Mel Steely: 00:01:09 I'm Mel Steely from the History Department at the University of West Georgia, director of the Georgia Political Heritage Program. Today is January 5, 2004. We're interviewing Congressman Phil Gingrey. Mr. Gingrey, would you start off our interview by telling us a little bit about yourself? Your early life, where you were born, and when and so forth?

Phil Gingrey: 00:01:33 Well, Dr. Steely, I was born actually in Augusta, Georgia. I'll tell you the exact date. I would tell you my age, but I guess 7-10-'42, and I'll let you do the math. But I was, my parents at that time were actually living in Edgefield, South Carolina. The home of Strom Thurmond. We lived in Edgefield, I think maybe the first year or two possibly of my life, and then moved to a little community on the Savannah River called North Augusta, South Carolina.

Phil Gingrey: 00:02:05 When I was raised there in North Augusta, I went to school in Augusta. My mom was Catholic, and she wanted me to go to a little Catholic school there. Sacred Heart was the name of the school. A wonderful school. All of my education was in Augusta, Georgia.

Phil Gingrey: 00:02:22 After I went off to Georgia Tech to college, my dad opened a business in Augusta. Actually a motel, a mom and pop motel. It was called The Heart of Augusta. At that point we became permanent residents, if you will, of the state of Georgia. That was sort of my early background. I graduated from Georgia Tech, came back to Augusta. Mom and dad still had the motel there.

Phil Gingrey: 00:02:49 I went to the medical college. After finishing the medical college of Georgia, I returned to Atlanta to do my internship at Grady. Then after that year, went back to South Carolina, across the Savannah River, and practiced for a couple of years.

Mel Steely: 00:03:08 You graduated from Sacred Heart High School?

Phil Gingrey: 00:03:11 Sacred Heart actually was what we used to call a grammar school. It was first grade through sixth grade. Then I went to high school in Augusta. It's no longer ... Well, it is in existence. The name has just changed. But it was called Boys Catholic High
School. It was a boys only school that, the Marist Catholic brothers were the teachers. That became Saint Thomas Aquinas High School, which is an outstanding school. Still in Augusta. It's a Catholic school, but a lot of students go to that school because of its academic excellence. I'm very proud to have been really one of the first graduating classes from Saint Thomas Aquinas High School.

Mel Steely: 00:03:52 I went to Saint Pius in Atlanta.

Phil Gingrey: 00:03:55 Yeah. This was very much like Saint Pius. Much smaller, but the same type of school. Excellent school.

Mel Steely: 00:04:00 Mm-hmm (affirmative). What did you find most interesting in school? What subjects?

Phil Gingrey: 00:04:06 Well I was very good at math and science. I think possibly because I wasn't challenged the way I needed to be challenged, and I did very well in those subjects, that led to my decision to matriculate at Georgia Tech. The other thing that kind of motivated me in that direction was the fact that they had a co-op program. That's a work study program, as you know.

Phil Gingrey: 00:04:33 Although I spent a lot of my early childhood across the river in South Carolina, and was very inclined to go to Clemson, where my brother had gone. My brother was four years older than me. But they didn't have a co-op program, and financially I really needed that. I ended up at Georgia Tech. Because of my, I thought I had an aptitude for math and science, I enrolled in an engineering program at Georgia Tech. Ultimately though decided that what I really wanted to do was to go to medical school and become a doctor. That's how it all happened.

Mel Steely: 00:05:05 Yeah. I started out as a vet, and ended up being a teacher.

Phil Gingrey: 00:05:08 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 00:05:09 Same thing. I hit chemistry and decided, “I don't really want to do that.”

Phil Gingrey: 00:05:12 Well, the chemistry didn't do me in. Actually, when I decided to go to medical school I switched my major from an engineering curriculum to chemistry. That was actually my BS degree from Georgia Tech, was in chemistry.
Phil Gingrey: 00:05:35 Well I'm happy to do that. Of course as we get older, that means so much to us. My dad actually died in 1980 at age 67. My dad was from Aiken County, South Carolina. As far back as I can trace, everybody was pretty much from that area. His father, his father's father. Dad was raised in a very impoverished background. His mom died in childbirth, as it were, when he was only five years old. His father struggled to raise four children.

Mel Steely: 00:06:20 What was his name? Your grandfather.

Phil Gingrey: 00:06:21 My grandfather's name was Charles Gingrey.

Mel Steely: 00:06:25 Okay.

Phil Gingrey: 00:06:26 His wife was named Ethie. Of course, obviously I never knew my grandmother on that side. But dad and his brothers struggled so much just to survive, that as teenagers they all went to New York City looking for work. They dropped out of school, and went to New York City. That's where my dad eventually met my mom.

Phil Gingrey: 00:06:52 My mom, her mother was from Scotland, and her dad was from Ireland. Her dad came to this country through Ellis Island in 1903, I believe. Maybe 1905. But in any regard, they started raising their family there in New York City. I think my maternal grandfather, Patrick Gannon, was a bartender in New York. He died at a very early age, so my mom and her three sisters and one brother were raised by a single mom. She never remarried.

Phil Gingrey: 00:07:33 I think my mother was eighteen years old in New York City when she met my dad. He was about twenty-five at the time. He was going to night school in New York, trying to complete his high school education. He eventually did. In fact, he excelled in night school in New York. He was very proud of that.

Phil Gingrey: 00:07:51 After they married, one of my two brothers was born in New York City. When he was one year old, my parents and my older brother came back to South Carolina. Then of course I was born, when they were living in Edgefield, and the rest of the story I've already told you.
Mel Steely: 00:08:09 Yeah. That was a rough period there. That would have been during the Great Depression, when they were having children and getting married, and getting started. That's a bad time.

Phil Gingrey: 00:08:17 Times were really tough. I think probably tough for everybody, even if you had a good traditional family and two strong parents. But in particular on my dad's side, it was a real struggle. Because his father, my grandfather, who by the way lived to be 84 years old. I knew him very well. But he struggled with life. He was not a really good provider. He was a good person. He was a master carpenter, and he could have done very well. But like so many people, I think he spent more time feeling sorry for himself over the death of his wife at a very young age. He never remarried.

Phil Gingrey: 00:08:56 My dad and his siblings suffered because of that. But my dad was a self-made man. He never had an opportunity to go to college, but I was very proud of him. He motivated me a lot, I think, in a very subtle way.

Mel Steely: 00:09:14 Georgia Tech was your choice, you said, because you had excelled in science. Tell me what Tech was like. What year did you go to Tech? What year did you enter there?

Phil Gingrey: 00:09:22 1960. The fall of 1960. I had just turned 18. I had been to Atlanta one other time very briefly for a high school basketball tournament. State playoffs. But I really knew nothing of the city of Atlanta. I had never been on the Georgia Tech campus.

Phil Gingrey: 00:09:44 Back in those days, maybe I was the only one. Or maybe it was typical. But I don't ever remember visiting any college campus except Clemson. Because my brother was going to school there, and my dad and I would oftentimes go up on Sunday to have Sunday dinner with my brother. But I never took these college trips that the youngsters take today, looking for just the right place. It was Clemson or Georgia Tech.

Phil Gingrey: 00:10:10 When I arrived there, it was kind of a culture shock. I had gone to a very small high school. That little Catholic high school only had 200 students in the whole school. The four grades of high school. It was a total of about 200 students. It was a rude awakening. I tell this story often, that I had actually never heard of the term "calculus." I didn't know what that meant. I guess I had taken trigonometry and geometry and algebra, but I did not know what calculus was, so I really struggled that first year at Tech.
Phil Gingrey: 00:10:46 My children, two of whom graduated from Tech, don't believe it when I tell them that twenty hours was a typical schedule. The fact that we went to school on Saturday from nine until twelve, everybody did at Georgia Tech in those days. That first quarter I had seven courses. One was PE. But we had some legendary coaches back then, like Freddy Lanoue, who taught drown-proofing. Physical education was a tough course at Georgia Tech.

Phil Gingrey: 00:11:17 I had seven courses, including PE. That was a lot to say grace over. Thank God, and by God's grace I was able somehow to manage to get a 3.0 B average that first quarter.

Phil Gingrey: 00:11:30 I went to work right after that in the work rotation of the co-op program. The whole time at Tech under that program was a five year course. I wasn't behind academically. It was a five year curriculum.

Mel Steely: 00:11:46 What kind of work did you do when you were co-oping?

Phil Gingrey: 00:11:49 I worked most of the time at the Savannah River Project. The DuPont Company had the contract for SRP at that time, which was in Barnwell County, just maybe twenty-five miles from Aiken. When I would go to my co-op quarter, I would actually live at home with my parents and carpool to work. Most of the time that was my job, working at the Savannah River Project. What we used to call the bomb plant.

