Today we’re interviewing Congressman John Linder at his home in Atlanta for the Georgia Political Heritage Program. Congressman Linder, you were born September 9, 1942 in Deer River, Minnesota. Please tell us a little about your family and your early life, if you would.

Deer River’s a town of about 800 people. Is now, was then. My dad sold cars. He started out as a mechanic and then worked his way up to running the parts shop and selling cars for this very small Chevrolet dealership.

Very family oriented town, very small. Most important politician in Deer River was the School Board Chairman. Everybody ... the real movers and shakers were on the school board. We didn't talk about government, we didn't talk much about politics. Government essentially was the school.

We grew up in a family that we didn't realize until years later that my brother and I never lived above the poverty line until we got our jobs. I went to the Air Force and he got his first job. We didn't know it; we thought we were blessed. We thought we were the fortunate ones in school. We had what we needed. Had a nice home. My folks had no way to send us to college. But they expected us to go, so we did. It was just an expectation.

You got scholarships or worked your way through?

Worked. I had a scholarship of $500 a year for five years, four years. So I went to school at the University of Minnesota Duluth for three years and then went to dental school in Minneapolis. We just were expected to do that, we were expected to do well in school. And we did. But it wasn’t “you do this or else,” it was just they expected that of us.

Anything stand out from your church or your school years in high school and junior high, in your mind?

I really believed that if it hadn't been for playing football, basketball and baseball I would have quit school. I was bored. I did well in school, I don't recall ever bringing a book home.
Mel Steely: 00:02:12 Just have a photographic memory, type thing?

John Linder: 00:02:14 I've got a very good memory. It wasn't very challenging to me. I remember sports with paper routes, worked for the businesses in town. Started my first summer job when I was thirteen and worked every year since then. Bought our own clothes as best we could. But we played summer league baseball.

John Linder: 00:02:35 I remember getting out of hand one time way. I answered an essay question on a test, and the teacher marked it wrong. And I was really upset about it, so I grabbed the book and I opened up the page of the book where I had written the answer verbatim. I said, "You're still going to call it wrong?" And he said, "Yes." And I got out of hand and swore at him. I got kicked out of school for three days.

John Linder: 00:03:04 And my dad and mother were called down to the principal's house. And they went in, and it was explained my being out of line, and I was. And my dad said, "Just tell me this, was he right or wrong?" And the principal said, "He was right." And dad said, "That's all I need to know." Walked out of the house. It was an error ... I was correct in my answer, but I was wrong in what I did.

John Linder: 00:03:34 But not a whole lot of things stand out for me. It was just a small town America.

Mel Steely: 00:03:40 Kind of like the Garrison Keillor's A Prairie Home Companion.

John Linder: 00:03:45 Yeah, where all the girls are beautiful, and all the kids are [crosstalk 00:03:50]-

Mel Steely: 00:03:50 The women are strong, the men are good looking and all the children are above average.

John Linder: 00:03:55 Above average, that's it. Yup.

Mel Steely: 00:03:55 That sounds like that is. You were above average, I suppose. In the sense that you had good genes anyway.

John Linder: 00:04:03 I suppose.

Mel Steely: 00:04:03 You graduated at University of Minnesota Duluth with a B.S. in '63, went on to get a D.D.S. in '67. This was about the time when the war in Vietnam was beginning to heat up.

John Linder: 00:04:15 Just beginning.
Mel Steely: 00:04:16 Just starting to. What do you remember about those days and school politics, one thing or another. You involved in any of that?

John Linder: 00:04:23 I was President of the Inter-fraternity Council at one time. And I was asked ... I didn't run for anything, I was the head of the publications board at one time. So I guess I was involved in political activities. I never ran for an office in the student council. I was active with people who were in the National Student Association and traveled to some events and that.

John Linder: 00:04:47 I was politically involved, I guess, at that time. But I didn't think about it at the time. With respect to the Vietnam War, I was too busy working. I worked two jobs when I went to school. And I was active in the theater groups, and so I was doing theater at night and working. We just didn't think about it that much. The most important event I can recall was the Cuban Missile Crisis. And we really believed for three or four days that the world was going to blow up. And friends of mine and I talked about quitting school and going in the military. And we were very serious about it. It was very tense times. For about four, five days.

Mel Steely: 00:05:33 But do you don't remember any particular partisan activity? I mean it wasn't Republicans, Democrats fighting on campus, or anything?

John Linder: 00:05:40 No. That was the time of the House Committee of Un-American Activities. Activities and their ... so I was involved at that time from protesting some of that from the liberal point of view. I got caught up in it.

Mel Steely: 00:05:56 I did too.

John Linder: 00:05:57 And over time, it didn't take me very long to became a conservative.

Mel Steely: 00:06:04 You entered the Air Force right out of dental school.

John Linder: 00:06:06 Yes. I enlisted in the Air Force in 1963 or 4. To make sure I could get in, getting out of school. I thought it would be a good idea to practice in the Air Force before deciding where I wanted to live. Had I not done that I would have wound up in Minnesota. It would have just been easier.

John Linder: 00:06:26 So I was a second lieutenant during the time I was in the Air Force. I really wanted to get into it because for years just prior
to my going into dental school, they paid you second lieutenant wages and they paid your tuition and books. And just before I got there, they dropped that. So I became a first lieutenant later on, and I went in the Air Force as a captain. And about two years later they started that program again. So I missed that time of getting paid for it, so I came out of school with a lot of debt.

Mel Steely: 00:06:55 I bet you did.

John Linder: 00:06:56 But I did want to get in the Air Force. I was stationed in San Antonio. At the officers’ training school there. I was the dentist at the officer training school, and just living in the south like that was a different world. I recall my dad coming down to visit in February. And I was getting up to get to work at around seven in the morning. He'd been sitting out on the patio at our house on base, drinking coffee and staring around, shaking his head. And I stuck my head out the door and I said, "What's the problem?" And he said, "Just hard to believe people can live like this in February, without the snow."

John Linder: 00:07:33 When the time came to get out of school, or out of the Air Force, I mean. We decided to stay in the South and we picked one or two or three cities that we wanted to look at. Austin, Texas was a beautiful place. And we liked Dallas, and then somebody said you've got to look at Atlanta.

John Linder: 00:07:53 So I called a friend I'd gone to dental school with, who was practicing here. And he said, "Fly over and I'll let you use my car for the weekend and you can just drive around the city." I did that and decided that day I was going to move to Atlanta. Beautiful city. And we did.

John Linder: 00:08:10 I bought my dental practice here about two months before I got out of the Air Force.

Mel Steely: 00:08:15 You had leave time, or ...?

John Linder: 00:08:17 No, I came over here and bought the practice and ready to take control of it as soon as I get out. And it was there, running, it was another person's practice, had some patients.

