? You've seen that New Yorker cartoon? This congressman's at this big huge desk, and nothing on the desk except three postcards lined up here and one postcard here, and he's on the phone to the press. He says, "Well, I'd say my mail's running about three to one in favor of my position."

Mel Steely: 01:16:30 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:16:31 That was about the total number of people that asked me to run.

Mel Steely: 01:16:37 Well, the opening for you to get involved in Congress came in '77, when Jimmy Carter decided to appoint Andy Young to the United Nations.

Wyche Fowler: 01:16:46 That's right.

Mel Steely: 01:16:47 Andy resigned and went to the UN. Why did you decide to make the jump into that congressional race?

Wyche Fowler: 01:16:59 Again, it's funny how people get a fix on you and you... Everybody thought I was this young man on the go and that I just wanted to be mayor. But the only thing that really interested me, coming from my only barely two years of being a staffer, was national policy, and specifically international policy. I don't know where I became such a real internationalist, but my interest in foreign policy was certainly probably begun during my congressional service, all the stuff that only the Congress could deal with. That was not conscious. How did I get back to Congress? I was sort of doing my job. But the thing that the intellectual, I guess, to use the word, interest was certainly not streets and sewers and salaries of fireman.

Mel Steely: 01:18:03 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:18:04 It was, "How do you develop a better transportation policy for the country? What do you do to look after old people? How do you develop a humane and effective foreign policy working?" all these things that are national issues and therefore congressional issues. I jumped in the race. There again, the first
man that got in was Coverdell, who announced, I'll never forget, on the front page that he was going to spend, I think, $300,000, which was something like ten times what anybody had ever spent for a congressional seat. John Lewis got in, but there were twenty-six of us. Again...

Mel Steely: 01:18:55 [crosstalk 00:18:56].

Wyche Fowler: 01:18:56 ... I had a good platform, but I... Also, I guess it's fair to say, I might have thought more than I did if I'd had to give up my seat. I had to give up my seat to run for the Senate, so that took an act of fool heartedness, but I don't know. It was fun. Had Billy McKinney in there and Marge Thurman, who was the chairman of the party.

Mel Steely: 01:19:24 I remember Marge.

Wyche Fowler: 01:19:25 It was nonpartisan, so there weren't any party designations on the ballot. But I was fairly confident from the beginning that I could win it. In the runoff, it was me and my friend John Lewis. But again, I ran way ahead, and I knew that as long as I kept my twenty percent or thirty percent of the black vote... We became very good friends in that three weeks. It was very satisfying exactly ten years later when I beat Mattingly when I announced for the Senate. That's about the only deal... not a deal. But when I decided to run for the Senate about eight months early, I called John. He was the only one. I said, "John, I'm going to run for the Senate. It's going to be vacant. I want to tell you first to give you a leg up." He went out and ran. He beat Julian the night for the fifth district seat the night I beat Mattingly.

Mel Steely: 01:20:26 Yeah. I remember everyone thought Julian was going to win, and then Julian got involved in that drug business and had been accused of using drugs and had to famously-

Wyche Fowler: 01:20:34 It's Jar Wars.

Mel Steely: 01:20:36 Yes. Yeah. Let's go right now to the restroom.

Wyche Fowler: 01:20:38 Challenging each other.

Mel Steely: 01:20:44 What a race. Well, what was your race like for Congress after you got... Well, you weren't nominated. You were just directly elected, weren't you? When the runoff happened, that was it. You went to Congress.

Wyche Fowler: 01:20:56 I went to Congress.
Mel Steely: 01:20:57 Yeah. That wasn't a primary. You were not in a primary, per se.

Wyche Fowler: 01:21:00 No, it was a runoff.

Mel Steely: 01:21:01 Yeah, and-

Wyche Fowler: 01:21:02 But it was a nonpartisan special election.

Mel Steely: 01:21:05 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 01:21:06 Carter was elected in '76. He took office in '77, appointed Andy to the UN about a month later. Then they had a special election six weeks later or eight weeks later in April of '77 and I won. The next morning, I was sworn into the Congress.

Mel Steely: 01:21:24 Quick.

Wyche Fowler: 01:21:26 It was.

Mel Steely: 01:21:26 You went from Atlanta alderman to the United States congressmen overnight, practically.

Wyche Fowler: 01:21:31 Well, it was overnight.

Mel Steely: 01:21:32 Well, you had been up there-

Wyche Fowler: 01:21:33 But see, I knew a lot of these people. Tip O'Neill, the speaker and Hale Boggs, all these people, where there to greet me as-

Mel Steely: 01:21:41 Well, now, that's what I'm going to get to next. Tell me about this leadership. When you got up there, all of a sudden, you are a congressman now. You're a player and not just a staffer. You had Tip, and you had Hale Boggs. You had Bob Michaels on the other side. I don't remember who whip was for the Republicans at the time, but it's not all that consequential anyway at that stage-

Speaker 2: 01:22:05 Let me change tapes [crosstalk 01:22:06].

Mel Steely: 01:22:06 Okay. You need to go use the restroom or anything while we're taking a break here?

Wyche Fowler: 01:22:09 No. I'm fine.

Speaker 3: 01:23:05 We are rolling.

Mel Steely: 01:23:06 Okay. When you got to...
Speaker 4: 01:23:12 Here you go.

Mel Steely: 01:23:13 I got to put my mic back together here. When you got back to Congress this time being a congressman instead of a staffer, did you find it different than what you thought it would be, or were you pretty well anticipating what was going to happen?

Wyche Fowler: 01:23:33 I don't think I found it different. I'm just trying to think of ways that... but not really.

Male: 01:23:47 [crosstalk 00:23:48].

Wyche Fowler: 01:23:50 Working for Charles Weltner, he was a very strong congressman, not staff-dependent. Made his own decisions, did his own homework, did his own reading, spent a lot of time with his colleagues. I sort of took that approach. I've been told by all my staffers that I'm way too independent, but it was wonderful, as I say. I sort of talk about that like I talk about Saudi Arabia. It was the kind of place that there's no way in the world you'd be bored. If you get tired of trying to figure out how to help old people, then you can try to figure out what the right programs are for early learning and education. If you get bored with doing domestic policy, you can switch to foreign policy. It's too much, so you've got to pick and choose.

Mel Steely: 01:24:50 A cornucopia.

Wyche Fowler: 01:24:51 But if you are naturally curious by nature and want to make a difference in public policy, Congress is just a wonderful place.

Mel Steely: 01:25:02 Well, tell me about the leadership there. You had met these people, of course, before you went to Congress. You had probably the most interesting speaker in our lifetime, Tip O'Neill. Hale Boggs, who wasn't there all that long after you get there. I think he died in an airplane crash pretty quickly.

Wyche Fowler: 01:25:21 In fact, actually, he wasn't there. He had already died.


Wyche Fowler: 01:25:25 I think he died in '68 or something like that, but Hale was gone. I saw a lot of Hale when I was a staffer because our offices were right there, and I knew his staff. Hale was one of those guys that liked younger people around, and he'd call you over for a drink in the afternoon and that sort of thing. But I can't remember. The last time I saw Hale was at the Chicago Convention in 1968,
I guess that's when it was, the Democratic Convention when they had the riots in the streets and police gassed everybody.

Mel Steely: 01:26:05 The Julian Bond delegation from Georgia-

Wyche Fowler: 01:26:07 Had walked out. But I was there. I wasn't a part of any delegation. I was in law school and had just been invited by some friends. But I got caught in the section of the auditorium. Everybody was being cleared when the gas started coming in. All of a sudden, I saw Hale and Lindy, his wife, and I sort of followed them. They invited me in the car. I jumped in the car, they had a policeman driving them, and went back to the hotel. That was the last time I saw him. I've forgotten when he was killed. It might have been '70, '72, but I didn't go to the Congress until '77, so he was gone then.

Mel Steely: 01:26:52 Right. Yeah. Okay. Jim Wright was...

Wyche Fowler: 01:26:54 Jim Wright was our leader. Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:26:56 ... the leader at the time.

Wyche Fowler: 01:26:57 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:26:57 Okay. And Bob Michael was the Republicans’.

Wyche Fowler: 01:26:59 And John Brademas was the whip.

Mel Steely: 01:27:02 Okay. A great vote counter.

Wyche Fowler: 01:27:05 All of whom, as I say, I knew for one reason or another, because Charles was so prominent as a first or second termer.

Mel Steely: 01:27:16 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:27:18 But also, I guess I didn't think of it as politics, but I knew that part of the job for a congressional aide is to know the staff of the other prominent people and certainly the leadership, so I knew a lot of the staff of the three leaders. I had... Figured out how long I had been gone from the time I left. It had been ten years, but still a lot of those people were in place. But Tip and I were great... We bonded when I... because of baseball. He used to call me up there and say, "Wyche, wouldn't it be wonderful this year if we had a World Series between the Boston Red Sox and the Boston Braves?" That's when they already in Atlanta because-
Mel Steely: 01:28:09 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 01:28:12 I'd go to baseball games with him. We went to a World Series together. He invited me. He was very good to me. He put me as a charter member of the Intelligence Committee. The House Intelligence Committee was formed in 1977 to start probably in '78. It was really sort of unthinkable that he would put a freshman on there, but he did. [crosstalk 01:28:43].