Mel Steely: 00:12:15 Yeah. All of your work so far has been in engineering and industry, and stuff of that nature. Math and all. Why did you decide to go into medicine?

Phil Gingrey: 00:12:25 Well when I got to the first quarter, we were in a quarter system then, and until very recently when we made that changeover as you know just a couple of years ago. But on that quarter program, the first quarter of my third year, I guess you would call that the junior year, I took my first specific engineering course. The first two years were just basic. Everybody took math and physics and a little chemistry. Mechanical drawing, we called it. In preparation for whatever engineering curriculum you pursued.

Phil Gingrey: 00:12:59 Mine was chemical engineering. When I went in for the first course in chemical engineering, I was just lost. I felt that I really had no aptitude for it, nor much interest in the subject matter. I just knew that that's not what I wanted to do. Then I looked for another major, because I didn't want to leave Tech. I wanted to
continue on that program. I still had the financial need to remain on the co-op program. Chemistry looked like a pretty good alternative, and gave me a lot of opportunity to take elective courses.

Phil Gingrey: 00:13:36 It was shortly after that that I met a physician in Augusta, Georgia. He was chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery at the Medical College of Georgia, Dr. George Smith. I'll never forget Dr. Smith. The circumstances of me meeting him was this. He was a silent partner with my dad in the motel business. My dad didn't have quite the financial backing that he needed to build this motel, and it was not, it was a sixty unit mom and pop motel. It wasn't anything elaborate.

Phil Gingrey: 00:14:09 But Dr. Smith had been his physician. My father suffered from something that we back then called tic douloureux. It was a seventh nerve problem, facial pain. He had a lot of pain. Dr. Smith was his physician, and he became his silent partner as an investor in the motel. That's how I happened to meet him. I told him that I didn't know what I wanted to do, and he said, “Well you know, come down and see me sometime. I'll show you what I do.”

Phil Gingrey: 00:14:40 One Saturday I came home from Georgia Tech. He took me to the hospital with him, and let me watch some procedures that he was doing. I didn't watch any neurosurgery on a human, but he did take me to the dog lab, where they did a lot of experimental surgery and trained the residents, and let me watch as they were operating on a canine. I have to admit, it almost was too much for me to bear, to watch that. But I knew that I had an interest, and ultimately decided I would apply to medical school, and was very fortunate in a competitive situation to get accepted to the Medical College of Georgia. It was a wonderful experience, going to school there.

Mel Steely: 00:15:25 You must have been a pretty good student, to take a 3.0 at Tech and then switch to medicine, and be accepted. I mean, to get into Tech to begin with you had to be pretty good in high school. Then to get into medical school, with the competition you had to be pretty ... I think you're very self-effacing.

Phil Gingrey: 00:15:39 Well, so a 3.0 average is about what I maintained. Believe me, not without a struggle. I never at any time at Georgia Tech felt that I was over the hump. That I had it made. That I didn't have to continue to work right up to that last quarter, last course of the senior year. I tell people often that anything that I have done since my Georgia Tech experience has seemed easy by
comparison, including medical school. Maybe even including running for Congress.

Phil Gingrey: 00:16:12 Georgia Tech is a tough school. There's no grade inflation. But when you look back and you get some distance, in not only place, but time from that experience, you really have a great appreciation for it. It prepared me well for the medical school.

Phil Gingrey: 00:16:29 I will say this though. That a 3.0 average today probably wouldn't get you in the Medical College of Georgia, or most any medical school. It's highly competitive. But I guess back then, the admissions committee at the medical college realized that the curriculum at Tech was a little bit tougher than it is at a lot of other schools. They cut us a little slack. Of the five of us that were accepted and went to the medical college, so we were five out of a class of a hundred, we were all in the top fifteen of the class. Our track record of being Georgia Tech graduates was very good.

Mel Steely: 00:17:08 It is good. Once you got to medical school, you had to decide on a specialty after you did your first year. I guess specialty came, second year or third year? When did you make that decision?

Phil Gingrey: 00:17:21 Yeah, it really doesn't have to be made ... Back then everybody did what's called an internship. That one year internship after the four years of medical school could be with an emphasis in anything that you wanted. Mine was, because I had an inkling that I wanted to be an OBGYN, I did an OBGYN internship. It could have been general surgery. It could have been pediatrics. It could have been orthopedics. Where you spend maybe four months out of the twelve in that particular endeavor.

Phil Gingrey: 00:17:55 Then ultimately that year is when you have to make a decision about residency. That's the way I did it. But today, the medical students, as you alluded to, have to make a decision, usually in their third year. Then they go right out of medical school into that residency program. There isn't this separate internship. It's all a three or a four year program, in the specialty that they pick while they're still medical students.

Mel Steely: 00:18:22 I always liked the old system, because I think it broadened the doctor. Instead of focusing, it tended to give you a broader picture. But that's kind of out of fashion now.

Phil Gingrey: 00:18:31 But you know, and I agree with you that it was a great way. Because while I was doing that OBGYN internship at Grady in Atlanta in 1969, '70, and I felt that I definitely wanted to be an
OBGYN physician. In the spring of that year I had come home for a couple of days of the Masters golf tournament. One of the doctors, actually in South Carolina, over in Aiken, South Carolina, I guess heard of me from somebody else, and somehow got in touch with me. The Sunday of that weekend I went over and talked to him.

Phil Gingrey: 00:19:08

He was a father of eight children, and was what we call a general practitioner. Did it all. Delivered babies. Did everything, and talked me into coming and joining him. I actually left that internship and spent two years as a general practitioner. Now you have to specialize to be a family practitioner, but back then you didn't have to do that. You could complete your internship, and then go right out and hang up your shingle. I joined Dr. George Sura in Aiken, South Carolina, in 1970, and stayed with him for two years before going back to Augusta and doing the OBGYN residency. It was a great experience. I really enjoyed that.

Mel Steely: 00:19:49

Well that was a rough time. I think all of us that came out in the '60s and early '70s had the Vietnam thing in our face. How did you do with that?

Phil Gingrey: 00:19:59

It was interesting. My draft board, and of course the D word, the draft was still in force back then. My draft board was in Aiken County. As you remember, we all got classified. The number one classification, that group that they were ready to draft, were 1A. I was one of those. I didn't have flat feet. I didn't have poor hearing. I was in perfect health, a perfect specimen.

Phil Gingrey: 00:20:33

But of course if you went from high school to college, you usually got a deferment. Then in medical school, there was something called the Berry Plan. Young doctors in medical school, if they wanted to go from medical school to their residency program, which was another three or four years, they could get a deferment under this program called the Berry Plan. But after that they were committed to go into the service.

Phil Gingrey: 00:21:02

I didn't apply for that Berry Plan, so I remained 1A all through that time. All through the Vietnam, and just simply never got drafted. It was amazing. I expected to get ... I went for a physical. I passed it with flying colors. I really expected at any point to be in Vietnam, but actually never got called. Then, I think at age 36, doctors finally were no longer considered eligible for the draft, so it never happened for me.

Mel Steely: 00:21:32

I had a similar experience. Just never got called. Once you got into the business, you started as a GP. You came back and did a
residency in OBGYN. Any particular reason why you picked that one over surgery, or pediatry, or whatever?

Phil Gingrey: 00:21:50 Well as a medical student on the obstetrical rotation, and we spent time on each specialty. Maybe three months. That usually was during the third year of medical school. But we weren’t permitted to do too much. It was mainly observation and tagging along, and learning how to do a physical and this sort of thing. General surgery. Just all scrubbed up, standing at the bedside watching, and trying not to fall in the incision, or pass out. But we weren’t permitted really to do a whole lot.

Phil Gingrey: 00:22:25 On OB, just simply a lack of manpower and so many deliveries, and people coming in without prenatal care, they threw us right into the fire. With supervision. But we were able to do things, deliver an occasional baby. I guess at that point, I felt like I really was a doctor. I liked the compassion. I just felt that it was a good mix of a little bit of surgery, and a little bit of general medicine, for females obviously. I thoroughly enjoyed that work, and so it was almost a love at first sight kind of thing.

Mel Steely: 00:23:00 Mm-hmm (affirmative). When you finished up your residency, did you at that point come to Cobb County?

Phil Gingrey: 00:23:08 Yes, I did. When I finished my residency in Augusta, Georgia, toward the middle of that last year it was time to start looking around. My wife is from Newnan. She's a west Georgia girl. A graduate of Newnan High School. Mr. O. P. Evans I think was principal when she graduated. A very strict disciplinarian.

Phil Gingrey: 00:23:31 Then she went to LaGrange College, and graduated from LaGrange. She loved the Atlanta area and west Georgia. I think I could have talked her into staying in Augusta. But if mom ain’t happy, nobody's happy. Billie, my precious wife of 34 years, she wanted to get back to the Atlanta area and be close to her home. It was a good decision for us. We've been very happy with it.