Mel Steely: 00:08:27 He was retiring, or whatever.

John Linder: 00:08:28 He was moving to Macon. So I was up in business the day I got out.
Mel Steely: 00:08:35 Oh, that was good. When did you first get interested in politics, and why?

John Linder: 00:08:43 I think I've always had an interest and I don't know why. I can recall getting married, I got married two days before I started dental school. The day I started dental school my wife started her first job. I was twenty-one and she was eighteen. We'd known each other three months, that's thirty-three-plus years ago. The first two weeks of our marriage we had to stay with my cousin because our apartment wasn't ready. And I can recall sitting there one evening talking, and my cousin's husband said, "What are you, what will you be doing thirty years from now?" And I said, "I'll probably be in Congress." And my wife almost died, she'd never heard. And I really let it go.

Mel Steely: 00:09:28 Well, that's phenomenal.

John Linder: 00:09:29 Yeah, I said, "I don't know but someday I'll do that." And in the meantime I was busy and interested in getting my dental degree and setting up a practice.

John Linder: 00:09:39 I moved to Atlanta in August of 1969. And in 1974, Harry Geisinger was representing a seat in the Georgia House, in the Dunwoody area. Where we had bought a home. And he decided to run for governor, and I said, "Why don't I run for that seat?" So I did. I had some neighbors and people in my church got real active in my campaign, and we run a ... I had three people in the primary. I won without having to have a run off by five votes. And then I won the general election.

Mel Steely: 00:10:23 What church did you go to at the time?

John Linder: 00:10:26 Saint Luke's Presbyterian Church in Dunwoody. I was one of the founding charter members of it.

Mel Steely: 00:10:31 Okay. Tell us a little bit about your '74 race.

John Linder: 00:10:38 Just kind of interesting that we got more press attention in that race than I did in my last race for Congress. For some reason we generated some excitement in Dunwoody, with the Dunwoody Neighbor and the Decatur-DeKalb News.

Mel Steely: 00:10:53 Who was your opponent?

John Linder: 00:10:55 Gerry Burrows, an attorney who ... interestingly, his whole campaign was that he was an attorney and we need more attorneys in the legislature because they understand the laws.
And that John Linder was a dentist, what does he know about writing laws and besides that, he's a Yankee. And he was saying that his case was that he was born and raised in Georgia. Well Dunwoody, Georgia at the time was probably about 60% Yankees. And there were very few people shouting for more lawyers in the House. So he did himself in.

Mel Steely: 00:11:29 He obviously did no polling ahead of time.

John Linder: 00:11:32 No. No. We actually learned how to do polling in that race. Sam [inaudible 00:11:37], who was a professor at Georgia State, got interested in the race. He was a McGovern Democrat and I was a Reagan Republican, and we became good friends. And he showed us how to do our own polling and we were very good at it. We would poll across the district. For the reason that if we knew an area that we should be doing well in and it was highly undecided, for example. We then did ten or fifteen people the next weekend and we'd walked every house in the district. And in that area just trying to bring up name ID. We had letters from every, into every church for every member of that church, mailed in just before the election saying my friend John Linder is running for the Georgia House.

John Linder: 00:12:20 We believed that recommendations of friends are the best recommendation you can get for a candidacy. And we ... my opponent mostly went door to door. He came to my door, and it was at the very edge of the district, in March, or May. In May of that year. And his goal was to touch every house in the district before November, and he probably had close to it. He worked very hard at it.

John Linder: 00:12:49 My campaign was mainly going into people's homes and talking about issues and coffees and things like that. Back and forth on issues. And then one day the Dunwoody Neighbor did a big story on this race, that said “Walking versus talking in the 44th House district.” I didn't think that was a good juxtaposition of things, that they thought he'd maybe worked harder and he was going to every door. So we stole his campaign from him. At the very end we sent out a postcard that said, "And remember when you go to vote on Tuesday, remember I was the one who cared enough to come by your door." They didn't remember who had been by. Six months later, no one remembered who had came by and knocked on their door. So that was, I guess my first dirty trick.

Mel Steely: 00:13:43 Was he protesting and screaming about it?

John Linder: 00:13:45 No.
Tell us a little bit about the reaction that people had to your beard at the time.

Ah, that was funny. I had a goatee and a mustache. And I thought I should shave it off. I think in politics the one thing you don't want to do is create questions. And no one's going to ever going to say, "I wonder why he doesn't have a beard." But some people are going to say, "Why does he have a beard?"

Now see, eliminate all the questions you can what are unusual. So I decided I should shave it off, and we had a big discussion with my neighbors and friends. And Judy Tate said, "John, when you shave that off you look thirteen. So if you leave it on at least you look old enough to run." And so I left it on. And on election day in November, Louise McCann was going door to door trying to get people out to the polls, and she saw a lady raking her leaves, and she walked up to her and said, "Have you voted yet?", and the lady said, "No, I don't very often vote." She said, "I wish you'd go to the polls and vote for my friend John Linder, he's running for the Georgia House." And she handed her a brochure that had a picture of me on it. The lady took one look at that brochure and said, "I never did trust a man with a beard." And she threw it away.

So, I wore it for about two or three years, I guess. I had it on for some time. And Tom Murphy, the Speaker of the House, began calling me “Mandrake.” And that stuck for a while in the legislature. But I think I shaved it off a couple years later. My song was five years old, as I recall, when I shaved it off. He'd never seen me without it.

You had it in the '76 campaign.

Yes [crosstalk 00:15:32].

For part of that session, at least.

And I shaved, I think in '77. And he was five, and I walked in the house, he hadn't seen me without it. And he looked at me, and he was scared. He didn't quite know what to make of it.

That first campaign was one where President Ford had just pardoned Richard Nixon. Did that have an impact on you at all?

It hurt Republicans in general across the country. But I was running in a fairly good Republican district, it had a lot of people had moved in from northern areas. It was fairly affluent, it was
one of the more affluent areas in the state. And it didn't directly impact me.

John Linder: 00:16:15 To tell you something interesting about ... the very first political thing I did in Georgia is I went door to door in DeKalb County for Nixon for President. And he was in the Congress speaking with us a couple of years ago, spoke to the House Republican Conference at Bob Michael's request. And afterward I stood in line to get a picture taken with him. I don't very often do that. Like my friend said, "You were in the Air Force and you only have to stand in line once in your life." So I really just don't stand in those lines, but I want to do it for Nixon. And when I got up there, I noticed he was having conversations with everybody referring to something specific about their neighborhood, their home.

John Linder: 00:16:54 And I said, "Mr. President, this is one of the first times I've ever stood in line to get a picture taken with a politician, but I'm proud to be standing here with you." I said, "The first activity I ever had in politics was going door to door for you into DeKalb County in 1972." And he told me what percentage vote he got in DeKalb County in 1972.