Mel Steely: 01:28:40 Did you enjoy your work on that committee?

Wyche Fowler: 01:28:44 Very much. But there again, see, I was already on the Foreign Policy Committee.

Mel Steely: 01:28:48 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 01:28:49 He put that because I asked for it. I should have done it in the Senate, but I got talked into by the agricultural interest to going on the Agriculture Committee. But no, so my interest and my involvement in matters of the intelligence community of the United States, the CIA and the FBI, dates back to that committee in '77.

Mel Steely: 01:29:16 I got to remember when we get there for you to tell me about your FBI medal that you won. You were on [crosstalk 01:29:27]-

Wyche Fowler: 01:29:27 But I was treated very well in the House.

Mel Steely: 01:29:28 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:29:29 I knew how to operate, so to speak...

Mel Steely: 01:29:34 Well, talk to me about Tip-

Wyche Fowler: 01:29:35 ... because I had been a staffer.

Mel Steely: 01:29:36 Tell me about Tip. I've always been fascinated with him. He just seemed like a wonderful person to [crosstalk 01:29:45]-

Wyche Fowler: 01:29:45 Well, he was larger than life, and yeah. All that stuff about all politics is local, he believed that. A great storyteller. A great Irishman. Grew up poor. Physically, he was like Lyndon Johnson, whom I also worked for by the way, for a brief time. He was so physically imposing that he didn't do it by, like, Lyndon did by scaring you to death or threatening you, but you just felt like that he had thought things through. What he's asking you to do is the right thing and the best thing for you and the best thing
for the country. But, I was lucky as a young 35, 36, 37 year old Congressman seen a lot because his roommate at that time was Eddie Boland. They roomed together for something like thirty-five years and Mr. Boland was the chairman of the Intelligence Committee.

**Wyche Fowler: 01:30:56** When, you know, Carter's elected, we've talked about Andy, one of his Cabinet appointments, one of the first was my old Sunday School teacher, Griffin Bell, as Attorney General. Well, the FBI, the Justice Department has these intelligence functions. So the next thing you knew, here's my Sunday School teacher appearing before my Intelligence Committee, but I had to be moved by Eddie Boland from Connecticut, a real Connecticut Yankee. And just the most polite man you ever faced. He, the Committee, and Boland could not understand a word that Griffin Bell said. So I was moved from the last man of this fourteen member committee to sit next to the chairman as the interpreter.

**Wyche Fowler: 01:31:53** Griffin had come in there and he'd say "This here is the Attorney General of the United States and he'd have told you about some grave present matters, because in the old days you act, unless you act, you get sued." And Boland would whisper to me and then he'd say, "Wyche is, is 'zoo' a Georgia colloquialism?" I'd say "He is saying sued!" He's saying sued, unless we ask. He's saying "sued."

**Mel Steely: 01:32:25** Oh Lord.

**Wyche Fowler: 01:32:28** But we had, we had because of Boland, we'd be working on some things together and go over and have a drink with Tip every once in a while, you know, at night. But, my bond with Tip was he loved to talk baseball with me and he had known that I was a big fan of all baseball back when I was a staffer.

**Mel Steely: 01:32:52** You even quit campaigning to go to Florida, as I remember on occasion.

**Wyche Fowler: 01:32:58** I went with Speaker Murphy. My staff, I mean they thought I'd lost my mind.

**Wyche Fowler: 01:33:06** We went up to the, the great deciding game between...

**Mel Steely: 01:33:12** Minnesota?

**Wyche Fowler: 01:33:13** No. The Red Sox and Mets where the ball went through Billy Buckner's legs.
Wyche Fowler: 01:33:18 We flew up. That was, that was about seven days before the election with Mattingly and I was eight points behind at that time. But I got these tickets on the front row and I couldn't stand it.

Mel Steely: 01:33:29 First things first.

Wyche Fowler: 01:33:30 First things first.

Mel Steely: 01:33:31 Did you see the HBO thing on "Curse of the Bambino?"

Wyche Fowler: 01:33:35 No, I missed that.

Mel Steely: 01:33:36 They did this last week. It's new; it goes back to Babe and carries it all the way up to today. And it's the misery of the Boston Red Sox kind of thing. Fascinating hour to watch all the old film. And if you end up in one of your motels where you're staying...

Wyche Fowler: 01:33:52 yeah, no,

Mel Steely: 01:33:53 And you see HBO and you see "Curse the Bambino," you want to watch it.

Wyche Fowler: 01:33:56 It's good?

Mel Steely: 01:33:56 It's a good baseball film. No. Well, tell me what was Jim Wright like?

Wyche Fowler: 01:34:05 Well, first of all, I, the two greatest speakers that I've ever heard, I think, were Claude Pepper and Jim Wright. Pepper was unbelievable. I just got where I could and would never miss a speech. And he was in his eighties when I was there.

Mel Steely: 01:34:25 I remember.

Wyche Fowler: 01:34:27 He died when I was in the Senate. So he was alive my whole ten years. He could talk for an hour and a half with never a note, of course. And it just perfectly structured point by point. Never made a mistake. And in his eighties. Jim Wright was almost that good and on almost any subject that he either knew or had time to prepare. So, he was, he was fascinating. He was also had a real temper. My real congressional story was that I decided in my second term that I wanted to be on the Ways and Means Committee, because that used to be the old committee on
committees. The most powerful. Rostenkowski was the Chair. They had five vacancies and I went to Tip and asked him if he would put me on the committee. And I don't know why, I guess, I was more naive than I thought. He said, "Wyche, I can't put you on the committee. You got a Georgian. Ed Jenkins is on their committee." And I thought fast. I said, "Well, Texas has two seats on there, and Cal." He says, "But yeah, you know, they're huge. We can't do it." So I said, so I went away. I understood, I thanked him. And then that night I made the mistake of reading the rules, but I thought I'd read carefully. But it said, that the committee of the whole, the committee on committees makes the recommendation and then the whole House, you know, votes on it. So, they made their five recommendations. But for some reason, I decided that I would run. That I thought I had a near enough people in the House, even though I was a second termer. To say that the committee ought not to select all the people that the House as a whole. Of course the House had the vote. But what I did know, I didn't read the rule carefully enough, is that I could challenge, but I had to beat the whole slate. I had to beat, I had to get more votes than all five. I couldn't just beat one or two.

Wyche Fowler: 01:36:56 I had to beat the whole slate and then if I did, it knocked off the one of the slate, that got the fewest votes. Well, the night before, I guess, because Texas already had one on there, Jake Pickle. I wasn't campaigning and saying Texas has got two. I just said, I just pick. I called on the weekend. I got all my staff in there and I called every Democrat that I could and gotten almost the majority. Because these other guys thought they were just in, as soon as the committee has rubber stamped. So nobody else is campaigning. I said look, just vote for me. I mean you got five guys, they get it automatically, but House ought to pick one for the seat. So, I beat them all by about seventy-five votes. But the night before, Jim Wright, the Speaker of the House calls me at eleven o'clock you know, I'd called these Texas Congressman.

Wyche Fowler: 01:37:53 I picked up the phone at home. He said this voice, he didn't say hello. He says, "I understand that you think you're so God damn smart that you can substitute your judgment against the collective will of the House." I said, “Mr. Leader, I just, I'm just following the rule.” "Don't give me no God damn rules. You, smart ass, are challenging in the leadership of your leadership in this House." I said, “Mr. Leader, look, I am not.” But anyway, he didn't get me to back off and, but he correctly identified was the reason he was calling me. I hadn't figured that out. That the weakest link, because Texas already had one, might be Sam Hall, who went on to be a federal judge. He died couple of years
ago. But he, Hall, got the fewest votes. So I did. I knocked out Hall and got on the Ways and Means Committee. Wright didn’t speak to me for about a year and a half after that.

Mel Steely: 01:39:17 So you and Ed were on it together, Ed Jenkins?

Wyche Fowler: 01:39:22 And of course we had a great time with Rostenkowski. And we did the Tax Act of ’86.

Mel Steely: 01:39:28 One of his great achievements.

Wyche Fowler: 01:39:29 Right.

Mel Steely: 01:39:29 Yeah. What was he like? He’s always fascinated me. I’ve always thought a lot of Rostenkowski.

Wyche Fowler: 01:39:37 Well, I did too. He was big and gruff, but he had, his heart was in as far as public policy concerned.

Mel Steely: 01:39:43 That’s what Gingrich said.

Wyche Fowler: 01:39:44 He really was trying to try and to have the fairest tax code, just to put it plain. He didn’t need, you know, these big captains of industry or these sweetheart tax breaks and special interest stuff, you know, that didn’t appeal to him. And he could stand up to them. Of course, he had a totally safe district before he got into trouble. And there again, I had known him. I thought, I always thought he was sort of secretly cheering for him even though he was part of the committee that recommended that slate. Because his office was next to Charles’s and they were elected at the same time in ’62 and you know, he was sort of plucked out of the Democratic machine there.