Phil Gingrey: 00:23:58 We came to Cobb County, Georgia, Marietta, in 1975, with two children and one on the way. Or maybe it was three children and one on the way. I think it was three children, yes, and one on the way. We stared our married ... Well, didn't start our married life there. But it was a wonderful, it has been a great place not only to practice medicine, but also to raise a family. We're still there.
Mel Steely: 00:24:26 Were you by yourself in practice? Or did you join a group? How did you do that?

Phil Gingrey: 00:24:32 I joined a group. I decided that I really wanted to be in a single specialty group practice. I found two fantastic physicians, Dr. Glover and Dr. Mitchell, who had been there for a while. That practice was pretty well established. Very well respected in the medical community. I joined them, so I was the third member of that group. Then over time the group has grown. Right now there's six. Now the originals are no longer there, including myself. But that practice Marietta OBGYN Affiliates now has six physicians, and is, again, well respected. I'm proud to have been a part of that for twenty-eight years.

Mel Steely: 00:25:18 At that time when you were making these decisions in the late '60s, early '70s, was the suing of doctors as prevalent as it is now?

Phil Gingrey: 00:25:29 It didn't seem that it was. We have gone through other crisis periods in the time that I was practicing in Marietta. Maybe twenty years ago the medical association formed their own insurance company, a mutual company that doctors actually were a part of. That gave us an opportunity to have a competitive product with some of the commercial carriers. That helped keep the malpractice premium rates reasonable.

Phil Gingrey: 00:26:05 But there were times when there'd be a spike up in that premium, and doctors of course would be very concerned. But we've always had that concern about malpractice. That's not inappropriate, because it's important for doctors to perform at least at the community standard of care. To do a good job. Not to be always playing defense, and afraid to do the right thing for fear that you might make a mistake.

Phil Gingrey: 00:26:38 But you know, that's always been there. It's always been with us. But it's never been the crisis that it is today. Since I've been elected to the congress, I'm committing myself, as my physician colleagues know, to really work hard on getting some meaningful tort reform. We're talking about just leveling the playing field. We're not talking about anybody's right to a redress of their grievances. We're not talking about taking away someone, an attorney, who practices in the personal injury specialty. Most of them do a very good job.

Phil Gingrey: 00:27:11 But I'm again not trashing attorneys. There are some that are not so good. There's some doctors that are not so good. But we just really need to level the playing field, because it's not about the doctor's back pocket or bottom line. Or even his or her
career. It's about access to care for our patients. Particularly doctors who are willing to practice in high risk specialties, such as obstetrics and neurosurgery, emergency room care, that sort of thing. If those providers are not there, then people are going to suffer.

Mel Steely: 00:27:48 I think in some of the places like Nevada, they've actually had to shut down hospitals and emergency rooms because the doctors all left.

Phil Gingrey: 00:27:55 This is true in Texas and West Virginia, and thirteen other states including Georgia.

Mel Steely: 00:27:59 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Now we've started moving into politics here. You practiced for, what, about fifteen years?

Phil Gingrey: 00:28:07 Actually I practiced a total of 27. I may have said 28 earlier in the show. But I think I actually practiced 27 years, from 1975 until whenever. As far as the politics are concerned, I sort of gradually got into that. People often ask, of course, "When did you decide you wanted to be a member of Congress?", or, "When did you decide you wanted to get into politics?"

Mel Steely: 00:28:32 That's a good question.

Phil Gingrey: 00:28:33 It is a good question. I wasn't anything that I ever thought that I really had a game plan. In my younger years I was, I think I had leadership skills. I think I realized that even when I was in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. When I was in high school I was fortunate to have been elected class president, and captain of the football team, and was one of the senior superlatives.

Phil Gingrey: 00:29:03 But again, a very small school. I would have been ashamed of myself in that small school if I hadn't had been one of the superlatives. I really felt that I had leadership ability. But quite honestly, when I got into medical school, I had done some things in college in regard to campus politics. I ran for student body vice president and lost. I was president of my social fraternity, and I was in a number of clubs in college.

Phil Gingrey: 00:29:35 But when I got to medical school, I kind of just buried myself in learning the practice of medicine. That lasted really for nine years. Eleven counting the two years that I spent in general practice, before I came to Marietta in my early thirties and began to earn a living. There wasn't a lot of time for politics or anything else except trying to be a good dad and a good husband, and build a good decent medical practice.
Phil Gingrey: 00:30:11 One of the children, I think my youngest daughter, when she was in the ninth or tenth grade tried out for the cheerleading squad at Marietta High School, and didn't make it. My wife especially and my daughter were crushed. Of course I had to bear the brunt of all that weeping and gnashing of teeth that went on at our house. My wife and I decided, the thing for us to do was for me to run for the school board, get elected, and fire everybody that had anything to do with my daughter not getting chosen as one of the cheerleaders. That's the gospel truth.

Phil Gingrey: 00:30:52 I ran for school board, and I was elected. Shortly after the election, my co-board members, some of them new, decided I should be the chairman. All of a sudden I realized I had a bigger job to do than just worrying about whether my daughter was a cheerleader, or my son got to start at quarterback for the football team.

Phil Gingrey: 00:31:15 I learned a lot about politics, leadership, working with other people. It was a great four years, and it was just a part time job. It didn't really take away from my practice of medicine. I was able to do most of this in the evenings, and on my day off. I probably would still be doing that, because it was very enjoyable.

Mel Steely: 00:31:34 Did you fire the evildoers?

Phil Gingrey: 00:31:35 No, I realized that they were right.

Mel Steely: 00:31:37 Okay.

Phil Gingrey: 00:31:37 Of course I didn't tell my daughter that. At that point she was in college, and had long since forgotten about that slight that occurred to her in high school.

Mel Steely: 00:31:49 That was your first introduction into politics, was going into the school board.

Phil Gingrey: 00:31:55 It was.

Mel Steely: 00:31:55 Which can be quite deadly in and of itself. If you're in Clayton County today or some of those places, I know they have constant fights and so forth.

Phil Gingrey: 00:32:03 Oh, listen. I got some advice from one of my physician friends when I told him I was going to run for the school board. I asked him to make a little contribution to my fledgling campaign. He
said, "Phil, I'm going to give you a little check here." But he said, "I'm going to give you some advice too." He said, "My grandfather told me one time that there are three things in life that you should never do. That is, first, never have your property line surveyed. Never have your prostate checked. Never run for the school board." I did all three.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:32:41 But I really, really enjoyed serving on the school board. Actually, four years into that, just at the time that I was about to run for re-election, our state senator, Chuck Clay at the time, decided that he would run for lieutenant governor. I looked at that opportunity to represent northwest Cobb County in the Georgia General Assembly, to take Senator Clay's place. I threw my hat in the ring and won, in a very Republican district, so there really wasn't much of a general election.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:33:19 I served there, and again I enjoyed that very much. Until this latest 2000 census and redistricting occurred. You probably know the rest of that story.

**Mel Steely:** 00:33:30 Well, tell me about your first race for the Senate. What was that like? You had a competitive race in the primary.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:33:37 Yes.

**Mel Steely:** 00:33:38 But then the general election wasn't that competitive.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:33:41 It was not. In fact, I'm trying to remember if there were ... Yes, there was an opponent. But it wasn't very competitive. Even in the primary it wasn't very competitive. But I didn't realize it at the time. I worked extremely hard. I had a couple of young consultants, and we really, really worked hard. My family pitched in. Particularly one of my daughters, who was my campaign manager. She's currently a senior law student at Michigan State. But she did a great job. Her name is Phyllis.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:34:19 Phyllis just gave me that year of her life. She had just graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in microbiology. She became my campaign manager. We did very well. We raised money. We worked hard and got elected. Then the next time, the re-elect was almost a shoe in because of the very Republican leaning of my district.

**Mel Steely:** 00:34:43 Mm-hmm (affirmative). That would have been in what, '98?

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:34:46 '98 is when I was elected, yes.
Mel Steely: 00:34:48 When you were elected.

Phil Gingrey: 00:34:48 Right.

Mel Steely: 00:34:48 Then re-elected in 2000.

Phil Gingrey: 00:34:50 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:34:53 What were the big issues? Or were there any issues? Did you find the race mostly a personality one?

Phil Gingrey: 00:34:59 Well I think it was, yes. There weren't real big issues, because Cobb County, particularly northwest Cobb, is blessed with a lot of affluence. We have a great college there, Kennesaw State University. The average household income probably is, I'm going to say $60,000 in that northwest Cobb quadrant. It wasn't like people were saying, "Phil, go down to the Georgia General Assembly and bring home some bacon for northwest Cobb," or, "Phil, go down and clean up the mess, and throw the bums out," or anything like that.