John Linder: 00:17:13 Amazing intellect. Amazing.

Mel Steely: 00:17:15 What a memory, huh?

John Linder: 00:17:16 Yeah, amazing.

Mel Steely: 00:17:18 But you got your picture?

John Linder: 00:17:19 Got my picture taken.

Mel Steely: 00:17:20 Yeah. That ... the pardon I think did hurt, I remember that was Newt's ...

John Linder: 00:17:27 Well that was, you know, the class of '74 they swept into the end of the Congress. And that was the reform group that changed campaign finance laws and everything else. Changed the seniority system and became just as encrusted in their ways as any other group has.

Mel Steely: 00:17:46 Twenty years later, you had another reform, and were being compared to that. Some of my Democratic friends don't like that comparison, but I think it's an apt one.
John Linder: 00:17:55 Actually, they come from different sources though. The '76 class was really a reaction to Watergate. The '94 class was really a national mandate without a national election. It was a sea change in attitudes of Americans about their government. And that's why '96, in large part we survived it, because that movement of more government to less government is still solid in the conscience of the American electorate.

Mel Steely: 00:18:31 Pretty much, I think, yeah. When you first entered the George House after that '74 election, Tom Murphy was the speaker. New speaker. More or less. I think he'd been in what, one year, or two years.

John Linder: 00:18:43 He was elected speaker in, I want to say, December of 1974 or maybe earlier in '74. He'd been there maybe one year. My first year was '75.

Mel Steely: 00:18:55 I think he replaced ... 

John Linder: 00:18:58 George Smith.

Mel Steely: 00:18:58 George Smith. George L. Smith. And in the middle of a term, I think is how he got in in '73, instead of '72 or whenever it was. Anyway he'd been there a little while. So I remember George Busby was the majority leader. Who were the Republican leaders at the time? Was Herb Jones ... ?

John Linder: 00:19:18 No, Mike Egan.

Mel Steely: 00:19:19 Mike Egan, okay.

John Linder: 00:19:21 And on the Senate side it was Paul Coverdell.

Mel Steely: 00:19:26 That's right, and then Mike went to Washington with Jimmy Carter.

John Linder: 00:19:28 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:19:29 In '77.

John Linder: 00:19:30 We got together for a Republican gathering. I think there were twenty-one Republicans at the time, out of 180 Members of the Mouse. And we had a meeting. Bob Irvin had been there two years. He's now the Republican leader of the House. And we decided to have an agenda. And Mike Egan wasn't much for agendas. He really kind of ran the Republican conference out of his hip pocket. And very much like Bob Michael did in
Washington. Didn't consult with many people, just sort of did what he wanted to do. And we got together, Bob Irvin really was the driver in this, put together an agenda and had a vote, and decided we'd push that in opening day of House with some rules changes.

John Linder: 00:20:17 And so it came up to the rules in the opening day of the House, Mike stood up to represent the Republican conference and his hand was just shaking, I mean he was doing things that he wasn't comfortable doing. He knew Murphy was going to get upset. And he proposed these rules changes, and Murphy was swinging that gavel as hard as he could, and Mike was just standing there shaking. But we forced some votes that they didn't want to take. And it was the first time that anyone can remember the Republican conference getting organized, to try and make change.

John Linder: 00:20:46 We succeeded in several areas. We succeeded considerably in several areas. And Mike led us for a period of time. I recall at one point there was a dispute between the speaker and Governor Busbee, and it was very parochial, had something to do with highway patrol. And we decided to use it as an opportunity to flex our muscle. So we went to Mike and forced him to go sit down with Busbee and with Murphy. And demand some concessions to give them our twenty-one votes. We chose to go with Murphy. He would put a Republican on every conference committee. The minority leader on the committee that meets during the “offs” when the legislation session to move money from one category to another. And one other item. And Murphy said yes. We gave him our votes. He won. The next year I said to Mike, it was towards the end of that session, and the next year I said to Mike, "Have you talked to Murphy? Is he going to deliver on his part of the deal?" Mike says, "No, I don't think so. Why don't you go talk to him?"

John Linder: 00:21:59 So I went and sat down with the speaker, and I said, "You gave us your word. And we delivered your votes, and you won. Now we want you to deliver." He said, "I can't do that." And I said, "Why? Why can't you keep your word?" He said, Marcus Collins won't let me." And I said, "Who's the speaker, him or you?" And he goes, "We're not going to deliver, John." And he didn't.

Mel Steely: 00:22:30 That's remarkable.

John Linder: 00:22:31 Yeah.
Mel Steely: 00:22:31 For a man ... I don't know how many times I've heard Mr. Murphy, "It's one thing I can't stand is somebody that gives me their word and won't live up to it."

John Linder: 00:22:39 He did, and he didn't.

Mel Steely: 00:22:40 I'll be darned. I never knew that. That's interesting. Is that your most memorable vignette from that early period?

John Linder: 00:22:48 No, actually the most memorable one was when he tried to force a, not only a raise for the legislature. 1974 was a big, was just after they raised their salaries from 4,200 to 7,200 dollars. And there were sixty or eighty new members in the House, because of that pay raise. And then he, I think it was '75, he wanted to fix legislators' raises to increases in the merit system employees, state employees. And index it for inflation and make it, never have to vote on it again. I'm not been one to oppose getting people justified raises, but I think it should be voted on. And so I went to the well of the House to fight it. And beat him. And had chairmen coming up to me and say, "Go back for him. Keep fighting. We'll get you some votes." Democratic chairmen. And I beat him on the floor. He was in the well, and I was in the well. Separate times, going head to head.

John Linder: 00:23:55 I brought it back for reconsideration in the afternoon and I took him on again. It's the only time my father's ever seen me on the floor of any legislative body. He died shortly thereafter. He was sitting in the gallery.

Mel Steely: 00:24:07 Good time for him to be there.

John Linder: 00:24:09 Yeah. I was supposed to be on MacNeil/Lehrer that night. Talking about the Carter reorganization, and I don't know how they picked me out, but they picked me to do it. And Robert MacNeil was on the floor of the house after the house was out of session, interviewing me. And he was going to be situated there and Jim Lehrer was in Washington. And I had been talking to Culver Kidd and a variety of people who had been around, about the Carter re-organization. Interesting thing was that people, departments that had political clout like the Labor Commissioner, never got reorganized. Four street, never got re-organized. Because they had the political clout to go to the legislature, and good relationship with the leadership of the legislature.

John Linder: 00:24:53 So I showed up, and like a fool, I called ... or my wife called relatives and said, 'John's going to be on MacNeil Lehrer
tonight." And I showed up on the floor of the House at the appointed time and I was told, for Robert McNail looked at me kinda funny and said, "Weren't you informed?" And I said, "Informed what?"