Mel Steely: 01:40:33 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:40:33 Thought he was going to be mayor of Chicago after that. But there again, he knew me, going all the way back to ’62. Not well, but I knew his staff and I was in and out of his office. And you know, we’d run into each other there. We would know him. But no, he was, he was like Tip, you know, he was pretty large than life and Jenkins was very close to him. I wasn’t, I wasn’t quite as them. Again, just a little bit too independent. Yeah. But on the big issues and on the, you know, the big, the tough votes, he knew that he could, he could count on me when we had to stare down the lobbyist and huge special interests too.
Mel Steely: 01:41:19 Do you ever go with him to go eat at Rosten's corner? They talked about?

Wyche Fowler: 01:41:23 At Morton's. So all the time, many, many, many, many times. We went to once or twice to spring training to see the Cubs. I know we went once. Second time, I think Rosten got sick at the last minute, but I remember all the tales. And I've seen him twice. We've had two reunions since he's gotten out of jail, of the Ways and Means Democrats. What was just about six weeks ago, Ed came up to Florida. We told all the tried and true tales, but he's, he's bounced back. Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:42:06 You know? That was one of those things that just, it's just...

Mel Steely: 01:42:10 I view that as just tragic.

Wyche Fowler: 01:42:11 Yeah. The old guys still doing the things, the old ways.

Mel Steely: 01:42:15 In interviewing Talmadge and Ellis Arnall, you know, they all told the same stories. We took money. What was the guest? Smith. George T. I mean, served in all those different capacities. He talked about taking money.

Wyche Fowler: 01:42:33 Well, now, wait a minute. There is taking money and there's taking money.

Mel Steely: 01:42:38 Political campaigns, campaign contributions.

Wyche Fowler: 01:42:40 In the- when I came along in the Congress, not so much in the in city government, but you had to account, you could not use those. The federal law, you had to, you had to account for everything. You couldn't, couldn't take money. Now when Talmadge was growing up in that crowd, George T. and those old guys, old farmers, yeah. They just put the money in his hand.

Wyche Fowler: 01:43:06 He put in his pocket. That's five dollars here, ten dollars there. But they also had no rules against that.

Mel Steely: 01:43:12 That's right.

Wyche Fowler: 01:43:13 A pass the hat at church or the meeting or something before, after the speech. But when I came along on the federal level, which is where all the rules started, you had to account for every campaign contribution, and you absolutely could not use it for personal use. Now, that doesn't mean there are always ways to devise that it can be done. But most people became
very careful. Now, when Charles was there and I was his AA, because this was ten years before I was elected with all these new rules, saw the Watergate rules. You know when Charles was there, when Rostenkowski was elected, they had about five, it may have been seven, but they had separate accounts. There was an equipment account for your Rolodex. What do you call now?

Wyche Fowler: 01:44:07 Before we had printers. Before we had fax machines. But you know all your office equipment were accounted. You had your salaries in one account and they were rules on the salaries and how that could be used. You also had a, and you had a travel account. And when Charles was here, you only got four round trip paid air tickets to your district. We were always, people always want him to come down said I can't come make your speech, you know, unless you pay. Cause I can't use up my four. When I was there, it's unlimited back in the day.

Mel Steely: 01:44:42 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:44:43 But also they had to stamp account. This is what got really got Rosti. It wasn't ghost employees in Chicago. And if the stamps were for personal mail. Mail that, if you were careful, if you knew was not to be frankable. One time, I just been his AA for a few weeks. I put, well, I guess I must've been there a year because it was at Christmas and I put Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year, Charles Longstreet Weltner for his signature. He signed all his mail.

Wyche Fowler: 01:45:29 He, but you know we had had I, you know it was three thousand letters. He wouldn't, he made me tear them all up because he said I'd have to put a stamp on them. Yeah. Personal greeting, in his mind, made it not frankable. Made it not official correspondence. Most people, let's say it was something like $3,000 worth of stamps. Most people, most Congressman, frank, everything. Would never even occur to them.

Mel Steely: 01:45:58 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:45:59 So at the end of the year, any money that you didn't use from your stamp account, you could keep, put it in your pocket.

Wyche Fowler: 01:46:14 What Charles did, is that since, I mean, if, you know, if he had to, for, if he had to put a stamp on something, he would do it. But, since he always had about two thousand dollars he used that as his fly the extra times to Atlanta. So, then I remember on several occasions when he was going down to pay for his ticket
at the office downstairs, he would ask me to go get a roll of stamps. We'd get one of these big $200 rolled stamps. He turned that in for his airplane ticket. All of which was perfectly legal. And what Rostenkowski was, once the law changed, he kept doing that. And he had a guy there in the dispersing office that would take his stamps and give him cash for it. So they both went to jail. But it was perfectly legal up until about '72 or something like that.

Mel Steely: Well, I can remember talking to these old boys and one of them telling me that a friend had given him $1,000. Ten one hundred dollar bills. I said, so, you reported that to your campaign? He said, no, and so you gave it to your treasurer? No. What'd you do? I put it in my pocket. I said, but, you know that that was against the law. He said, well, it ought not to be and ain't nobody going to buy me for $1,000. Hey, what do they think? He said, people crazy. I would've hurt his feelings and insulted him if I'd tried to do all of that stuff. I couldn't do that.

Wyche Fowler: Well, it's funny how most of that, very, very seldom didn't people try to give me cash.

Mel Steely: This was a personal friend who told him, this is for you. You spend it on your campaign any way you want to, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Mel Steely: Of course, he couldn't take it, legally. Yeah, but...

Wyche Fowler: He could take it. He just didn't have to report it.

Mel Steely: That's right. He couldn't take it and put it in his pocket like the guy ask him to do. Yeah. But he did anyway. My personal friend and yeah and so forth.

Wyche Fowler: Well, I certainly had, you know, contributions from some guy I run into on the street or run into anywhere and said, look, I want to help you. And he gives me a twenty dollar bill or something. Some might give me fifty dollars. I just put it in my pocket and tried to get his name and address and thank him for it. So I'm certainly not saying every dime of that found its way into my campaign account, but it was just so, it's so unusual. Most people wanted to have the credit, you know, from giving you a check and all that sort of stuff.

Wyche Fowler: But they also knew that it had been press criticism with people going to jail of misusing campaign contributions. So, I was
fortunate I didn't live through that period that Senator Talmadge and others did.

Mel Steely: 01:48:51 It was a rough period for them to have to go through, because it really did change the whole way of life.

Wyche Fowler: 01:48:56 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:48:57 And they didn't understand it at all. I mean.

Wyche Fowler: 01:48:59 The television did that.

Mel Steely: 01:49:00 I don't think Talmadge ever understood to his dying day, what was wrong with that. And we talked about his, his shoe box of money and he said, “It wasn't in my overcoat, it was in a shoe box on the back.” I mean, he, sure I had money. Of course I did. Everybody did. Well everybody didn't.


Mel Steely: 01:49:18 But in his mind, all his old friends, I suspect they still did. And you worked for one of them on Lyndon Johnson. Tell us about your capacity or your, your work with Lyndon.

Wyche Fowler: 01:49:30 Well, what happened was when Charles resigned, within a couple of months, the Democratic National Committee had set up a new division called the Young Americans Division to attract young people on college campuses to be Democrats.

Wyche Fowler: 01:49:51 I went off to London, as I told you, in that September, a month after Charles, about October. So, they recruited him for this job. He was thirty-six, I'll say. And he did it for about two or three months. They wanted me to go around these campuses and make a speech. He called me up one cold January night, my little heat in my little room had gone off. And the woman down, I was fighting with this land lady comes, couldn't get any heat. I had to go down and get this telephone. It was Charles. Wanted me to get on the next plane and come home and take this job. He was too old for it. Needed a twenty-eight year old.

Wyche Fowler: 01:50:36 And I said, well, I just can't do that. And he cajoled with this and that. So anyway, I thought about it for two or three weeks. He kept calling, right. And then finally, about March, I came home and took that job. And, well, one of the first guys I ever debated was young Congressman from Illinois named Donald Rumsfeld out at Texas Tech. He spoke, he was second term and he was all
full of himself. Of course, I was full of myself because I'd been a congressional staffer.

Mel Steely: 01:51:10 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 01:51:12 And he still remembers that cause I won the, you know, the informal vote of the students. But the coordinator, not John Bailey, I'll think of his name in a minute. Young man, this chairman. But Marvin Watson at the White House was the real coordinator. He was a real chairman of the Democratic National Committee. He called all the shots just like the White House does now.

Mel Steely: 01:51:42 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:51:43 And he liked this effort that we were doing for these young American, young people. And when I, I'd go around the country and I'd meet these students, student body presidents and things like fraternity presidents. So, we put together four or five or six different one day conferences in Washington. Meet the Senators and everything. But also we'd go to the White House and sometimes see the President on at least four or five different occasions. And then, I was sort of informally tasked, when he was dealing with youth issues, one of way down the line, you know, a young person looking at the President’s proposed speeches, or even writing a few paragraphs. So, for about an eight month period or maybe it's longer than that. Wasn’t more than a year for about.

Mel Steely: 01:52:43 6-7.

Wyche Fowler: 01:52:45 Yeah, before I came home to law school.

Mel Steely: 01:52:48 Right.

Wyche Fowler: 01:52:50 Before I entered Emory that fall is when I was there.

Mel Steely: 01:52:53 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:52:53 It may have been only six or seven months. But I saw the President, you know, seemed like a lot. Eight or ten times, in small groups and talking to him.