Phil Gingrey: 00:35:41 I think it was really just a matter, as it so often is, of people looking in an election like that for somebody who's shown some leadership skill. Who has good listening skills. That if they do need you, you'll be there and your judgment is good. That's really all that race was about.

Mel Steely: 00:36:02 When you got there, was it what you thought it would be? In the Senate?

Phil Gingrey: 00:36:06 It was, the first year -

Mel Steely: 00:36:08 Mark Taylor I think was your lieutenant governor.

Phil Gingrey: 00:36:09 Mark Taylor was elected lieutenant governor in a very close race. My good friend Chuck Clay did not win the Republican primary. He ran a very good race, but he lost to Mitch Skandalakis. Mitch, of course, was beaten by Mark Taylor. Mark had served in the Georgia State Senate, I believe, for ten years before running for lieutenant governor, so he -

Mel Steely: 00:36:36 Of course Roy Barnes was elected at the same time.

Phil Gingrey: 00:36:37 Roy, Governor Barnes was elected. I think that Governor Barnes was someone that I knew not well, but he was very, very well respected in Cobb County, south Cobb community, and still is. I enjoyed going at that time, and working and trying to be as
bipartisan as I possibly could. It was a thrill the first year. It was a lot of fun.

Phil Gingrey: 00:37:10 But the two things that I learned. One is that the 236 members of the general assembly, 56 in the senate and 180 in the house, I didn't see many people that I thought didn't belong there. Whether they were white, black, male, female. Each and everyone had different skills. Some were better speakers than others. But it just, you could see how they got elected by their community.

Phil Gingrey: 00:37:42 I don't mean to sound Pollyanna about this. But a lot of times people think, “Well you've just got a bunch of bumpkins down there. A bunch of hayseeds that don't know what they're doing.” That is absolutely not true, in my humble opinion. I respected my colleagues, and I tried, and have continued to try to do this in the congress. Being just as bipartisan as I possibly can, and finding issues that you can agree on.

Phil Gingrey: 00:38:11 But the disappointing part is that there is a high degree of partisanship, both in the general assemblies of the respective states, and certainly in the congress. I think the reason for that is, everybody can't be a committee chairman. Everybody can't be the speaker of the house. Everybody can't share the presidency of the Senate. There is no power sharing, essentially. It's winner take all. That just leads to a very cutthroat situation, and a lot of partisan bickering. I don't know if we'll in our lifetime see that change. I wish there was some way we could.

Mel Steely: 00:38:52 Some people at the time, I remember Bill Shipp and some of the writers. You know, Shipp from Cobb County.

Phil Gingrey: 00:38:58 Yes, sure.

Mel Steely: 00:39:00 Commented that they thought maybe part of the problem on the national level was Newt Gingrich stirring up everything, and his fight to take over. But on the local level they blame Bobby Kahn, who was an assistant to Governor Barnes. You knew Kahn and Barnes. What is your assessment of that relationship, and how it played out in the legislature?

Phil Gingrey: 00:39:23 Well governor Barnes had a very, very able chief of staff in Bobby Kahn. I didn't know Bobby well, because the Republicans, the red carpet was not exactly rolled out for us to come in on any and every occasion to participate in whatever was going on under the gold dome. But Bobby probably could've been a little more tactful in the way he related to the loyal opposition. But
as far as his skills and his ability to help governor Barnes, and it just didn't start with that election. There had been a relationship there that I think went back to 1990. Or was it, I'm trying to remember exactly the date.

Mel Steely: 00:40:19 It was '90 when Zell got elected.

Phil Gingrey: 00:40:20 Yeah. Bobby Kahn served the governor well. I believe that maybe from my side of the aisle, I would have given the governor some different advice on some of the issues. But Governor Barnes is a big boy with lots of political experience, and he had to make his own decisions and live or die by them. But I think history will reflect very favorably on Governor Barnes. I think that he's a good man.

Mel Steely: 00:40:53 You had a fun year that first year. The second year, the governor got almost everything he wanted the first year.

Phil Gingrey: 00:41:00 He did.

Mel Steely: 00:41:00 People looked around and said, "Oh my lord. He's better than Zell, better than anybody. This man's going to have four wonderful years." But then the roof kind of caved in on him that second and third and fourth year. The flag was a part of it. Redistricting was a part. That whole series of things happened that began to build a lot of enemies. Separate interest groups were enemies against the governor.

Mel Steely: 00:41:26 At the same time, to refocus themselves around Republicans. Republicans began to benefit from some of this. You of course were re-elected with little or no opposition. What about your second term? That's the last two years of the Barnes era, and things are starting to heat up then. With the flag, and one thing. Talk about that period for a few minutes.

Phil Gingrey: 00:41:51 I think Governor Barnes probably overstretched himself. I think he tried to maybe do a little bit too much. Any time you try to make sea changes, whether it's in education, or the Department of Corrections, or juvenile justice, or certainly the flag, you're going to step on some toes along the way. You're going to pick up some enemies. Some political baggage. You spend political capital.

Phil Gingrey: 00:42:25 It may be that he tried to do a little bit too much. The creation of GRETA, the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, was a big push when I first got in the Georgia General Assembly. I don't know how many bills were in the governor's package
those first two years. But I'm going to say maybe 23 or 24 different things that the governor's office brought to the general assembly. I voted for most of them. I was onboard with most everything.

Phil Gingrey: 00:43:01 But when I decided that for a number of reasons, I couldn't support the education reform package. I thought it was far too costly. I didn't like the idea of getting rid of para-professionals. Reducing class size sounds good on paper, and I think any parent in the state would love for their children to be tutored one on one. Or be in a classroom with ten other kids that look just exactly like their child. It's a very expensive thing to reduce class size. In any regard, I think the governor overreached just a little bit.

Phil Gingrey: 00:43:41 Some people say that he was a one term governor because of the flag issue. I don't think that that, at least from my perspective, was the thing that caused Governor Barnes to not be re-elected for a second term. I think it hurt him. But as I look back on that issue, and I didn't support the change, I can understand the tremendous pressures that he was under to make that change. Tremendous pressures. Not just from the African American community and the African American legislators in the general assembly. But from the business community.

Phil Gingrey: 00:44:18 They say that Atlanta is the economic engine of the state, and it's true. We've got 8.2 million people in Georgia, but 4.5 million of them live in metropolitan Atlanta and surrounding communities. Governor Barnes was under tremendous pressure. I'll cut him a little slack on that one, even though I voted against the change. Because I felt that the people in my district didn't want the change. I had to first and foremost answer to them.

Phil Gingrey: 00:44:45 But I think the thing that really undid him was redistricting. That was the thing that offended me the most. You have to say that the buck stops with the governor in regard to how those lines are drawn. I understand gerrymandering has been going on since Governor Gerry up in Massachusetts 150 years ago. But to the extent that it was done in Georgia. When you look at those maps and the final analysis, the voters in Georgia are the ultimate losers. They ought to be able to pick their politicians. But in this gerrymandering process, the politicians picked their voters. That's completely backwards of the way it should be.

Mel Steely: 00:45:30 Absolutely. One of the raps on Barnes and Kahn was the same one they placed on some of the old Democratic leaders. The rap
of arrogance. That, "We can do it and we're going to do it." In fact I had my state representative actually tell me when I asked him, "Why did you redistrict this way?", and he said, "Because we could."

Phil Gingrey: 00:45:52 Yeah. Well, power corrupts, and absolute power, and you know the rest of that saying. It's just too much power for too long, and you're not responsive to the people. You forget about who brought you to the dance. I think that did happen to them, and I hope we Republicans, and to have the opportunity after 130 years to have Governor Perdue and a Republican administration, and actually finally the control of at least one house or one chamber of the General Assembly.

Phil Gingrey: 00:46:23 We need to remember how we felt, and make sure that we treat the loyal opposition with respect, and try to bring them to the table as often as possible. Let them be part of something, and not just sitting on the back bench. That leads to a tremendous amount of resentment. Again, it's the people who suffer because of that.

Mel Steely: 00:46:49 You served briefly with Governor Perdue when he was in the senate. He had already made his switch I think when you got there, didn't he? Wasn't that the year he did switch over to the Republicans?

Phil Gingrey: 00:47:00 That's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:47:01 You knew him when he was not the pro-temp or anything, but was still active. What is your assessment of him as a senator, and as a governor for that matter?

Phil Gingrey: 00:47:11 Well I think as a senator, and I had never heard of Sonny Perdue, didn't really know a lot about state politics. Although I've voted for lots of governors, all the way from Vandiver to present day. But because of the practice of medicine and the demands on my time, I really was not, so didn't know Sonny. Had never met him.