John Linder: 00:25:11 "We were told the Speaker said you weren't going to be able to be on the program." So I walked out. Bob Beckham filled in for me and he did fine.

John Linder: 00:25:22 The Speaker didn't ... never missed an opportunity to be petty. We got in a big battle, me from my chair in the back of the floor of the House, and him from the podium. I recall on a ruling he made, on that issue at one point. And I pointed out that he was wrong on the rules, and I pointed out the rule was abusing and he said, "Did you want to appeal the ruling of the chair?" And I said, "No, I've got enough sense not to do that." So I sat down. But the big story the next day in the paper was by Rick Allen about this big battle that went on all day long between he and I. And he said, "Just for a matter of clarification, Linder was actually right on the rule and the Speaker was wrong."

John Linder: 00:26:14 We had many battles over the rule in time.

Mel Steely: 00:26:17 As I remember, in that period you probably were the most thoroughly disliked member of the House from Mr. Murphy's point of view.

John Linder: 00:26:25 Yes.

Mel Steely: 00:26:26 There was a continuing feud-

John Linder: 00:26:28 Yeah, he said that.

Mel Steely: 00:26:28 And it was pretty well reciprocated as I-

John Linder: 00:26:31 No, no, I didn't. I never did dislike him. We had two different approaches to this. He takes politics personally and I don't. So when I would be singled out when he would be in the well of the House, singling me out for personal jabs. Absolutely against the rules of the House. He never bothered me. I would see him on TV on a press conference, singling me out. It just never bothered me. I've always said that I didn't go down there to make friends, I went down there to make change. And I didn't need to be liked down there, I get plenty of love at home. My kids and my wife, and we even had a dog that liked me at one time.
And Tom Murphy took it personally.

What were the major issues, facing the legislature in those days?

Well, some are still facing it. It was a closed system. No open bidding. That's when Kerry Bond went to jail for having the people around the Capitol to build his house in Rockdale County. Sam Caldwell went to jail, Labor Commissioner. There was a lot of abuse of the system. A lot of financial problems. I actually originally authored virtually every reform measure that finally passed the House and the Governor signed. None of them with my name on it, of course. I sponsored bills to abolish the elections of the school board superintendents, it was my view they should be appointed by elected boards so that they didn't have to worry about re-election, they just had to worry about education. I abolished the election ... I wanted to abolish the election of the agriculture, labor, insurance commissioners. It struck me that the governor comes in with very little influence over those departments because their heads are elected state wide and they have their own constituency. I also believed that each of those departments had two complete staffs. One to hand out checks and one to keep them elected. And so all those reform measures I initially sponsored the demand that all purchases by the legislature above a certain dollar amount be by bid process. Open meetings. Ultimately passed. I watched the system work for a while and realized, while Murphy controlled virtually the whole process, the lobbyists were picking up the tab. He could do whatever he wanted and just turn over and hand the bill to some lobbyists and they pay it.

And so I sponsored a bill that required lobbyists to report who they spent money on, and for what reason. Zell Miller finally introduced that in one of the first reformers when he became governor, never went anywhere when I sponsored it. But I just-

Took twenty years to get there?

Yeah. But I've always believed that all you really need is full disclosure and the public will make a good judgment. And ...

Well that's Speaker Gingrich's position now, isn't it? The latest thing I've been reading is he's saying we do not need to cap spending for elections, but rather leave it open but have good reporting.
John Linder: Yeah. American people spent more money on yogurt last year than all the elections combined. And it takes money to get your message out beyond a broader audience. I've said over and over, you can't shake 588,000 hands. So full disclosure, American people are wise, they can make discerning judgements. Let them see who pays for your campaign, who sends the money in and how the money's being spent and they'll make good judgments.

Mel Steely: What good things would you say about Mr. Murphy, what were his strong points?

John Linder: Very fair. He did his very best to be very fair to the whole state. And he had a heart as big as the world, he really did. He loved kids, and he was a softie. He was very fair in the chair. Sometimes he'd get personally involved and get angry and his judgment would get clouded. But he was good for the state, he was fair to the city of Atlanta, more than fair and the things that he helped them build. He didn't just spend all his money in the rural area, although that's where he came from and that's where his base of support for his speakership came from. But, Tom Murphy was.

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

John Linder: Came from. But, no, Tom Murphy was a decent man. I enjoyed him.

Mel Steely: Mm-hmm (affirmative). You served not only with Mr. Murphy but you served with three future governors: George Busbee and Joe Frank Harris in the House, Zell Miller in the Senate as lieutenant governor. How would you describe these three guys as political leaders and what was your relationship with them?

John Linder: Knew them all well. George Busbee called me Tom Linder for eight years. Mary Beth would always correct him, because Tom Linder's a famous political-

Mel Steely: Yes.

John Linder: Name in this state. He was agriculture commissioner for generations and we loved ... I've always said, if I had an ounce of larceny in my heart, I would have changed my name to Tom because everybody remembers him, and stolen his reputation.

John Linder: Busbee was a good governor and he was a leader. He did tough things. Joe Frank was one of the most decent men you'd ever
meet in life. He's a real committed Christian man. He's soft and quiet and very conservative. Not much of an aggressive political leader. Let things kind of coast, but he didn't hurt the state. He won only because he promised no new taxes. Do you remember that?

Mel Steely: 00:32:22 Yes.

John Linder: 00:32:23 Came out late in that campaign with "no new taxes." That was it. And we had no new taxes. He was the one who sponsored the education reform bill that really did nothing. It was a lot of noise.

John Linder: 00:32:41 Zell Miller is an interesting guy. I've known him for twenty-plus plus years. In fact, his daughter-in-law is a dear of Lynne’s and mine and grew up in our neighborhood. Every time I see Zell I say, "Is she still a supporter of mine?" and he said, "Yeah, she's still a Republican. I can't change her." Zell did some good. He came in energetic. He passed some valuable reforms. Surprised that he won re-election, frankly, because after as long as he's been in public office he's got so many decisions that hurt people ... not hurt, but disappointed this group or that group, that sooner or later, you just have so many people disappointed that you lose. He should not have won re-election. If there had been a better campaign against him, he wouldn't have.

Mel Steely: 00:33:32 Had the lottery pulled him through?

John Linder: 00:33:36 I think the lottery helped him. I think the campaign against the lottery should simply have been ... It's an unseemly way to finance government off the backs of peoples' addictions. But he charged you $200 to bring your car into the state from another state and seems to have raised the license fees, and it seems to me that he has his picture in every one of those county tax collector offices. Every time somebody came in there and paid for their auto licenses or their $200 fee to bring a car in state, he'd have a lot of people remembering him. But he snuck through and even Zell has said that he was surprised that he's still at that desk.