Mel Steely: 01:53:07 What's your impression of Lyndon?

Wyche Fowler: 01:53:09 He was, it's hard to imagine how big he was. He was huge and when you shook his hand, and I got, my hands are thin, but
they're long, long fingers. He just, you just lose your hand in there. And he was powerful. But he's funny. He was this marvelous mimic. A marvelous mimic. One time we were in there, he's about to go off to, he is proposing an amendment to Medicare to give people, old people, false teeth on Medicare, and he was mad at the speech writers. He was saying, “You speech writers. You don't remember Miss Lucy Springer’s class? On speech? On how to make a speech in my little one room school house in the sixth grade? You know what it is? What is it? What's the first rule? Speechmaking! Speech writers. I'll tell you what it is. Know your audience! Now, who is my audience? It's a bunch of eighty-five year olds that got no teeth?” Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: **01:54:25** “Their President is going to get them some free teeth. You got to make them feel that their President is going to give them some teeth.” He could blow you out of the room.

Mel Steely: **01:54:41** All the imagery. You’re very good mimic yourself, in that regard. I can see you. Yeah. Our camera man here never saw Lyndon. But he was something else. He was a force of nature, wasn't he?

Wyche Fowler: **01:54:55** Oh my goodness. Yeah, of course. I think, you know, one of our greatest Presidents.

Mel Steely: **01:55:00** And I think had a great heart in him. I mourned for him when he died.

Wyche Fowler: **01:55:04** Just his legislative accomplishments.

Mel Steely: **01:55:05** He wanted to do so much and, and people that he helped so much, the African Americans and women and all were so ungrateful to him there towards the end.

Wyche Fowler: **01:55:14** Well, he got off on the war.

Mel Steely: **01:55:16** I don't understand that.

Wyche Fowler: **01:55:18** But, you know, you're talking about the formative periods of my life. That was of course after my Charles Weltner congressional experience. But that, seeing what he, I mean, only Lyndon Johnson, I mean in all history here, you know, in all of his works now, and he's the only one. They'd been trying to pass civil rights legislation for twenty-five years. You know, those chapters in there, only he had the legislative wherewithal. But also the commitment or heart that, you know, determined this was the right thing to do. Voting Rights Act. All of the Social Security reforms. I mean the Lyndon Johnson legislative legacy,
but it's because he was a master of the process and the tactics. An eighty year old friend of mine, eighty-one year old. You don't know her, Sarah Craig, she worked with Charles and she's one of my closest friends wrote it. I wish I'd brought it to show you what a mind can do. She wrote a thing about, she's so sick of these outsiders running for President, talking about [inaudible], you know. Only society, she wrote in the world, where politicians run against the town and the government they're trying to head.

Mel Steely: 01:56:31 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 01:56:32 They'd be laughed out of the French system, the German system, the British system. You going to go be President, going to convince the public that you know less than anybody else? I've never.

Mel Steely: 01:56:41 At least experienced.

Wyche Fowler: 01:56:44 But Johnson is the epitome of what a president, in my lifetime, that, that knew, what he's doing and had the experience and the experience showed in the record of what he was able to accomplish.

Mel Steely: 01:56:59 I think that's true. I think his legislative accomplishments, in fact, I tell my students when I'm talking about American history, even the Cold War, and one of the great speeches was his "We Shall Overcome" speech. And if you read that speech, it's, it's wonderful. If you listen to him say it is horrible.

Wyche Fowler: 01:57:18 You talk about Johnson or King?

Mel Steely: 01:57:19 Johnson.

Wyche Fowler: 01:57:20 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:57:21 Johnson gave a speech to Congress.

Wyche Fowler: 01:57:24 Right.

Mel Steely: 01:57:24 And I don't know. No, that was after. No, well, no matter. Well, Weltner was there, I guess.

Wyche Fowler: 01:57:30 I don't know whether that was, it may have been.

Mel Steely: 01:57:32 He was gone in '67. That was the, no it would have been, it was the '66 or when was the Civil Rights bill on housing?
Wyche Fowler: 01:57:42 Was it on housing? Was on housing, or on voting rights?

Mel Steely: 01:57:46 It might've been voting rights.

Wyche Fowler: 01:57:47 I think it was.

Mel Steely: 01:57:48 I believe it was voting rights.

Wyche Fowler: 01:57:49 I think it was when Charles was there in '65.

Mel Steely: 01:57:51 Yeah, that was a, that was a great speech. And you go back and read that speech and it reads wonderful. I mean, it's, well drawn. Whoever put it together did a fine job on doing that. It's a marvelous speech. And usually you never credit Lyndon Johnson with giving great speeches because of his delivery and the cadence, you know. And instead of making it soar, it was, we shall overcome.


Mel Steely: 01:58:19 Yeah. And it just didn't hit. But you read it and it soars, it's a marvelous thing. And I thought what he accomplished was, was a wonderful thing. I really do. He'll be reassessed later in history and move up the ladder. I think. I really do.

Wyche Fowler: 01:58:40 Well, as a historian, I'm glad to hear that. That I, I believe it too.

Mel Steely: 01:58:45 And Vietnam will not be the dominant. It will still be important. I mean, it's going to, it's going to mar him forever. But he'll, he'll come around. All right. Well, you were a Congressman. You went in through what, five elections. You had one election, your special election, in '76 or '77. Almost immediately, you began running for a '78 election because they come every two years and you had to stand. Then you had after that, what, four more? Or three more?

Wyche Fowler: 01:59:15 I used to know I used to.

Mel Steely: 01:59:17 You had '78. Then you had '80 and '82 and '84 and then '86. So that's three, four, five elections for Congress.

Wyche Fowler: 01:59:26 But also in, there were a couple of special elections ordered by the court when they reinforce it. So, it seems like I was running about every eight or ten months. I just have to go back and count them up. I can't remember what years there were, but on a couple of times the court didn't act in time and we had to have an extra election. Same cast of characters is always all
these, a lot of blacks running against me in the primary. And then the Republicans finally came out with some guy named Paul Jones who was black, a real estate guy. They put him in to see if they could do anything.

Mel Steely: 02:00:03 The black instead of the white podium. They had a white podium and a black podium.

Wyche Fowler: 02:00:09 He was sort of like The Great Gildersleeve, he was very courtly. A Republican, but you'd only get ten percent or something like that in the general election.

Mel Steely: 02:00:18 Anything stand out in those campaigns, in your mind?

Wyche Fowler: 02:00:23 The word I use, it was fun. I had the small district, the press was basically good to me, but the main thing was that my opponents, being all black, didn't have any money, and therefore I didn't seek to... That was not an onerous task, that I had to raise money all the time. That's what I couldn't stand about the Senate, really couldn't stand it. But never... spent a few thousand dollars when I was... I was just sort of a year round campaigner in the sense that the district was easy, as I said. I'd go to six or seven churches, usually by myself on Sunday. Politics was fun, and I didn't have any serious threats, so I was comfortable. I could do my work. I wasn't looking over my shoulder, didn't feel like I had to come down here in the middle of the week to some church supper. And I enjoyed having the freedom to make friends, and learn in my congressional activities in Washington.

Mel Steely: 02:01:56 You got to Congress one term ahead of Gingrich. What do you remember about him coming to Congress?

Wyche Fowler: 02:02:05 I'll tell you a funny story about Gingrich. I don't know whether he remembers it or not. I think I teased him about it one time. When I was [inaudible 00:02:16], this guy came down to see me. I don't think he had called. I think he just talked his way into city hall, and I was upstairs about ten o'clock at night. I'll never forget, he had these granny glasses on, and had his hair out to here, all teased and frizzy, white Afro style. It was Gingrich. He introduced himself as a professor at West Georgia, and said he wanted to meet another young successful man, and he said he was thinking about, he was a Republican and going to run for Congress. We just sort of talked... He's a Rockefeller Republican. He told me, he was Rockefeller Republican. So I think I said something to him, I said, "Well, I think I can get you a little hair gel or something if you're going to start running up there." And
he laughed at that. I know we're supposed to be brutally honest on this tape.

Mel Steely: 02:03:25 Well, do that.

Wyche Fowler: 02:03:32 It goes back to there, from being a Rockefeller Republican. He was a liberal Republican. He tried that, that didn't work. Then I think he deliberately tailored his views on the conservative side in his second race. Didn't work quite as much. Then he had to do the organizing and really as Talmadge would say, get the nut vote and all these people by some... I was never convinced, either before or after, that he had a bedrock of public policy principles on which he stood firm. Smart as hell. Turned out to be a tremendous political tactician. A man of, certainly, historical substance. He's extremely well read, he's well-grounded in history.

Wyche Fowler: 02:04:54 But it did not surprise me, I guess. In looking back, I could have never predicted it. When he hit town, he proclaimed himself sort of to be oversized and fearless. So the press, of course, took that up and followed him like a Pied Piper. But I predicted to a lot of people that he couldn't last, because I still was simply not convinced that this was about much more than Newt Gingrich, and not about Newt Gingrich's transformation of America through well thought out Founding Father-like principles of governance.

Mel Steely: 02:05:45 I can remember in his second term, I guess it was, I'd ask him about... You're a peer of a lot of politicians and the Georgia delegation... Some bright people. Most of the Georgia delegation is fairly mundane. He thought you were his equal and that Elliot was smarter than both of you.