Phil Gingrey: 00:47:34 The thing that impressed me about now-Governor Perdue was that he was basically stripped of everything because of his defection to the Republican Party. I remember the old television show, a western, when somebody in the cavalry had all of their buttons stripped off of their shirt, and their sword broken and thrown on the ground. That's kind of the picture in your mind, if you will, of what happened to Sonny Perdue. State senator Sonny Perdue.
Yet as he joined our caucus, and we met daily. We would have a
caucus meeting before the session started every day. I was so
impressed with his wisdom. His ability to accept the things that
he couldn't change, but the courage, absolutely courage to get
in there and try to change the things that he thought he could.
Although he was not part of our leadership, he to me was a
titular head instantly of the Republican caucus. He gave a lot of
good advice to us as a body, and to me as an individual.

I like Sonny Perdue. He is a good man. He kind of took his
penance well when he had to. He had the opportunity to run
against what seemed to be insurmountable odds. I don't think
many people in Georgia, maybe even Mary, gave him much of a
chance. But I'm very proud of him. I think he's going to make a
great governor for Georgia.

How about Mark Taylor? He was your lieutenant governor.
What do you ...

Mark is a very, very skilled politician. He has spent most of his
adult life in politics. He's from south Georgia. He's got a good
constituency there. Bu he has actually done well in
metropolitan Atlanta too. Mark Taylor would be a formidable
opponent for anybody in any race. I'm not sure what his
ultimate plans are.

Mark, if he's got a shortcoming, I think he's a little testy
sometimes. He's got a bit of a temper. Don't we all? But I think
Mark has a tendency to take no prisoners, and be a little bit
more partisan than he has to be. That's been the undoing of a
lot of politicians in this state and others. We'll see what
happens.

It's interesting, his approach there. Because the previous
lieutenant governor, Pierre Howard, had been just the opposite.
He had worked with the Republicans, and even made a couple
of them chairmen. To the great disdain of the governor and the
speaker, and others that thought he was on the wrong track. He
had left Republican senators with a taste of what it's like to
work with a relatively bipartisan leader. Then to get one that
was so partisan, at a time when the governor and his staff were
so arrogant, really did set people's teeth.

It did, and I had a number of veteran Republican state senators
tell me, "Phil, you should have been here when Pierre Howard
was lieutenant governor. It was very different. It was an
atmosphere of collegiality." But I've heard other pundits and
critics say, "Oh yeah, well, Pierre Howard wasn't tough enough.
This is a rough and tumble game, this politics, and he was too nice a guy." I hope that maybe that will be my epitaph one of these days when it's all said and done. That I was too nice a guy, rather than too tough.

Phil Gingrey: 00:51:32 You know, Mark Taylor's a friend and I respect him. He and I did work together on the teen driving bill. Mark comes to Cobb County a lot. He's been very supportive of Sheriff Bill Hudson and others. Again, he's a tremendously skilled politician. If he runs for the United States Senate he would be a strong Democratic candidate. If he ran for governor he would be a strong Democratic candidate. But there are others that would love to have that job, and I'm very hopeful that Governor Perdue will be a two term governor, and he'll be replaced by a Republican.

Mel Steely: 00:52:09 Now when you got to the senate, who was the Republican leader? Was it Eric Johnson?

Phil Gingrey: 00:52:16 It was Eric, that's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:52:17 Eric is the one that was in charge?

Phil Gingrey: 00:52:18 Right. Eric was the senate minority leader, that is correct.

Mel Steely: 00:52:21 Mm-hmm (affirmative). What is your assessment of his leadership?

Phil Gingrey: 00:52:25 Well, Eric Johnson from Savannah is a very good leader. He's very smart. He's got as much political skills as anybody I met in the General Assembly. He's got great instincts. Eric, I think that one of these days, if the opportunity presents itself, would make a great United States congressman. I don't know that he wants that. But I think that this state is a beneficiary of Eric Johnson's leadership now as president pro-tem of the Senate. As long as Republicans remain in control of the state senate, Eric Johnson will be a significant player.

Mel Steely: 00:53:13 How does he, or does he, tend to be a unifier within the party?

Phil Gingrey: 00:53:20 I think that Eric is a unifier within the party. Now, Eric could stand to be a little bit more bipartisan. I think that he has a tendency to be a little bit abrasive, and give everything that he has to take and more. When I got to the Senate, Eric had been there a while. I'm sure he had been bruised up a bit about one party politics, and maybe he had gotten a little bit sensitized to all of that.
Phil Gingrey: 00:53:53 But Eric probably would agree that now that he's in that position of leadership, second only to the president of the Senate, that it's time to look for opportunities to work closely with the other side.

Mel Steely: 00:54:11 That's probably a pretty good assessment. But these last six years now have been marked by an awful lot of partisanship. I'm not sure where it all comes from, but it seems that people are having great difficulty backing away from it.

Mel Steely: 00:54:28 Now the issues that you faced while you were in the senate, some were pretty hot. We've already talked about the flag a little bit. You had your teen driving bill that you were the chief push for. What other issues do you remember standing out in your mind during those four years in the Senate?

Phil Gingrey: 00:54:49 Well you mentioned two biggies, and of course we went through the reapportionment issue in the special session.

Mel Steely: 00:54:59 That's almost an obsessive.

Phil Gingrey: 00:55:00 I think one special session is about enough for anybody in a political lifetime. Obviously it only happens every ten years, although there are special sessions for other reasons, and redistricting. But that was something that kind of stands out in my mind, because of the manipulative process just for playing out political partisanship, and holding on to power.

Phil Gingrey: 00:55:31 I remember introducing an amendment during that special session, calling for Georgia to create a special bipartisan commission to deal with the redistricting process and the map drawing. A number of states have done that. Iowa, I think, is one of them. When you look at the maps in these states who have turned this responsibility over to a bipartisan commission, you see more geometric figures that you recognize, such as squares and circles and triangles. Maybe a quadrilateral that's not too stretched out.

Phil Gingrey: 00:56:15 When you look at the map of Georgia, and some other states where Republicans are in control, you see fish hooks. You see Rorschach ink splats. You see things that make no sense at all, except for holding on to political power. I think that a person's politics, and certainly incumbency, should be given some consideration in the map drawing. But it shouldn't be the number one priority. It should probably be the last priority. Protecting communities of interest, and not dividing up counties unless you have to. Not splitting a city down the middle unless
you have to. Certainly not splitting a street down the middle, which you never have to.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:57:02 I felt so strongly about that and I was so disappointed in that process, that at that point I was ready to run for Congress against overwhelming odds. Even though everybody expected me to lose. Because I didn't want to go back down to the Georgia General Assembly and suffer the same kind of partisanship for another ten years. I had no interest in doing that.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:57:26 As luck and the grace of God would have it, the voters revolted and gave a message to the Democratic party. Or any party that would be responsible for doing that and saying, "We've had enough, and we're not going to take it anymore". Now we have a Republican state senate.

**Mel Steely:** 00:57:45 One of the things that commentators remarked on during that period was the divisions within the party. The Republican Party was seen as being a party divided between, I guess you would say traditional Republicans and the religious right, on one hand and the other hand. The Democratic Party was split two ways. One was the black-white split. The other was the rural-urban split. Were those valid observations, do you think? Or is that just something that pundits dreamed up?

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:58:22 Well I think that they're somewhat valid. But you have big tents. You need to in politics to be successful. In the congress, in the Republican majority in the house, we have 229 Republicans. On social issues there are very good Republicans that I am 180 degrees apart, on certain social issues. Like things, particularly like the right to life, a so called woman's right to choose. Pro-life, pro-choice. The second amendment. Other issues.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:59:07 I think the common thread, at least in our party, is fiscal conservatism. Believing, a firm belief that that governs best who governs least, and that all politics is local. We shouldn't take things away from the states the constitution does not specifically delegate to the federal government. But you get a lot of variation on social issues. Some of the greatest Republicans in the Congress are members that I don't agree with on right-to-life issues. But we're in the same tent.

**Phil Gingrey:** 00:59:52 That's true in the Democratic party as well. I don't think this is as much of a split as the pundits would say. I don't think those splits are, is a wedge rather than a splinter. I think these parties have the unique ability to come together at election time, because if they don't, they lose.
Mel Steely: You have indicated that one of the reasons you decided not to say ... Of course you had no inkling that Republicans were going to actually win the governorship and take over the Senate.

Phil Gingrey: No.

Mel Steely: But what made you decide to run for Congress, instead of something else?

Phil Gingrey: Well, I actually had looked at the possibility of running for United States Senate. I felt that Max Cleland, although I respect him, and even maybe more so today having just come back from Iraq and seeing some pain and suffering first hand. Respect his service to his country. Giving two legs and an arm for your country is quite a gift.