John Linder: 00:34:23 George Busbee did the toughest things when he was governor. And of course at that time, Zell was lieutenant governor. They worked well together. Zell and Murphy have had problems the whole time they've been working together, but the problem is they're all the in the same old school. And nothing changes. This state's problems are structural. We have constitutional officers precisely because 150 years ago, in a one party state, it was the countervailing balances to the governor. And all these
constitutional officers were balancing off the single role of the governor, and it divided up his powers. Now that we have legitimate two party system, it seems to me we need structural changes and we need a breath of fresh air in there. We need somebody to come in there, clean house and start over and bring some new leadership in. If you go around the Capitol anymore, there's no morale left. People are not happy down there. They're just doing their jobs. You need some structural change with new ideas.

John Linder: 00:35:35 Our government ... Bob Irvin did some wonderful research in 1984 for Operation Breakthrough that he and I were on. And so if you take as a measure of the efficiencies of government, how many public employees per capita it takes to deliver state and local services, and you have to include local in this because some states deliver things at the local level that others deliver at the state level, so take all the non-federal services, public employees per capita deliver them, Georgia's the sixth least efficient state in the nation. If we were as efficient as Kentucky which has a governor's cabinet form of government, where the cabinet officers are brought in by the governor, and it that cabinet officer messed up, it's the governor's responsibility. That cabinet officer has one constituent; the governor. If we were as efficient as, in public employees per capita, Kentucky was, we'd have had a billion dollars freed up for tax relief or education. We have too many towns. We have too many counties.

John Linder: 00:36:42 One of the bills I introduced that got more response than anything I've done was to reduce the number of counties from 159 to about 110. Reduce the number of members of the House from 180 to 150, and the members of the Senate from 56 to 50. And I had people all over the state calling me to talk about that. Kil Townsend introduced a bill that I cosponsored with him that would've eliminated 48 counties. And it would've only impacted 6% of the state's people and 3% of its commerce. Well, why could we do that? We had hearings around the state. And one hearing that got showed up, we flew down to south Georgia and a sheriff showed up and said to Townsend, "I figured you'd need a little protection down here." We had, in that hearing, the typical taxpayer didn't show up but the county commissioner, and his wife, his mother, his children and the sheriff and wife, mother and children, they all showed. And it was not a pretty sight. They were angry. Because when you get outside of metropolitan Atlanta and rural Georgia, the best job you can get is for the county.
Now it's organized in a convenient way. Anybody was the hero here in the 1890's got a county named after him, if you had a lot of friends in the legislature. We organize judicial circuits in a different way, according to the size of the need. Populations expand, we need more judges, we might create a new judicial circuit. If you look at the Ocmulgee judicial circuit, you've got eight clerks of court, eight county commissioners, eight sheriffs, eight coroners, one DA. One DA for the judicial circuit who creates the papers that eight clerks follow. So, it seems to me we ought to take a real look at that, the numbers of county revenue. They all consume tax dollars, and the same folks are paying the dollars.

In '82, or rather, in 1980, you ran for the Georgia Senate. Why did you decide to do that? Tell us about that campaign.

Well, Jim Tysinger was a fourteen-year Republican incumbent in that seat. And to be really honest with you, in 1976 after I'd won a seat in the House, he started floating the rumors that I was going to run against him. I had no intention of doing that. And people would call me, "You're not going to run against Jim, are you?" He wanted to make sure he could build up a backstop. Of course not. So I ran in one re-election. 1978 he did the same thing again. I ran without opposition. 1980 he did the same thing again. I said, "Maybe I'll just run against him", so I did. I was leading him by about ten points going into the final weekend, and I got a call from Louise [inaudible 00:39:43] said Manny Maloof was running on the Democratic primary for county commission chairman, was calling all my supporters saying, "John Linder's got his race won. Why don't you vote in the Democrat primary and help me defeat Walt Russell, and I'll stop that road widening on Ashford-Dunwoody Road." I said, "Louis, don't worry about it. They're not going to vote in the Democrat primary." They did.

Manuel, every time I've seen him since that day, has apologized to me for taking a thousand of my supporters into his primary. I lost by 232 votes, and then he widened the road anyway. So it was a good lesson. I have said though, ever since that time and many times I've said that, it was the best lesson of my political life, because I learned at age 38 that I'd never be President of the United States and it took a great burden off my shoulders.

You also learned to question Democratic promises a little bit, didn't you?

Well, yeah. We were out all those precincts, we had everyone covered and watched all of our friends who'd given us money
and have decided they're going to vote in the Democrat primary-

Mel Steely: 00:40:52 Couldn't believe it?

John Linder: 00:40:52 Wondering what in the world is going on?

Mel Steely: 00:40:55 Yep.

John Linder: 00:40:55 But it was a lesson. It's good for me. Spent two years out of politics and worked hard on my business and it was a good lesson for me. It was good two years for me.

Mel Steely: 00:41:07 In '82 you ran for the House seat 44, again, and won. You served on banks and banking defense and vet affairs, legislative reapportionment. Isakson, at that point, Johnny Isakson, was the leader-

John Linder: 00:41:23 That's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:41:23 Minority leader-

John Linder: 00:41:25 Back the minority leader up.

John Linder: 00:41:26 When Mike Egan was leaving to go to Washington with Jimmy Carter, he called Bob Irvin and I into his office. I was a freshman, just in my second term, Bob was in his third term. And Mike said, "I want one of you two to be the leader when I leave." He said, "I'm not going to make an announcement, but quietly talk to your friends and see who's going to run. I want each of you to run. Whoever gets the most support ought to be the candidate and the other one step back." And said, "That's fair." So by the time Mike announced about three days later, I had been getting my supporters lined up and Bob hadn't. I thought I had enough support that he'd support me, and he thought the same. Both of us ran. He dropped out on the second ballot. The final ballot was Herb Jones and I. Herb had been there for about twelve or fourteen years from Savannah. I lost by one vote, and I know whose vote it was.

Mel Steely: 00:42:39 You subscribe to Mayor Daley's rule, "Don't get mad, get even"?

John Linder: 00:42:43 No, I never got even. It's behind you.

Mel Steely: 00:42:47 Okay. Never even got even with Mr. Murphy?

John Linder: 00:42:52 No. I don't have any reason to ... He's got to live with it, not me.
Mel Steely: 00:43:02 After you left, he only had Democrats to fight with.

John Linder: 00:43:05 And he's had plenty. He's had plenty.