Wyche Fowler: 02:06:10 That's interesting. I think he was being uncharacteristically modest. I give him full credit for being probably a very, very fine historian and political tactician, that's the best I can do. I just think that Newt's history now just speaks for itself.

Mel Steely: 02:06:46 Was he a surprise to anybody when he came? He was the only Republican when he came in. You'd had been there a term, you'd been around, you knew the Democrats, you knew the other

Wyche Fowler: 02:06:55 Was he elected in '78 or '80?

Mel Steely: 02:06:58 '78, went in in '79. You'd just gotten reelected in '78, so you had two years on him. You were on key committees already, a major
player. He was just starting out trying to feel his way. But as you say, characteristically, fairly self-assured. Just want to know how people perceived him at the time?

Wyche Fowler: 02:07:23 The key to success I think, was not only his brilliant tactical political nature, but you remember, the reason I was on key committees and all that sort of stuff is, this is where Gingrich and company were right, we were in the majority. He had to do it. What he did so brilliantly was organize a down and out fatalistic Republican house minority that had been beating their heads and getting nowhere. And what he did was instill in them pride, unity, and then a way to win. I don't agree with the tactics that he used to show them how to win, and all their outrageous handbooks, and how you use certain buzz words, and you know how you undercut on the social issues. To me, that's unprincipled. But, if in love and war and politics everything is fair, he invented, almost, and adopted and pursued and succeeded in his tactics that gave the Republicans the majority. Then you get to do anything you want to do.

Mel Steely: 02:08:52 The two of you get along all right?

Wyche Fowler: 02:08:53 Yeah, I don't see him very often. I've never had a spat with him of any sorts. I was gone about the time he... When did he get the speakership?

Mel Steely: 02:09:11 He got the speakership in '95, so you were way gone. You were in Saudi Arabia by that time.

Wyche Fowler: 02:09:18 But I was also way gone at that point from the House before he started his move.

Mel Steely: 02:09:23 It wasn't until '89 that he got to be whip. By that time you were already three years in the Senate.

Wyche Fowler: 02:09:31 And people used to come over and ask me all the time about him, and I just demurred.

Mel Steely: 02:09:36 You two seemed to work together all right. I've watched you a couple of times, once in Congress, and once down at the Braves game. Both of you happened to be there, and you came down and you sat and talk business for a while, while we were waiting for the game. You seemed to get along fine in that regard.

Wyche Fowler: 02:09:54 Absolutely. And the few times when we've been together in public at a forum or something. I mean as you can, as I've said, I have greatest respect for his intellect, so I'm not trying to pull
any fast ones on him. And I'd like to think it's the same, that he treats me with just a little bit in reserve.

**Wyche Fowler: 02:10:15**

I'm trying to judge him just in the public policy context. I don't want to be judged by my personal life, whether it's good or bad, like others have judged him. It's only the fact that I've seen the results now, and that's one of the things that is infecting the style and tone of our political discourse in this country. Of course this just my opinion, but that the Republicans, and Gingrich was a major part of it, have learned how to use what should not be political issues, social, the moral questions to undercut the opposition.

**Mel Steely: 02:11:15**

Your views are pretty close to those of Mr. Murphy's, Speaker Murphy, on Gingrich. He feels the same way, particularly upset about the use of religion in it. Gingrich was not involved with the right wing group, but was often, because he was a leader, was oftentimes tarred with that brush, as are most Republicans in leadership positions. I know Mr. Murphy felt very strongly that that was using your religion against you, and he thought that was just absolutely beyond the pale, and was very upset about handouts in churches, and that sort of thing. And then going to your constituents and mailing them letters about your votes, and interpreting it as a religious issue instead of a policy issue, and things of that nature. Both sides have ended up doing it now. And once the floodgates were opened, I'm afraid, as you indicated, the whole temper of politics today has changed radically from what it was twenty-five years ago.

**Wyche Fowler: 02:12:27**

Or even fifteen years ago.

**Mel Steely: 02:12:28**

I know he, like you, would hold Gingrich in some measure responsible for opening that door. Not by himself of course, but still, he's a major player.

**Wyche Fowler: 02:12:38**

We all acknowledge there's a serious right wing of the Republican party now. There is a fundamental, a social right-wing that that even the Bushes, father and son, can't figure out how to deal with. Gingrich was a large part, deliberately or not, in creating that by the adoption of the tactics that he used and advocated and promoted to every Republican district, giving them their books and mantras and code words.

**Mel Steely: 02:13:14**

Through GOPAC.

**Wyche Fowler: 02:13:16**

Through GOPAC, and just making the speeches too.
Mel Steely: 02:13:18 He did make a lot of speeches, that's true.

Wyche Fowler: 02:13:21 That's how he gained... That's the traditional way of currying favors with your colleagues, to go campaign with them. But Gingrich had something to offer to them, and they took it.

Mel Steely: 02:13:36 Yeah. What other Georgia Congressmen impressed you, or depressed you? The men who served with you, do any of them stand out in your mind?

Wyche Fowler: 02:13:46 Ed Jenkins, was an excellent public servant. Smart as he could be. Extremely shrewd. Canny, could figure out anything. Had a, like Charles Weltner, had this extraordinary legal mind too. Didn't go parading it, but that's where it was grounded. He could see, he could calibrate the legislative effect of draftsmanship.

Mel Steely: 02:14:16 He said Phil Landrum taught him all of that.

Wyche Fowler: 02:14:19 I knew Mr. Landrum, but didn't serve with him, and didn't know him well. And of course, Elliot, he had a very fine mind. Elliot's a very interesting fellow because he used to... You'd almost think it was a great game to him.

Mel Steely: 02:14:39 I think it was a great game to him.

Wyche Fowler: 02:14:44 Yeah, he liked to be totally unpredictable.

Mel Steely: 02:14:44 He was that.

Wyche Fowler: 02:14:50 Elliot's problem was, with so many members in the House, it may have gotten in trouble politically, I don't know. Unpredictability can somehow be translated within the legislative process into unreliability. So he was always in trouble with the leadership. There's always a Democratic way, or the leadership way, and the alternative substitute resolution, and then there was the Levitas way. He always had a way. I hadn't seen Elliott in about ten years. I ran into him at the ticket counter in Washington a couple of weeks ago buying a ticket. He looks good.

Mel Steely: 02:15:31 My strongest memory of Elliott Levitas was him on a Friday... On a Thursday, him bouncing down the steps on the Library of Congress side. Coming down and a very attractive young woman had pulled up in a convertible waiting on him. He came down, jumped in the car and gave a big, "See ya later." Threw his hand up in the air and drove off just having a great time.
That's why I look back on it, I come to find out later he was being sued for alienation of affection or coerced by, I don't know, some kind of problem with this young lady's husband. But it didn't seem to bother Elliott at all. He was just enjoying life, and having a grand time.

Mel Steely: 02:16:19

When you look back on your ten years in the House, two things. One, what is it you're most proud of having done there? And second, what do you, you're not embarrassed about or anything, but you're disappointed, you wish you could have done?

Wyche Fowler: 02:16:43

The reason that governors get so frustrated when they get into the House and the Senate is that it's just so different, legislative responsibilities and executive responsibilities. There's not much glory as a legislator. If you're there long enough, and you get to be the chairman, then your name goes on the legislation no matter whose idea it is. You don't have a Fowler bill as a second termer, unless you happened to invent a tax that people would like to pay and then maybe the chairman might try to claim it, but the press might give you the credit or something. So, I never had any expectations. I just enjoyed the work.

Wyche Fowler: 02:17:40

I've always been good because it's natural to me, what you call constituent relations and constituent services. You've got a lot of people now, let's say in the last twenty-five years elected to Congress, who don't like people. You say that and people look at you like you're crazy, but they are creatures of the television advertising, and they have no common touch. They're just uncomfortable when they are just sitting around having to talk and answer for their policies. Coverdell was a lot like that, in truth. He didn't like to mix it up with people, even though he came through the state ranks, and he didn't like to debate. But that part of it I just enjoyed, because I like people of all stripes and sizes, and enjoy the give and take with them, and trying to help them.

Wyche Fowler: 02:18:38

Legislatively I have no huge accomplishment... Anything that would be memorable, except that for ten years one of my staffers, Bill Johnstone and I worked to... I was very interested in historic preservation, and no one had ever codified all the historic preservation codes of the federal and state government, and rewrote some of them. We worked with all the groups, all people interested for five, six years in the House and then in the Senate until it was done. It took about twelve years. But we have a modern recodification, it's all together, all up-to-date. I was very proud of that.
Mel Steely: 02:19:26 I'm glad you did it right.

Wyche Fowler: 02:19:28 But that's long and unsexy.

Mel Steely: 02:19:32 I'm chairman of our committee on historic preservation at the university. We're now having to teach them all the rules because they've been doing it without any reference to anything. And we've dug up artifacts on campus, one thing and another, and they're changing old historic buildings they ought to leave alone, so we're having to come down kind of hard on them, I'm afraid. They're not always pleased with our judgment, but we've got some rules behind us now.