Phil Gingrey: But his politics are just too liberal for me, and I think too liberal for mainstream Georgia. Quite honestly, a lot of Democrats I think felt that way too. I felt that Max as a one term United States senator was definitely vulnerable. I felt like we needed a strong voice on judicial appointments and other issues that concerned me. I was prepared, even though I will be the first to admit that I would have been a very long shot in that race. Bob Urban was a respected member, former House minority leader from Buckhead, who had announced, and a gentleman from Bibb County, a county commissioner, Calder Clay, had announced. Both Republicans.

Phil Gingrey: I decided that I had a good chance to win that Republican primary, and to beat Max Cleland in the general election. But I knew at that point that Washington and the Republican National Committee were trying to recruit one of the G8. Our eight Republican members of Congress. Even though I formed a committee and I began to raise a little money, and get the word out there that I was in the Republican primary for US senate against Max Cleland, I was kind of looking over my shoulder to see who the Bush administration would endorse. As it turned out, it was Saxby Chambliss. Saxby and I had a good telephone conversation when he announced.

Phil Gingrey: About the same time of course, the congressional maps were coming out. Congressman Bob Barr, my congressman in the 7th, decided that he didn't want to run in this newly configured 7th, which became the 11th, and decided to run against a fellow incumbent, John Linder, in a much more Republican new 7th district. Sort of the northern crescent of the Atlanta suburbs. The 11th was an open congressional seat, and I thought Saxby Chambliss had a better chance quite honestly than I would have
had in beating Max Cleland, and so I decided that I would instead run for that open congressional seat.

Mel Steely: 01:03:38 You said the two of you had a good talk. Who initiated that phone conversation?

Phil Gingrey: 01:03:42 He did.

Mel Steely: 01:03:43 He called you to ask you to get out of the race, or what?

Phil Gingrey: 01:03:46 No, not really. I was in Disney World with my grandchildren. I got a cell phone call from my consultant. Someone who had helped me kind of formulate my ideas in regard to whether or not to stay in the state senate and run for re-election there, and what my political future was. He said, "Saxby has called, and wants to call you." I said, "Well sure."

Phil Gingrey: 01:04:12 Saxby called and basically said, "Phil, I know you have formed a committee, and you’re planning on running. I just as a courtesy to you, I wanted to let you know that just today I have talked with my family. I made a decision to run for Senate.” He said, in fact I think he even said, "I'm not asking you to get out of the race. You do what you've got to do. But I just as a courtesy wanted to let you know that I am running.”

Phil Gingrey: 01:04:50 No, I wasn't pressured at all by Senator Chambliss. He was a perfect gentleman in regard to that. It was just a decision, a practical one, a pragmatic one that I made. I felt that Saxby, by virtue of his ten years in the congress and the work that he had done on homeland security and other issues, I thought that he had a much better chance than me, or my good friend Bob Urban, or Calder Clay had against Max in the general election. That's how I made the decision.

Mel Steely: 01:05:23 You decided then with Barr stepping out and running for a different seat, to go for the open seat?

Phil Gingrey: 01:05:29 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:05:31 When did you decide that? Do you remember?

Phil Gingrey: 01:05:33 Yes. I believe that was in mid-October of, I guess it would be ... I don't know, what the date -

Mel Steely: 01:05:46 No, it'd be '99. No, it'd be 2001.

Phil Gingrey: 01:05:48 Yes.

Phil Gingrey: 01:05:49 That's right.

Mel Steely: 01:05:50 Because 2002 is when you ran.

Phil Gingrey: 01:05:50 That's exactly right. October of 2001 is when I made that decision. Believe me, from October of 2001 to October of 2002 was the longest twelve months that this politician has ever experienced. It was really tough. Obviously in an open seat, others felt that they had a good chance of winning. Our Republican primary was contested.

Mel Steely: 01:06:23 Two strong -

Phil Gingrey: 01:06:24 Two very strong candidates.

Mel Steely: 01:06:25 Bob Harriet.

Phil Gingrey: 01:06:27 Bob Harriet from right here in Carrollton, Georgia, had been the 11th district chairman. Or 7th district chairman for congressman Barr, for I guess the whole time that he served, and was a surrogate speaker on Bob's behalf. Had organized a lot of the Republican county organization in the old 7th. Knew a lot of people. Grass roots wise was very strong, and well respected.

Phil Gingrey: 01:06:56 Then the other candidate in the Republican primary, Cecil Staton, a PhD professor and book publisher from Bibb County, and affiliated with Mercer University, had never run for anything before. But financially he was very strong, and had been an active supporter of at least a couple of the current Republican members of congress from Georgia. Charlie Norwood, and I think maybe Matt Collins too.

Phil Gingrey: 01:07:33 I had two tough opponents, and it was not an easy primary. I'd hate to have to go through that again.

Mel Steely: 01:07:40 What were the issues in the primary?

Phil Gingrey: 01:07:44 You know, the issues became, who had the best conservative credentials? If you cut right to the chase. We were all sort of focused on the general, the big prize, the general election. Not knowing whether that would be former congressman Buddy Darden, or former candidate Roger Kahn. Both very strong candidates. But the Republican primary kind of became, who could gain the allegiance of the base? Of the core Republican
voters. That's always about your conservative credentials in Georgia. It came down to that.

Mel Steely: 01:08:36 You had a runoff, you and Cecil Staton.

Phil Gingrey: 01:08:39 Right.

Mel Steely: 01:08:39 You defeated him in the runoff. Then you had to face Roger Kahn. Tell us about the race in the November election.

Phil Gingrey: 01:08:52 Because the primary was so tough, and we were pretty close together on election day. On, I guess that was July 27. Or 20th. I'm forgetting. But in any regard ... No, we had an August primary. That quirk in the law. That's a whole other story. But I think it was August 20 when we had the primary. I had 40 percent, Cecil Staton had 32 percent, and Bob Harriet had 28 percent. It was very close. That was an agonizing night. Then we had a three week runoff, and there was a lot of bloodletting during those three weeks. The gloves were kind of taken off, if you will.

Phil Gingrey: 01:09:45 At the end of the day I won, I think with 65 percent of the vote. What that did for me though was give me tremendous momentum. Because during that three week period of time, the Democratic opponent, Roger Kahn, was quiet. I guess you'd use the expression, "Went dark." Probably didn't feel that he needed to spend any more money. Had plenty of it, but felt like maybe he could hold back for a while.

Phil Gingrey: 01:10:12 Well that gave me an opportunity for some earned media. Because people were concentrating on the primary, and thinking that it would be razor thin and a cliffhanger. We got momentum. We really got the big mo. I don't think that Roger Kahn could ever really catch steam and catch up with us. I will say this. The general election as it turned out was much easier for me emotionally. I had a lot more confidence coming off of that runoff victory. I thought that we were strong in the general election.

Phil Gingrey: 01:10:52 Of course, winning with 51.6 percent is not exactly a landslide. But for a district that was drawn with such a Democratic flavor, a one vote victory would have been sufficient.

Mel Steely: 01:11:06 Yeah, absolutely. Once you're elected, you look back over the whole thing, make an assessment. What was your cost in this? Emotionally I know it was pretty heavy. But financially, what did it cost you to run a race like that?
Phil Gingrey: 01:11:23 Well personally, if I had lost it would have broke me. It would have taken me a long time to recover financially. We had, our daughter actually got married on July 27.

Mel Steely: 01:11:39 I remember that.

Phil Gingrey: 01:11:40 Three weeks -

Mel Steely: 01:11:40 That'll break you too.

Phil Gingrey: 01:11:42 Three weeks before the general election. We really had to beg and borrow to get through that personally. But you know, once you get into a race you never, I don't think anybody realizes ultimately what it's going to cost them. But once you get in and you're committed, and you've got a chance to win, you reach back. As I say, whatever you can beg and borrow, and you do that. You worry about the consequences later.

Phil Gingrey: 01:12:15 The reality is that people in that situation that lose, they never can get any help in paying off that debt. That's why a lot of times good candidates that run good races that lose, you don't see them coming back. They just can't afford to. They're too busy trying to restore their financial wherewithal. It's tough.

Phil Gingrey: 01:12:40 I did though, once we got through that runoff and got into the general election, it seemed like everybody wanted to give me money then. The Republican National Committee and the Republican National Congressional Committees, and the administration, didn't really get involved in the primary. They looked at the three of us and said, "We don't see a dime's worth of difference in these three guys. Furthermore, none of them have much of a chance of beating either Roger Kahn or Buddy Darden." We weren't getting too much ... No help financially, and not a lot of encouragement.

Phil Gingrey: 01:13:20 But after my runoff victory, we convinced them. The proof of the pudding, of course, was in the election. That we were viable and had a great chance to win that seat. Money came in. I probably ended up spending, including what I spent and what was spent for me, about $2.2 million in this race.