Mel Steely: 00:43:08 In the late 80's and into the 90's, there was something of debate within the Republican Party in Georgia on the best approach to take on the legislature. Now some favored what I'll call "The Gingrich-Linder" or "Linder-Gingrich" approach, which was a more aggressive, in your face, build our party to oppose them, et cetera, get something done. The other was what I'll call "The Isakson approach", which was get along, go along, get what you can from them, you never get anything if you're fighting with them kind of thing. What do you remember about all of that? That was a fairly important debate during that period within the party.

John Linder: 00:43:48 Goes back to 1978, when we quickly got tired of seeing carpet layers be our candidate for governor because no serious people ran. Rodney Cook was the chairman of the party, and we wanted ... George Busbee was going to win re-election, and we wanted to put a decent candidate up to be at least on TV with Rodney Cook that we weren't embarrassed and it would help our other candidates around the state at the legislative level. Coverdell and I got together and decided we had to change the rules for the two thirds vote of the state party so that our state chairman could run for that office. We solicited support. I'm from the right wing of the party and Paul's from the left wing of the party, if there is a left-wing, moderate side. And we got together and agreed on this.

John Linder: 00:44:48 I remember Johnny Isakson calling me and telling me this was a big mistake. We should not run against any of the incumbent Democrats, it'll only make them mad. I said, "Then how do you build your party if you don't run candidates?" He said, "Well you just lay low and don't run against any incumbents for about eight years and then run against all of them and surprise them." I'd been in politics long enough to know that that was silliness. We succeeded in changing the rules. Rodney ran a respectable race. He even got to the point where he believed he could win, which was crazy, but we all worked on his campaign and it looked good. He held George Busbee down to a respectable number. We looked like Rodney got about forty percent of the votes, something like that. We determined what the Republican base was, which was valuable, and we started getting more and better candidates.
In 1986, when Mattingly ran for reelection, in my office I had Fred Davison, immediate past chancellor of the University, or the President of Georgia-

University of Georgia.

University of Georgia, who I'd been talking with who was going to consider running against Joe Frank Harris's second term. He'd run for governor. Alton Crews was in my office with him, he was going to be running for school superintendent. Very popular in Gwinnett County. Very popular school superintendent. I was talking to Larry Thompson about running for attorney general. Tyrone Spearman about running for the Ag commission and we had a slate. What I wanted the slate to be talking the same language was the structural changes we needed to make. I wanted somebody to run for Ag commission saying, "If you like me, I'll help abolish the election of this position and allow the governor to appoint someone in here to get rid of the two staffs that we have. One for handing out checks and one to keep you reelected."

Fred said that he would only do it if he got solid support from the party, and he had an appointment to see that afternoon Paul Coverdell, who was the chairman of the party. Paul said, "We're not going to support you. We've got a deal. Mattingly wants no one running against, no serious candidate against Governor Harris because they've got a deal." I said, "This is the dumbest thing I've ever heard." Mattingly truly believed that they were going to back off him if we didn't give Harris trouble.

We didn't get enough serious candidates to run, we didn't promise or ensure Joe Frank would have a second term. And about two weeks after qualifying closed, Sam Nunn came down here to do a fundraiser for Wyche Fowler. Mattingly lost that election, much because of his own self-inflicted wounds. But more importantly, if Alton Crews had been on the ticket, he would have picked up the 30,000 additional votes in Gwinnett County alone and Mack would have won. He only lost by 22,000 votes.

Those that think you can build a party by not running candidates are nuts. When you go from there, then, back to trying to get along in the legislature, my approach was not necessarily confrontation, although I think when the speaker's out of line you ought to call him on it. He used to bully freshmen and I would jump to their aid, because I knew the rules better than anybody else in the House, and I could tie him up in knots. I wanted to force votes under rule 157, I believe it's 157, so long
If a committee doesn't discharge or act on a bill within ten days, you can serve an announcement on the floor of the House that tomorrow immediately after the period of unanimous consent I intend to force a vote to force out of the committee this bill. At least it gets members on record on that issue, and it gives our candidates across the state an opportunity to know what voting record the democratic incumbent they're running against had. That always created a problem for Johnny and his group of people, because they said it'll only make them mad and that we won't get our share of the highway and all this stuff. And my response was always, "You're not getting your share now. Is it more important to get a highway, or is it more important to change the state?" There was always conflict. It was friendly conflict, I don't harbor any ill feelings toward anybody on the deal, but I said, "If you don't get them to vote on tough issues, how are we going to run against them?" That went on the whole time I was there. That made people uncomfortable.

Mel Steely: 00:49:35 This reform program was really centered around a group of people: yourself, Newt Gingrich, Bob Irvin, Coverdell. I'm sure there were a number of others. What was it precisely you were trying to achieve in this? Newt has frequently mentioned, "We were trying to rebuild the Georgia party, et cetera." Using phrases like that.

John Linder: 00:50:01 That's it. We believed that you can't have honest government unless you have an honest two-party system, and we wanted to learn how to build a party.

John Linder: 00:50:11 I'd introduced Newt ... One of the first speeches he gave after he became speaker in Washington and I was asked to come and introduce him. I said, "Twenty years ago, I had won my first seat in the Georgia legislature, and Newt ran for Congress the first time and lost." And I said, "Every Friday afternoon twenty years ago, Newt Gingrich, Paul Coverdell, Mack Mattingly who was the state chairman at the time, Bob Irvin and I met at Republican headquarters to try and discuss how to build a two-party system." I said, "Since that day, Mattingly has been a United States Senator, Paul Coverdell is one, Bob Irvin is the Republican leader of the Georgia house, I'm a member of the United States Congress and Gingrich hasn't been heard from since."

John Linder: 00:51:05 He actually was a leader in the group. It was not uncommon for Newt to, as you know, even when he was congressman, when he was first elected in 1978, to land at the airport and get in the car and drive to south Georgia to talk to Young Republicans. To
go up to Athens and talk to Young Republicans or College Republicans. We did everything we thought we could do to bring people into the presidential campaigns. It was always Linder versus Coverdell in those races. I was a Reagan guy and Coverdell was for Ford. I was for Reagan and Coverdell was for Bush. By 1984, we finally convinced him. But we'd debate each other on these issues. And to the extent that we could get involved in these campaigns and bring new people into the race, we succeeded. I think we have a two-party system.

John Linder: 00:52:02 The only thing that's holding us back from getting control of the legislature right now is incumbency and access to both financial support and boardrooms. Incumbents have that non-incumbents don't have, challengers don't have that access. But that will come in due course. You'll see some retirements soon, and we'll win those seats.

Mel Steely: 00:52:24 In working with the party, who are the most effective party chairmen that you worked with and the national committeemen, committeewomen that you worked with?