Wyche Fowler: 02:19:59 I probably did have something to do with that. Just like in Saudi Arabia, a lot of my most satisfying was through the Intelligence Committee, and all done out of public scrutiny, or at least was supposed to be. I had some real head knockings with President Reagan and his administration over Contra policy in Nicaragua, and foreign policy. I got after him privately very strongly when all of our Marines were killed in Lebanon. You might recall, the very next day, or maybe technically it might have been thirty hours later, is when we invaded Grenada for no reason whatsoever except to take people's minds off the fact that we lost all those Marines over there. You remember our troops got lost over there, they didn't know where they were. They claim they were looking for these medical students that were on a certain part of the island.

Mel Steely: 02:20:56 They found some.

Wyche Fowler: 02:20:57 They finally found some after about ten days. I had some good, a lot through the committee system, some real head butting over...Even when we went to Panama looking for Noriega,

Mel Steely: 02:21:16 That was under Bush.

Wyche Fowler: 02:21:19 That was under Bush.

Mel Steely: 02:21:20 Bush One.

Wyche Fowler: 02:21:23 That's right. You remember, we sent the B-2 down there on its trial run, and we bombed every taco stand and brothel in Panama for about seventeen days and still couldn't...

Mel Steely: 02:21:33 Clearly the work of the Republicans.

Wyche Fowler: 02:21:35 And still couldn't find Noriega.
Mel Steely: 02:21:37 They did leave the bars alone.

Wyche Fowler: 02:21:42 I'm trying to answer your question. My most interesting work in my ten years in the House was on foreign policy, mostly outside of public scrutiny or controversy. That House Intelligence Committee was a force to be reckoned with, because we had a lot of good membership on the Democratic and Republican side. Asked tough questions.

Mel Steely: 02:22:20 You were there on the Intelligence Committee when Jimmy Carter kind of redid the CIA, and put Stansfield Turner over there.

Wyche Fowler: 02:22:27 Yes.

Mel Steely: 02:22:28 And you had to approve, the committee, had to approve his appointment, didn't you?

Wyche Fowler: 02:22:33 No.

Mel Steely: 02:22:34 No, you didn't do that?

Wyche Fowler: 02:22:38 No, the committee didn't do that.

Mel Steely: 02:22:39 The historians have looked back...

Wyche Fowler: 02:22:42 The Senate would have to confirm Turner, because that's the cabinet level, which they did. I was in the House.

Mel Steely: 02:22:52 Historians look back on that as a flawed appointment, that Turner did a lot to hurt the CIA, or at least things happened that were negative while he was there. Did you have any sense of that, or do you think they were wrong on that? They went so far as to say he went into publicizing who our spies were, and opened this, and opened that, and opened doors on everything, and we never should've done that. You had an inside look at all of that. Without going into specifics, which I know you don't want to talk about, what was your general feeling about the changes under Carter towards intelligence?

Wyche Fowler: 02:23:39 I don't have a well-formed, I guess, memory. My solid recollection was that Turner emphasized the human intelligence to the detriment of the technology crowd. He wanted to have more spies, more people on the ground. More linguists and not, the NSA and these huge operations basically out of sight, buried in the Defense Department who want more satellites, and more technology. I think he got in trouble just because of his manner.
He was a gruff Admiral and thought... He was very impolitic. I don't recall... It'd be interesting to see... I haven't read anything, I don't know what the historians are saying.

Mel Steely: 02:24:58 You've looked at the CIA from just about every angle, you've been in oversight with the committee, you've worked as an ambassador, you were involved as a Senator. What is your general assessment of the role of the CIA in that period from 1979 or '80 up to the present?

Wyche Fowler: 02:25:24 Well, that's a big question I'm not really prepared to answer off the top of my head.

Mel Steely: 02:25:30 We'll hold it then. In our next interview we'll go to that, when we get into your ambassador years.

Wyche Fowler: 02:25:35 All right. Yeah, that'd be better.

Mel Steely: 02:25:38 You can be more reflective at that stage possibly than at this.

Wyche Fowler: 02:25:42 I've had a lot of dealings with them, and I'm somewhere in between being a true believer and, like my friend, the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who want to abolish the CIA.

Mel Steely: 02:25:59 Oh, I liked him a lot.

Wyche Fowler: 02:26:01 He thought that you didn't get anything from them that you couldn't read in the newspapers. So I'm sort of in the middle there.

Wyche Fowler: 02:26:13 The basic philosophy, the difficulty, especially in dealing with and thinking about the public, is there are two different kinds of secrets. There are secrets, and there are mysteries. Secrets are something that you can ascertain with the right detection, or the right equipment, or the right people. You can steal the code, you can determine where the hangars are. You might, if they're there, even find weapons of mass destruction somewhere. The mysteries are what we want the CIA to solve. How long is the King of Saudi Arabia going to live? Will there be political instability as a result of Putin's policies? It is the great mysteries that will have an effect on American foreign policy, and should have, and determine who are our friends and enemies. But those are all educated, hopefully educated, speculation. You can't ever prove them. You can't ever determine them with certainty. And therefore, we ask the CIA to do that, and when they fail to do that, we don't understand why. The failure is not
institutional, it's just that you're asking questions that really cannot be determined with absolute finality.

Mel Steely: 02:27:39 You served under two Presidents while you were in the House. Carter and Reagan.

Wyche Fowler: 02:27:44 Well, as Robert C. Berg would say, I serve with two presidents, I haven't served under any president.

Mel Steely: 02:27:50 That's true. Would you give me an assessment, your assessment of them

Wyche Fowler: 02:27:57 I served with Carter, I served with Reagan in both terms, and I served with Bush. Oh, House and the Senate, I'm sorry.

Mel Steely: 02:28:04 I'm talking about different, they're different roles in a sense. The two in the House were Carter and Bush, I mean Carter and Reagan.

Wyche Fowler: 02:28:12 Right.

Mel Steely: 02:28:13 And later, when you do the Senate, by the time you get through the ambassador, I'll ask you to do Bush One, and Clinton.

Wyche Fowler: 02:28:22 I didn't serve with Clinton except as his ambassador.

Mel Steely: 02:28:27 You were his ambassador. It's pretty much serving.

Wyche Fowler: 02:28:33 I'm sorry, I'm thinking about in the Congress.

Mel Steely: 02:28:36 What do you think about Carter overall? If you were writing the history and somebody said, "I want you to write an assessment of Jimmy Carter's years as president. I need one good paragraph." What would you write about him?

Wyche Fowler: 02:28:51 Well, again, it's just hard to be accurate just like that off the top of your head. I'd have to work on that paragraph. I don't think I have any original insight. Carter was, and is, an incredibly smart, substantive man whose heart was always in the right place, as you've seen in his post-presidency. He believed in helping people. He believed in trying to figure out better policies that were fair and effective to all Americans of any stripe. His problem was something that I alluded to before about my friend Sarah Craig, in her article. His problem was coming from the outside with no experience whatsoever as to how the government, the federal government, is intricately organized. And how, if you do not know the levers of power in these
agencies, and how their constituencies are affected and how
their bureaucracies are governed, then you can't harness them
the Lyndon Johnson style for your program to move things
forward.

Mel Steely: 02:30:23 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:30:23 It's impossible to ask somebody to do that. He had no
experience, he had nobody around him with any experience,
which was even worse. That was a huge mistake. If you’re going
to come in as a governor, and especially one that has had no
real, had no experience, you just can't do it. It'd be like asking
me to drive a train or something.

Mel Steely: 02:30:49 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:30:51 So that's what hurt him. He almost overcame it with just by the
sheer power of his will, which we know is extraordinary. And his
learning capacity, his being a quick study, his persuasiveness
when he would get these Bureau chiefs and heads of agencies
and everything. But he just never did get on top of it. Therefore,
I guess I feel like that the country sort of felt like there was a
drift that Reagan was able to capture in his rhetoric.

Mel Steely: 02:31:38 You were there all four years of the Carter administration. Well,
except for about three months-

Wyche Fowler: 02:31:43 Right.

Mel Steely: 02:31:43 ... The first. Did he ever invite you over to the White House? Or
want to talk with you? Or seek advice or anything?

Wyche Fowler: 02:31:52 I wish you hadn't asked me that.

Mel Steely: 02:31:55 Well, be like Talmadge and say, I'm not going to answer it.

Wyche Fowler: 02:31:59 No, I'll be honest. No, he didn't never asked the Georgia
devolution to Camp David, little things that were... I was the
only one that was voting with him.

Mel Steely: 02:32:11 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:32:11 I've gotten several handwritten notes from that period. I'd
support the State Department appropriations and foreign aid
and things that none of the other-

Mel Steely: 02:32:22 You supported Panama Canal, didn't you?
Wyche Fowler: 02:32:24 Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative). For the House part-

Mel Steely: 02:32:27 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:32:27 We had to-

Mel Steely: 02:32:28 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:32:29 I’ve forgotten who else, maybe Elliot did, but there’s probably only two of us. And of course, President Carter has been wonderful to me and he campaigned for me in the Senate both times all over the place. So my admiration just continues to grow. But in trying to answer your question he just didn’t have any preparation for what the abilities it takes to move a government, a hostile government, no matter what your party or stripe. If you step on their toes or go change, then they’re going to resist it. Unless you know how to go around them or go through them.