Mel Steely: 01:13:43 Were you able to get yourself reimbursed afterwards?

Phil Gingrey: 01:13:45 Not yet. We're still working on that. We have about, I think about $150,000 of debt still existing. It's tough, but you know, slowly but surely we'll try to whittle that down a bit.
Mel Steely: 01:14:00 Mm-hmm (affirmative), and a chance to win re-election is going to help bring in some of that.

Phil Gingrey: 01:14:06 Right.

Mel Steely: 01:14:07 Okay. You defeated him in pretty much a Republican sweep year. Things looked good, all the way from the top to the bottom. What was it like when you went to congress? You're a brand new congressman, but you're feeling really good because we've just done great things here in Georgia, in getting people elected. One thing and another. You could feel good about that. You've done ... The Republicans did pretty well up there in Washington as well.

Phil Gingrey: 01:14:35 It was a great feeling. I failed to mention probably one of the most significant things, at least from an historical perspective. That during the campaign, as if it wasn't tough enough to come through that primary, I began to have a little chest pain. I thought maybe it was just anxiety, or too much fried chicken on the banquet circuit or whatever. But as a physician it became pretty obvious to me after a couple of weeks that I was having classical, what people refer to as angina.

Phil Gingrey: 01:15:16 After the tests were done, I realized that I did have a significant blockage in a main coronary artery. Went into the hospital and had this stint put in on a Friday. On Monday I was in Washington, knocking on doors and walking all over the city. Continuing to campaign, trying to get somebody interested in our candidacy. We hardly missed a beat because of that, and I was able to continue to campaign hard.

Phil Gingrey: 01:15:54 But as the primary approached, maybe three or four months later, I began to have that same discomfort, and realized that maybe that blockage had re-occurred. I had a great physician, and I went back to him. I talked to him about it. He assured me that based on the studies that he had done, that I was really not in any danger. Even though I was having some discomfort, I was not in any danger of having a heart attack. He said, "You continue to campaign. Just don't overdo it. After the election, we hope you win. Congressman, you come back and we'll fix that blockage permanently."

Phil Gingrey: 01:16:39 Shortly after I was elected, I had to go in for open heart surgery. That was about a year ago, in December. Actually, Friday the thirteenth was the day that I had my surgery. When I went to Washington to be sworn in as a new congressman, I was three weeks post-op. I can tell you, as anybody who's a co-member of the zipper club, it takes a while to get over that big incision.
Walking up the steps to the Capitol was something that I struggled with for a while.

Phil Gingrey: 01:17:15 In a way, it took the wind out of my sails a little bit, and maybe took away a little bit from the excitement of being a new member of Congress. But certainly walking the halls and having people say, “Good morning, congressman,” was a thrill. Just as it was when I was elected to the state senate and people said, “Good morning, senator.” But that quickly wears off, and you get right down to the nitty gritty of doing the people's work. I realized that it was a very demanding job. Long days. A tremendous commitment is required. Thank the good lord I got stronger and stronger as the year went on, and feel a hundred percent now. Just real happy to have the opportunity to serve.

Mel Steely: 01:18:05 What did you think of the speaker, Mr. Hastert? That's it? Did you get his last ...

Mel Steely: 01:18:12 ...

Mel Steely: 01:19:06 Congressman, let's talk a little bit about the people that are involved in congress. First on your side, and then on the Democratic side. Have you had a chance to work with President Bush on anything? What is your assessment of him?

Phil Gingrey: 01:19:20 Well, I'm very fond of President Bush. I got to ride on Air Force One with him. He came, as you recall, into Cobb County the Saturday before the election in November 2002. He came, actually not as a fundraiser, but just a rally on behalf of me, and now-Senator Chambliss, and now-Governor Perdue. I got an opportunity really, Mel, to sit down and talk to him for maybe fifteen to twenty minutes, just as we're doing today. That was a one on one thing. He asked me about Saxby's race. He asked me about Governor Perdue's race, and obviously my own race.

Phil Gingrey: 01:19:20 I found him to be a very easy person to talk to. Very comfortable. No pretenses whatsoever. No airs. Very, very comfortable in a one on one situation. I like the president very much. Quite honestly, I think that's why he's president. I really believe that Al Gore came across pretty stiff, rehearsed. Very structured, and quite honestly, for lack of a better term, a little bit fake-y. I think George W. Bush is a more genuine person.

Phil Gingrey: 01:20:06 I don't say he's smarter. A lot of people question the president's intelligence. I saw a book the other day about presidential gaffes and that sort of thing. But I think Bush is smart. I think he's smart enough. He's got great political skills, and personal
rapport type skills that people like. I've enjoyed being in the minority ... Excuse me. Being in the majority situation, after spending four years in the Georgia senate in the minority. It's a lot more fun to be a part of the majority, so I have enjoyed this first year.

Mel Steely: 01:21:26 The leader of the House majority, of course, is Dennis Hastert from Illinois. Tell us a little bit about him.

Phil Gingrey: 01:21:32 One of the finest people that I've ever met. Denny Hastert, a former teacher and wrestling coach from the Chicago suburbs of Illinois, is one heck of a human being. As I say, he has absolutely no pretenses. He's not, I don't think, interested in any other office. He is very happy being a member of Congress and serving as our speaker. I hope he has that opportunity for many years to come.

Phil Gingrey: 01:22:06 I see him as not someone who is strident and overly partisan. I see him as someone who is always looking for an opportunity to reach out to the other side. He seems to have great understanding of our caucus, the Republican caucus, and the fact that there are differences. While the whip team, under the leadership of Roy Blunt, and obviously majority leader Tom Delay, they work very hard on holding the team together. Particularly on crucial votes, like Medicare modernization, the Prescription Drug Act, and others, tort reform, where every vote is so crucial.

Phil Gingrey: 01:22:50 The thing that I respect so much about the speaker is that, if someone wanders off the reservation because of very personal feelings of principle, or an obligation to their respective district, the speaker does not punish them. He might put a lot of pressure on them, and he can do it in a hammer lock, he can do it by just verbal persuasion. But once they tell him very honestly, that could include me. It hasn't happened yet but it certainly could and will. I don't fear that he would punish me because of my convictions, and I respect him tremendously for that.

Mel Steely: 01:23:32 How about Mr. DeLay? Tom DeLay from Texas?

Phil Gingrey: 01:23:36 Tom's a tough ... Some people refer to him because of his statue as a little bit of a bantam rooster. But he's a tough guy. He understands the rough and tumble politics of it. Sometimes maybe he plays a little bit too rough and could be maybe smoother around the edges. But I like Tom DeLay. I think he's doing a very good job.
Mel Steely: 01:24:02 How about Ms. Pelosi? Over on the Democratic side as a leader there?

Phil Gingrey: 01:24:06 Well, you know, and I don't know the Democrats, the 205 or so, 206 Democrats, as well as I know the members of my own party. But I do know them all, and I'm very proud that I can almost without exception call them by name as we see each other in Washington, and around the Capitol. I have had very ... I've had in fact no-one-on one dealings with Nancy Pelosi at all.

Phil Gingrey: 01:24:36 I quite honestly think that their strongest leader is Steny Hoyer, from Maryland. Steny is a guy that's been there a long time. When it's time to go to the well and make a partisan speech, he has few peers. He's excellent at it. Yet he can walk away from that podium, and walk right over to our side of the aisle and have an amiable conversation with our leadership. I don't see that as much in Ms. Pelosi. Of course, her situation is a little bit different.

Phil Gingrey: 01:25:13 She has done a good job though, and on key votes she holds her group together. As you know now, there are a lot of women in the Congress. The women's caucus is very strong, and they love Ms. Pelosi.

Mel Steely: 01:25:30 Issues. We've got a lot of them. The war in Iraq. Prescription drug care. McCain-Feingold. Education Act, Leave No Child Behind. That started even before you got there.

Phil Gingrey: 01:25:45 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:25:48 Partial birth. Tax cuts. Control of our border, which is getting to be a hot issue again. H. R. 5, the tort reform bill. That's the big ones. Are there any or all of those ... What do you want to talk about here?

Phil Gingrey: 01:26:08 Yeah, and those you mention -

Mel Steely: 01:26:11 I do want you to talk about the war.

Phil Gingrey: 01:26:12 Sure.

Mel Steely: 01:26:12 But anything -

Phil Gingrey: 01:26:15 That's a full plate, isn't it? Even if, and I'm sure we could think of a few more.
Mel Steely: 01:26:19 It's incredible. There's so many really big issues right now facing this country.

Phil Gingrey: 01:26:21 Every one you've mentioned is very near and dear to where I live personally. But I don't think there is anything more important, given the importance of everything that you mentioned, than the Middle East situation. I use the Middle East situation to include Iraq and Afghanistan. Operation Enduring, and Iraqi Freedom.