John Linder: 00:52:33 Alec Poitevint was the best chairman. Rusty Paul is doing a good job. He's doing a good job at fundraising and he's doing a good job at helping to develop a message for legislative candidates. He dropped a million pieces of mail in the last campaign. Poitevint took a party that was deeply, deeply in debt with very little financial base and in four years built it to a very, very sound financial base. Good candidates, the best candidates. We're getting better and better candidates, both at the federal level and at the state level. Rusty's doing a fine job. I think Alec is probably also our best committeeman.

John Linder: 00:53:17 The previous committeemen I knew, I'll give you a story about one, Carl-

Mel Steely: 00:53:21 Gillis.

John Linder: 00:53:22 Carl Gillis. In the Reagan campaign in 1976, we were at the convention in Savannah. Same Tate was the chairman of the Reagan campaign. My neighbor, he was my first campaign chairman and I got him that job. And he was in a room trying to negotiate who would be the delegates and alternates to the convention. I was on the floor running the convention floor. Carl Gillis, during the course of that campaign, came to Sam and I and said he'd like to get involved in the Reagan campaign and raise money. We named him co-chairman of the Reagan campaign. I don't believe he ever raised a dime. But during the course of the convention in Savannah, I was authoring and
passing resolutions. One of them was to bind all delegates, because Reagan carried Georgia on the first ballot to Ronald Reagan. And we passed it overwhelmingly.

John Linder: Then Carl came up to me and said he wanted to be committeeman. He was running against Don Layfield. And he said, "If you turn it over to the delegates and alternates, which is how we select our national committeemen, the delegates and alternates to the national convention vote." He said, "I will lose that." And he said, "Can you help me get this elected on the floor of the convention?" So I authored a resolution to suspend the rules and vote on the floor of the convention, and we elected Carl Gillis national committeeman. And he promptly went to the convention in Kansas City and voted for Gerald Ford on the first ballot. I just thought that was funny. He was committeeman for about eight years I want to say. It was out-

Mel Steely: That's about right, maybe even longer. He was there a good long while.

John Linder: It was an opportunity for him to make a trip every few months. He didn't contribute much to-

Mel Steely: He and Marguerite Williams, I think, were paired.

John Linder: Marguerite was a big financial contributor for a long time. She was an eagle. She gave money to campaigns. Marguerite did more than her share in terms of financing.

Mel Steely: Was bitterly hurt when she lost the race-

John Linder: In '88.

Mel Steely: To Carolyn Meadows, mm-hmm (affirmative).

John Linder: In '88, in New Orleans, and she thought George Bush's people did her in. She's now a very active Democratic contributor.

Mel Steely: Well, she was correct, wasn't she?

John Linder: Yes.

Mel Steely: They did do her in.

John Linder: She's correct.
Mel Steely: 00:55:59 Were you involved in the big fight that took place in the early 80's over the ... I guess it was the '84 campaign over the Christian Coalition was moving in and trying to ... Pat Robertson-

John Linder: 00:56:12 '88.

Mel Steely: 00:56:12 '88, was it?

John Linder: 00:56:13 Albany?

Mel Steely: 00:56:14 Yes. Albany. The Albany convention.

John Linder: 00:56:16 John Stuckey was running for-

Mel Steely: 00:56:17 Stuckey was running for state chairman.

John Linder: 00:56:19 State chairman. John Stuckey called me-

Mel Steely: 00:56:22 We hid Newt out during that period, so no one could find him, I remember.

John Linder: 00:56:26 Stuckey called me during that period of time and asked me if I would be the convention chair. I've done that several times. I'm considered reasonably efficient moving the convention along. And I said I really didn't want to do that because I knew that was going to be a tough environment, but I said I would do it.

John Linder: 00:56:48 Then I discovered he'd offered that same chairmanship to about six other people, including Fred Cooper. I don't know why he would do that. So I got a call from somebody that said, "Would you please step aside from being convention chair?", and I said, "No. John should call me and tell me he doesn't want me." He never did do that. But I realized that it was going to be a battle there and I wasn't going to be the chairman, so I went to my place in the mountains and I spent the weekend up in Big Canoe, Georgia, and read about it in the paper. And I was delighted to have missed it.

Mel Steely: 00:57:20 It was something else. I can't remember a time when we've had more controversy. That was a period when one of our bright young idealistic sorts, Randy Evans, got involved. I don't know if you remember Randy.

John Linder: 00:57:32 I know Randy well. I know Randy well.
John Linder: 00:57:35 I'll tell you, part of it had to do with the old guard not wanting new people in their party. Just that simple.

Mel Steely: 00:57:44 Yes. Which is one of the things you were opposed to.

John Linder: 00:57:47 What?

Mel Steely: 00:57:47 If I remember. You were opposed to this locking down the party-

John Linder: 00:57:50 Absolutely.

Mel Steely: 00:57:51 Keeping the leadership so tight.

John Linder: 00:57:52 I said, "Let the new people in. Some will stay, some won't. Those that stay will become part of the regular organization. They got energized because of their faith and moving their faith, they were putting feet to their faith in the political process. And those that stay will be just regular ..." And they are. You know them now, and I know them. They got in with the Pat Robertson movement and they're just normal everyday people. The Christian Coalition gets a lot of unfair abuse. They don't want anything different than what you want, which is streets that are safe, schools that work, taxes that are low so one of the parents can stay home. Of the fifty or sixty questions asked on their questionnaire, one is abortion, one's prayer in school and that's about it. The rest are taxes and school choice and safe streets. They're getting abuse that they don't deserve, but they're a very effective organization.

Mel Steely: 00:58:49 When did you first meet Newt?

John Linder: 00:58:51 '74. When he was running for Congress and it was probably at a convention or something. He was an idealistic guy. I remember sitting in someone's meeting in '75 when we'd be talking about the logistics. We were moving Mattingly around the state as though he were a statewide candidate. And he'd go into these small markets and get on the radio-

Mel Steely: 00:59:11 He was chairman at the time.

John Linder: 00:59:11 Chairman of the party, and he would get on the radios and he would talk to newspaper people and he was always talking about our local candidates. "And that's why it would be good to elect so and so." And Coverdell and I in our room would be talking about logistics and raising money and getting him to this place and that place, and what he should say in these towns.
Then Newt would wax eloquent on some cosmic theory. Brilliant as could be, but so far above the heads of the average person. I kept thinking, "If this guy could ever bottle it, and get it down to street level, he'd be famous." Well he did, and he is.

Mel Steely: 00:59:47 Yeah.

John Linder: 00:59:48 He speaks now to the hearts of the average person on the street in ways that not many people do. But I was impressed with him. I always thought he was criticized one time for, "It's nice to find a solution for the world's problems, but you probably don't want to do it every six weeks and find a new one." Over time he got onto a theme that is just powerful. His theme now is universal and powerful. But it was fun. I was always impressed with how hard he worked and how far he was willing to go to build a party.