Mel Steely: 02:33:22 It’s all the difference in the world, in personalities between he and his successor, Reagan. I remember Tip talking about going over and seeing Reagan at the end of the day, and having a drink with him, and talking, and swapping stories. That’s unthinkable with Carter.

Wyche Fowler: 02:33:38 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 02:33:38 It just-

Wyche Fowler: 02:33:39 [crosstalk 02:33:39] Well it was at that time.

Mel Steely: 02:33:40 Yeah. At that time it just didn’t happen. And-

Wyche Fowler: 02:33:44 And see where the Republicans... I can speak in partisan terms where the Republicans have always been very... They have developed sort of a cadre of very experienced people that are called in when they have a Republican president. I mean you just look at this Bush team; it’s all his father’s people.

Mel Steely: 02:34:05 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:34:06 It’s still Cheney and Powell was [crosstalk 02:34:11] Chief of Staff. Well, Wolfowitz comes from the ideological side.

Mel Steely: 02:34:15 Right.
Wyche Fowler: But the Jim Bakers of the world, those people have been in and out of government and Cabinet positions. The Democratic presidents have seemed to sort of come in and reinvent the wheel, including Clinton. But Clinton had political skills that we all give him that started off, dug a big hole for himself, but he also dug himself out and was able to make the government respond.

Mel Steely: In the twentieth century the only man with those kind of political skills was Franklin Roosevelt in my judgment. I think Clinton had-

Wyche Fowler: And Lyndon Johnson.

Mel Steely: Yeah, probably. Probably. I think Clinton was better than Johnson-

Wyche Fowler: Well, he's more persuasive.

Mel Steely: Exactly.

Wyche Fowler: But see, Johnson had the knowledge of the government-

Mel Steely: Yeah, exactly. Okay.

Wyche Fowler: ... And the knowledge of every Congressman.

Mel Steely: Yep. Just this internal sense of politics though, and being what people want you to be. See, Lyndon, like you said earlier, he'd beat you over the head and get what he wanted. Clinton would love you to death and get what you wanted.

Wyche Fowler: Yeah.

Mel Steely: I remember poor Buddy Darden and he made Buddy run with him that day. Buddy came out and showed that picture of me running with the president. The same time Bob Barr was showing the same picture and beat him to death with it. But he loved Clinton. I mean, and Newt told me the same thing. He said, Clinton comes in and puts his arm around you. He said "You can't help but like the guy." He was persuasive. Ain't no question about it, and had this gut instinct for how to do things. He just, super at that doing this sort of thing. I don't know. How would you judge Reagan overall?

Wyche Fowler: Well extremely effective. Aided immeasurably by that cadre of strong people around him.
Mel Steely: 02:36:03 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:36:04 For all the reasons that we all acknowledge, he's a tremendous communicator. In a limited... But he was a Hollywood television president. People don't look beyond that. Because I was on the Ways and Means Committee and the House Intelligence, I was over there about once a week. Because we were doing those major tax bills. You know how you sit, committee, they sit next to each other. The committee chairman sit on his right, and the ranking member would sit on the left and then he'd go by seniority all around the table there in the Roosevelt Room. So when you came around sitting just facing him, like me and you, was me the most junior member of both committees.

Mel Steely: 02:36:54 Uh-huh (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:36:55 So I-

Mel Steely: 02:36:56 But facing the president?

Wyche Fowler: 02:36:57 But facing the president.

Mel Steely: 02:36:58 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:36:59 For facing the president.

Mel Steely: 02:36:59 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:37:00 So some guy that had been in the Congress for twenty-five years down there trying to question him, I could interrupt at any second say, "Mr. President, what you think about that?" Or something because I was just sitting there looking at him.

Mel Steely: 02:37:10 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:37:11 But it's thought to be unkind to say it, and say he was... So, I say all the positive things, extremely effective. He got all his programs through, but he didn't believe but two or three things. He believed in less government, believed in abolishing taxes to the greatest extent possible, and he believed in the huge defense. Those grand pursuits were followed and to a large extent accomplished. He talked about a smaller government, but like every other president, he ended up with more people.

Wyche Fowler: 02:37:51 But he'd have these people around... I could see Jim Baker, Secretary of Treasury sitting right behind him, were Ways and Means committee. You'd ask him a question about, "Well, what
if we take this rate and we adjust it down twenty percent and maybe we change this deduction so, as to offset the loss? Do you think you could support that kind of thing?" And immediately Baker would jump, "Mr. Present, excuse me." Touching him, "Before you answer that, let me give a little context."

Mel Steely: 02:38:22 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:38:23 So then he would answer the question, and then President Reagan would say, "Ah." And then he'd tell a story.

Mel Steely: 02:38:30 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:38:30 He couldn't answer any detail about anything in the legislation.

Mel Steely: 02:38:35 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:38:36 But nobody expects him to, that's just the way he was. He talked about, "I remember when I was in Hollywood during the war, making those war films, I think the tax rate was ninety-five percent top bracket. You know, these taxes are bad. They are the worst thing for our country." Then you go to the next question and then the assistant secretary of treasury jumps up. But-

Mel Steely: 02:39:05 It's almost entertaining wasn't it? And frustrating for you? A little of both?

Wyche Fowler: 02:39:11 The frustrating was on the intelligence, on the foreign policy stuff. Sometimes he would try it, but it was just, he didn't really... Whatever he was told by his Secretary of State or whatever the policy was formed in the White House. Then he'd go out and read his note cards and that was it. He couldn't go beyond that.

Mel Steely: 02:39:36 Yeah. Busbee was working with him, with the governors would go up there, and was extremely impressed with him in those first two years. He said he did know exactly what was going on and had been a governor-

Wyche Fowler: 02:39:48 Well, that's right.

Mel Steely: 02:39:49 ... Backwards and forward, he really handled it. He said, "These people to say he didn't know what was going on, boy, they were just wrong." I said, "Well, did you talk about anything other than
your governor's roads?" He said, "Well no, that was what we were up there."

Wyche Fowler: 02:40:02 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 02:40:02 He said, "But Reagan was on top of that and he would get in right with us and debate it and argue and gave illustrations again when I was governor, we used to do this and that kind of thing." I suppose that's normal to a degree, but you're saying when you got beyond those three or four issues, he really did lean heavily on staff to kind of guide it?

Wyche Fowler: 02:40:21 Oh absolutely.

Mel Steely: 02:40:22 And trusted them to do it I suppose?

Wyche Fowler: 02:40:23 Oh. Absolutely, he had to.

Mel Steely: 02:40:26 Of course. I suppose that as a management style, if you don't know it, get you somebody who really does and then leave them alone, let them do it.

Wyche Fowler: 02:40:34 Well, to have an exact... The difference between Reagan and this Bush, George W., Reagan in my opinion, did have some intellectual curiosity about the large governing principles that he had thought through as governor, and however he developed that philosophy.

Mel Steely: 02:41:00 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:41:01 He could defend those in private. He'd just say, "Well, that just goes too far. We're not going to do that and that's going to hurt our farmers or something." But though I have not had the privilege of meeting or sitting with President Bush, my impression is the difference is that he just doesn't have really any... He's just never displayed any curiosity about-

Mel Steely: 02:41:28 This current Bush?

Wyche Fowler: 02:41:29 This current Bush, about matters of public policy. So that he's almost totally staff dependent, on whatever the collective staff and Cabinet, and Wolfowitzes of the world decide to sell to him. He's got to make the final decision whether he's going to invade Iraq unilaterally or not. What the final tax rate the administration is going to push. But he's going to rely very heavily like a board of directors, as to what the majority, or the
most persuasive, or whatever. Because he just doesn't display that... The only word I know for it, is curiosity.

Mel Steely: 02:42:13 Mm-hmm (affirmative). How about his daddy?

Wyche Fowler: 02:42:16 Oh, well his daddy was much... The daddy's a different breed of cat. His daddy didn't seem to be the most curious guy in the world, but he had, had incredible experiences in the various levels of the government, and vice presidents, CIA director, ambassador to China, where he gained a wealth of experience that he could rely on to make decisions, as well as the kind of people that he wanted around him to help him make those decisions.

Wyche Fowler: 02:42:49 Of course, he comes at it from a totally different approach with that experience. He's an internationalist. He believes in alliances. He believes in the United Nations, which, you know, America can't go it alone. But this guy is very, very different from his father. A lot of people say he's... I mean his father had a little trouble with the language too, but it's a different, even that's very different.

Mel Steely: 02:43:22 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:43:26 The fact that George Bush Senior sometime, sort of spoke usually in shorthand. That's very different from this guy who has trouble when you... He can't-

Mel Steely: 02:43:42 I've noticed-

Wyche Fowler: 02:43:43 ... Put it together.

Mel Steely: 02:43:48 ... This new guy, Clark, Wesley Clark-

Wyche Fowler: 02:43:47 Yes.

Mel Steely: 02:43:48 ... Burst on the scene. Seems to have the same kind of sentence structure problems since he's gotten into politics that-

Wyche Fowler: 02:43:56 Well maybe-

Mel Steely: 02:43:57 ... G.W. Bush has.

Wyche Fowler: 02:43:59 Maybe it's just stage fright.

Mel Steely: 02:44:00 I don't know. I don't know. It's going to be interesting to watch him.
Wyche Fowler: 02:44:03 But Clark, is some Phi Beta Kappa summa cum laude at all of his schools.