Mel Steely: 01:26:53 And Palestine.

Phil Gingrey: 01:26:53 Before that, Desert Storm. Absolutely, the situation in the Middle East, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which of course has been going on for thousands of years, this has got to be the number one issue. Because all of that hatred and animosity, Zionism, Islamic fundamentalism, all of that has resulted in this age of terrorism, and led up to 9/11. The horrible wake-up call that our country received in regard to who our enemies are, where they are, and what they can do to us, and how vulnerable we are going forward.

Phil Gingrey: 01:27:43 The challenge to a president, to a member of Congress, is there on many of these other issues that you talked about. Stem cell research, tort reform, the issue of abortion. Immigration, particularly our border with Mexico and the problem with illegal immigrants. All of that is tremendously important. But this situation in the Middle East is a challenge that is going to be with us for a long time.

Phil Gingrey: 01:28:15 We have got to continue to fight that fight. Those who would suggest that Iraq and president Saddam Hussein was not a threat to the United States, that he was just a threat to his immediate neighbors, I think they're wrong. I think the evidence suggests strongly that they're wrong. We need to show the people in the Middle East, particularly those who have been ruled forever by not benevolent dictators, but by tyrants. The worst of which seems to be Saddam Hussein. That there is a better way to live.

Phil Gingrey: 01:28:59 I would never suggest as a member of congress, if I were ever in a leadership position, ultimate commander-in-chief, I would never suggest that this is all about the spread of Christianity. Although we're a Christian nation, and the Judeo-Christian principles of this country certainly I hold very firmly in my inner being. But we're not ... There are probably twenty percent of the world who are Muslims. Their religion is Islam. That's fine. I don't think we need to necessarily try to change the world in
that respect. In fact, I think a lot of times that gets us in trouble. That some of this arrogance, a reputation that sometimes we earn.

Phil Gingrey: 01:29:53 But I think we need to let them know that there is a better way. That you don't have to be subjected to a dictatorial tyrant like Saddam Hussein. That there's nothing better than freedom of speech and personal liberties. That's what our form of government, our Republican form of government, is all about. We need to show the world that. Particularly the Middle East, and the Muslim countries. That's the only way you end terrorism and hatred, and these senseless killings that are going on.

Mel Steely: 01:30:28 Pat Robertson, the radio TV preacher who is a former candidate for president himself, '88, said over the weekend that he felt like God had placed President Bush in that position. To be the right man at the right time, to deal with this threat to Christianity. Not just to the west, but to Christianity. Many see Bush as almost leading a crusade against Islam. You've indicated you don't think that's true at all, and that's not what we ought to be doing. How do you react to Reverend Robertson?

Phil Gingrey: 01:31:10 Well I would say to him, I didn't see the show and I'm not totally familiar with his statements, but here again, the Crusades were a miserable failure. Some of the things that are done in the interest of religion is just appalling. I don't really believe, and I don't think President Bush is trying to save the world for Christianity. I do believe that God knows what's going on in the world. I do believe that he created us.

Phil Gingrey: 01:31:49 I believe that ultimately, I'd like to believe, that Christians and Jews and Muslims, Islamic people of Islamic faith, all kind of believe in God. Hopefully there's not a lot of difference in the god, monotheism, that we believe in. But I think it would be a mistake to suggest to twenty percent of the world's population that they all of a sudden need to convert to Christianity.

Phil Gingrey: 01:32:23 I think from that perspective, I don't agree with Pat Robertson. I'm very happy that I'm born a Christian, and am a committed Christian. But I think we need to be real careful about trying to force that on other people who have other beliefs. I think my firm belief though is in a democratic-republican form of government, where people have liberty. I think Patrick Henry had it right many years ago, and I think that's what we should be about.
Mel Steely: 01:33:01 President Bush is seeking the support of Congress for a continuation of what he calls a long, drawn out war. We're not having great battles like we did in the first few months. Is this how you see it? Is it going to be a long, drawn out fight, do you think?

Phil Gingrey: 01:33:18 Well I think it's going to be a long battle, this war against terrorists. I think that the inconveniences that our citizens are subjected to when the alert code is raised to a high level, and all of a sudden some planes are held at the hangar or are diverted. We've got to go through the inconvenience of metal detectors, and sometimes personal searches, is not giving up our liberty or giving away our rights under the constitution.

Phil Gingrey: 01:33:55 I think it's a matter of, in some instances, extreme personal inconvenience. But it's been two and a half years since 9/11. No telling how many attacks, and the horrific nature of those attacks, would have occurred had we not made this commitment. Both the commitment and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security here in this country, as well as Operation Enduring and Iraqi Freedom.

Phil Gingrey: 01:34:21 I think the war against terrorism is going to be with us for the rest of our days. I don't think that we're going to have 130,000, or maybe even 50,000 troops in Iraq for an extended period of time. I think we will hopefully get to the point, maybe as early as next July, to turn that government back over to the Iraqi people. Hopefully at that point we will have stood up the new Iraqi army, and have at least two divisions, maybe three by that time, and have a smaller contingent of our own boots on the ground.

Phil Gingrey: 01:34:57 But it's going to be a while. People that say we need to get our troops home tomorrow, they're just asking for disaster. Because we're getting there, but we're not at the point yet that we can do that. I think the Iraqi people know that. I think the capture of Saddam was a great step for us. It allowed the man on the street, the Iraqi, to realize that this thug is not coming back. We're beginning to get more and more human intelligence since his capture.

Phil Gingrey: 01:35:29 I think we see a light at the end of the tunnel. But the end of that tunnel is a long way off.

Mel Steely: 01:35:36 You've just come back from a trip over there. You spent the better part of a week, or about a week doing -
Phil Gingrey: 01:35:43 We were there four days. Four long, grueling days.

Mel Steely: 01:35:46 Did you have an opportunity while you were there to talk to any of our allies? The British, the Poles, the Spaniards, anybody?

Phil Gingrey: 01:35:53 You know, we didn't. As I got back, it was a wonderful trip. We had not a moment of free time. We were in briefings constantly. Our transporting from one place to another, including the site of Saddam's capture. But I wish we had had an opportunity to do that. Maybe go to Basra. We noticed over the weekend that Prime Minister Blair made a surprise appearance to encourage the British troops. We have about 15,000 Brits on the ground in southeastern Iraq, doing a great job in Basra and that surrounding area. But that would have been good. I wish we had talked to you before the agenda was set.

Phil Gingrey: 01:36:37 The other thing I was a little disappointed, we did not get an opportunity to meet with any of the members of the Iraqi governing council. We met with the CPA, with Ambassador Jones, the deputy chief assistant to Paul Bremer, and others. But we didn't get to meet part of the coalition force.

Mel Steely: 01:36:56 Am I safe in assuming that during this coming year of 2004, in this second part of the session, you will be supportive of the president's efforts to get money and support from Congress to continue this fight?

Phil Gingrey: 01:37:12 I will. Of course we've spent emergency supplemental spending so far of about $150 billion on Operation Iraqi Freedom. In supporting and sustaining the troops, as well as restoring the infrastructure of the country. About $20 billion of that for restoration of infrastructure. I do want to see the United Nations get involved. I want us to be able to reduce the number of both active duty and reserve component forces that are there.

Phil Gingrey: 01:37:46 We do have plans to go from four divisions to three, right after the first of the year, and rotate some of the existing divisions out with fresh soldiers. To gradually, slowly but surely, reduce the number that are there. But you know, Mel, there are 35,000 troops in the demilitarized zone in and around South Korea, and have been there since 1951. I don't say that we'll need that size of a force in Iraq. But it's very likely that we'll need some troops there for a long time to come.

Mel Steely: 01:38:29 All right. What I'd like us to do, we're going to have to break to go meet Dr. Sethna for lunch.
Phil Gingrey: 01:38:34 Sure.

Mel Steely: 01:38:34 But after the next election, when we get back into Congress again, come and do a second wrap up like this one and cover all of these other topics. I've got them written down here.

Phil Gingrey: 01:38:46 Sure.

Mel Steely: 01:38:47 We'll have some time to do that, because they're pretty interesting. You have entered Congress at one of the most interesting periods of history, for a congressman. You're dealing with serious issues that really make a difference. It's got to be pretty inspiring for you to be a part of all of that, and I want to be sure we get it all on tape.

Phil Gingrey: 01:39:04 Well, I would be proud to come back. I look forward to that re-election in November. That will just be a wonderful opportunity to come back, and continue the discussion with you. I appreciate the opportunity.

Mel Steely: 01:39:20 Thank-you.

Phil Gingrey: 01:39:21 Thank-you.

Mel Steely: 01:39:21 All right.