Mel Steely: 02:44:09 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:44:11 But he's got same problem we've been discussing, this big Mr. Outside role. I'm going to go in and straighten everything out because I'm not part of Washington. All he's really saying, if you translate it is, "That I haven't had to vote on abortion, and women's rights, and prayer in schools, and gun control, and all these controversial issues that these senators have. So I can just be anything I want to be."

Mel Steely: 02:44:34 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:44:36 That's-

Mel Steely: 02:44:37 You'll have to try to figure out what I am now and I'll surprise you when I get elected. Huh?

Wyche Fowler: 02:44:40 Exactly. Then I will know how to like things-

Mel Steely: 02:44:44 Kind of like Carter's '70 campaign. Yeah. Well-

Wyche Fowler: 02:44:52 How much tape we got left today?

Mel Steely: 02:44:54 You haven't got my last part there though, the thing you were disappointed in. We never quite got around to that. You told me what your positive part about being a Congressman. Is there anything you wish you could have done other than just that you wish that you'd had more power to affect what you were doing?

Wyche Fowler: 02:45:12 Yeah, I don't have any-

Mel Steely: 02:45:17 For instance, Andy Young wished that he'd stayed in the Senate instead of going... I mean in the House instead of going to the UN. He said, had he stayed there, he might have learned more about Martin Luther King's death. Because he would have been involved in the committee and all that kind of stuff. He said, "That might've served better. But at the time I thought I was better off going to the UN and moving forward, et cetera, et cetera, and missed an opportunity where we might could have really resolved." Because he didn't believe that Ray had killed him, like the King family, they just didn't buy that.

Wyche Fowler: 02:45:52 Yeah. I know that.
Mel Steely: 02:45:54 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:45:56 No I-

Mel Steely: 02:45:56 So if you don't have anything like that.

Wyche Fowler: 02:46:00 I really don't. I'm thinking, I'm trying to think hard. Maybe-

Mel Steely: 02:46:04 But see he'd left the legislative end of it, you didn't. You just went over to the other side, but it was still a legislative.

Wyche Fowler: 02:46:10 That's right.

Mel Steely: 02:46:10 So there is a difference there, there was nothing that you really left behind as it were, was there? I mean you said maybe a foreign policy.

Wyche Fowler: 02:46:19 Well, I think... We'll see, that's interesting, in that people, again, I have a hard time convincing them. But I guess I learned from my parents. I certainly would give them the credit. I do have an ability to very rarely look back. They sort of taught me that life, you either spend your life in the front-end of the boat looking forward, or in the back-end, looking at the weight. So that the one question that you could ask is what the best six years of my life, of my professional life, five or six years. It's not in the House, not in the Senate, but in Saudi Arabia. Because that-maybe it was the time I'd got tired of speaking to the same old Rotary Clubs every year, and seeing the same old pressure groups come around. I got tired of him in the house and he just went ten times more, for ten districts, in multiple of ten when I went to the Senate. I knew what I thought about most matters of public policy, the ones I'd been working on, the ones that I opposed.

Wyche Fowler: 02:47:32 So that to go to Saudi Arabia tapped all the talents that I had accumulated as a public/ public official interested in public policy, with the kind of I guess diplomacy that also comes from being a politician that you have to have. But that's where the mind was fully engaged because I keep coming back to this word, curiosity. Impossible to be ever bored. It was a challenge every day because you in a totally unique situation, unique in its history, unique in its geography, unique in its religion, uniqueness in its interpretation of that religion. Plus the executive responsibilities of security, protecting your people, how you promote American foreign policy and values, and how you try to make a difference in their society.
Mel Steely: 02:48:35 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:48:36 That was the defining period of my public policy life. Sort of like Gingrich... I never thought I would use that, use him. My real interest is not so much in politics as it is in public policy. I mean I have as you can probably tell more of a sort of pedantry, an academic interest in the how you affect public policy.

Mel Steely: 02:49:06 Yeah.

Wyche Fowler: 02:49:08 People tell me despite my losses over in different races that I'm a good politician but that's just because I like people and I'm comfortable with them. But even though I'm out of elective politics, for instance, I hope I'm never out of public service because that's what Saudi Arabia brought.

Mel Steely: 02:49:37 There are things going on over there right now. I think we'd almost be foolish to not utilize everybody we've got. Unless your views are so totally opposed to what the president's doing then he couldn't afford to put you in.

Wyche Fowler: 02:49:51 Oh no.

Mel Steely: 02:49:51 Because he would-

Wyche Fowler: 02:49:53 No, but-

Mel Steely: 02:49:53 I just think we've got to get our people that know what's going on over there and have a feel for it and talk with them. Even like a... I like Roosevelt's style, Franklin's style. Where you bring in people with opposite views and you sit and you listen.

Wyche Fowler: 02:50:05 Me too. Me too.

Mel Steely: 02:50:07 Let them go at each other and then you say, "Thank you gentlemen." They go away and then you make a decision based on what you've been hearing.

Wyche Fowler: 02:50:13 I think that's absolutely right. But no, this administration, they would never ever, have, as you can see, even a consultant who's had any Democratic leans.

Mel Steely: 02:50:25 That's tragic.

Wyche Fowler: 02:50:27 Well, they've gotten themselves in real trouble because they never asked people who spent the last five, six, eight or twenty
years going down these roads and knowing when you make mistakes-

Mel Steely: 02:50:40 Well that's the thing even if... You almost have to assume that the people who are Democrats have no interest in serving the country to reject it. You might not agree with them, but you ought to hear it. To me. Even if you politically have differences, you ought to hear what they're saying because they've been there and you can learn from them even if they made mistakes.

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:04 I'm just telling you that's not the way they do it.

Mel Steely: 02:51:07 No, I'm sure it isn't.

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:09 Without exception.

Mel Steely: 02:51:10 No.

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:13 It's one of the interesting things, whenever you have Democrats, Democratic presidents, since we've been talking at that level, they always put at least one Republican or two in their cabinet.

Mel Steely: 02:51:23 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:24 Clinton had Bill Cohen, a Republican, as his Secretary of Defense. Carter had the couple, I can't think of the names right now, but these were like these... From Reagan on, they never had any hint of any kind of bipartisanship in their governance.

Mel Steely: 02:51:45 You think he's just gotten too ideological? Is that-

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:48 Well-

Mel Steely: 02:51:49 It's just that partisan. It's just-

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:51 Well I think-

Mel Steely: 02:51:52 Pure partisanship.

Wyche Fowler: 02:51:52 I think partisanship, the guys that are in office... Well remember I hadn't been there for ten years?

Mel Steely: 02:51:59 Right.
Wyche Fowler: 02:51:59 But they certainly tell you that on both sides that it's so partisan, that it's unattractive, the good people. A lot of that, in my judgment, in this latest growing since Reagan is ideological.

Mel Steely: 02:52:20 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Wyche Fowler: 02:52:21 People just... A lot of guys, they just don't want to hear the other side, believe they... They're going to get there... For those seeing this tape fifteen years from now, they just go "Ah." We'll talk about that, I'm sure when we talk get on foreign policy. They just absolutely got their head handed to them in Iraq. I mean we have to succeed, we have to stay, we have to bring security, we have to bring stability.

Wyche Fowler: 02:52:50 But this business that we go have Jeffersonian Democrats, and a democracy, and we're going to revolutionize the Middle East, which was the raison d'être of their cause. Wolfowitz and Cheney and all these guys been preaching that. How we going to transform the Middle East? All these countries into carrying their Jefferson around?

Mel Steely: 02:53:15 People love it. They love to hear it and people believe it. I think G.W. Bush believes when he tells you that. I think he really thinks that kind of thing is going to... It reminds me of 61-

Wyche Fowler: 02:53:25 Yeah, but see he doesn't have any background for him to make a judgment on that. So, that's kind of thing we talk about. If you had-

Mel Steely: 02:53:32 That's never stopped him before.

Wyche Fowler: 02:53:34 Well it's not stopping him now, but as I say, I hope that we'll be able to be out of there, and with a stability in some kind of government that the Iraqis themselves are going to devise. But I can assure you, I hope I'm wrong. I'll be very happy to stand and proclaim my error, but I would suspect that when we get to stability, and we get to a representative government, it will look a lot more like some kind of travel form of representation than it will look like Thomas Jefferson.

Mel Steely: 02:54:14 I think it probably will.

Wyche Fowler: 02:54:16 Because that's what they've been doing for centuries and it works very well, thank you very much. It might not promote the most in what we call human rights, and equality. But it's their culture, it's their tradition. They don't... After you and I are long
gone we may have some kind of model democratic state over there, but I ain't going to be in our lifetime.

Mel Steely: 02:54:48 Not in our... I think you're probably right. Well, this is-

Wyche Fowler: 02:54:52 Well, thank you.

Mel Steely: 02:54:53 ... Probably a good time to stop here.

Wyche Fowler: 02:54:55 Yeah. I think I've had about-

Mel Steely: 02:54:55 About as much as you can take for the moment?

Wyche Fowler: 02:54:58 Well-

Mel Steely: 02:54:59 Well we’ve gotten-

Wyche Fowler: 02:54:59 I want to keep you interested.