Mel Steely: 01:00:23 You more or less bonded during that period, didn't you? That small group that was working-

John Linder: 01:00:27 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:00:28 Together.

John Linder: 01:00:28 Yeah, pretty much.

Mel Steely: 01:00:29 And he still thinks of that as-

John Linder: 01:00:30 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:00:31 A happy band of brothers-

John Linder: 01:00:32 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:00:32 That were fighting this fight. I remember coming out of a meeting in Savannah, the state convention, where the end of the convention they had a resolution thanking the mayor and one said, "We want to welcome people from different races and young people and all to our convention", and people actually got up and protested that and said, "No. We can't have that."

John Linder: 01:00:53 Yeah. Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:00:54 I remember he was just astounded that in the early 80's people would still be thinking-
John Linder: 01:01:00 I wrote the platform for one convention. I don’t think anybody ever read it. But I had some very innocuous stuff in there about opening the doors and it caused some problems. I was chairing one convention in Savannah when one of the resolutions coming through had to do with this Jewish person who was hung out in Cobb County. Do you know what I mean?

Mel Steely: 01:01:27 Yeah.

John Linder: 01:01:28 Frank. Leo Frank.

Mel Steely: 01:01:29 Yeah. Leo Frank, that’s right.

John Linder: 01:01:31 And Stanley ... Who is Stanley's last name? I just lost it.

Mel Steely: 01:01:38 He was from Fulton County.

John Linder: 01:01:39 Stanley Baum. Stanley Baum.

Mel Steely: 01:01:40 Baum.

John Linder: 01:01:40 He's in [inaudible 01:01:41] now, wanted to issue a resolution of support because Frank has pretty much been found innocent.

Mel Steely: 01:01:48 Yeah.

John Linder: 01:01:49 I said, "It's going to blow this place apart, Stanley." He said, "Oh, he's innocent. Everybody knows?" I said, "It's going to blow this place apart." And it did. It did.

John Linder: 01:01:59 Yeah, there's a lot of ... In the old guard, there's still a lot of...

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

John Linder: 01:02:00 In the old guard there’s still a lot of set ways and prejudice.

Mel Steely: 01:02:05 Who do you see today as representing the old guard? Where does that sit?

John Linder: 01:02:11 Rich Richardson and Willie are still the old guard, but they've moved along with modernization. But they've been around for generations. They're very valuable to the party. They're not resistant to new blood, but they've been around for a long time. I don't know who is facing resistance now. Most of those folks are no longer real active. Most of the new crowd is pretty... The new blood in the party is really not DeKalb County and anymore, which was the party at one time. In 1975, that was
the party. The new growing parties are in Cherokee and Gwinnett, and Cobb, of course.

Mel Steely: 01:02:53 Augusta's got a good delegation. Savannah has some people.

John Linder: 01:02:56 That's right.

Mel Steely: 01:02:56 It's becoming more of a statewide thing, as I remember.

John Linder: 01:03:00 Small communities. We're winning in rural counties now that we didn't used to win in.

Mel Steely: 01:03:06 Mm-hmm (affirmative). In 1990, you decided to give up baiting poor Mr. Murphy and run for the fourth congressional seat.

John Linder: 01:03:16 Newt is the guy that talked me into it.

Mel Steely: 01:03:17 Did he?

John Linder: 01:03:18 Yeah. Down at the Marriott Hotel one night, he said, "You got to do it. We'll help you."

Mel Steely: 01:03:22 Tell me about that, about the race.

John Linder: 01:03:27 I started out with way too much advice from the National Republican Congressional Committee.

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John Linder: 01:04:01 I started out with way too much advice from the National Republican Congressional Committee. I want to say they sent about twelve people down to organize my campaign for me. Sam Dawson was one of them, who will now be the new Executive Director under my chairmanship. They were just
insistent that this was a direct mail district. I said, "You know, I
don't know how you figure that." But they were going to put
some money in and they insisted they would do it their way. We
did a poll in January of '90. By that time I- I announced the
march of '89. Ben Jones hadn't been in office for two months,
and I announced my candidacy. And I started raising money.

John Linder: 01:04:46 Following the next twelve months, I spent over two hundred
thousand dollars, and left no footprints. It was on people I
hired, consultants I paid. We did a poll that showed six percent
of people had heard of me. During the course of that campaign,
I calculated, we kept on my calendar every meeting I had,
whether it was a church Sunday, or it was a single person that
would finance us or whatever. By the fifteenth of October, I'd
been at seven hundred meetings. And I was exhausted. We
were doing direct mail. In August I sat down with Marc Noddle,
who's then our CC Executive Director, and I said, "This is crazy,
Marc. We need to use television. If I'm going spend another
$450,000, if we put on TV." And he said, "No, you don't
understand, we know more about politics than you do."

John Linder: 01:05:40 By Thursday night before the election, I'd finally passed Ben
Jones and his polling. And he called Dick Williams, and Dick
called me and said, "Sit down, you've won." And I said, "No, this
election's far from over." And he said, "No, Ben Jones' pollster,
Allan Secrence has told him he can't win, and he's beside
himself." And he went out to some people and borrowed two
hundred thousand dollars and put a trashy, like trash man on
TV. I was nowhere on TV to respond. But what turned it around
mostly for him was the Christian Coalition, believing that I didn't
have the courage to be tough, made an independent
expenditure on my race. Essentially that was the error of the
Mapplethorpe pictures, National Endowment for the Arts. The
thing was, they dropped these pictures on people's doorsteps,
filthy, filthy pictures, I mean.

Mel Steely: 01:06:32 The Christian Coalition?

John Linder: 01:06:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative). They wanted to show, Ben Jones raised
your taxes so he could pay for this kind of smut, through the
NEA. And they were on Christian radio, but when they went on
to WGST and got into the broadcast spectrum, Jones came
unglued, and he was able to show sincere high-dudgeon, angry
and frustration. And he got the cameras, the TV cameras to
come out and try to interview me on that. My response was, "I
don't know who did this. We have no knowledge of this." I later
found out that a person in my campaign from the Christian
Coalition was the one that kind engineered it. He turned the race around, and I was nowhere to respond.

John Linder: 01:07:14 Neil Boortz and his afternoon cohort on WGST bashed me all day Monday. The reason I didn't wanna do that is I didn't need to, number one. And number two, he'd just been through that nasty, nasty race with Pat Swindall two years earlier, and I just didn't want to get caught up in that. I didn't want the public to say, get out of here, he's just another one of those nuts. Which they did. My friends were offended that I would do something like that. They didn't know I didn't do it. So I told Alfred, when he came to see me a couple years later trying to get me to run for the Senate, I said, "You cost me that seat, you know." And I said, "Sometimes you got to trust the candidates." I just knew that would backfire, if I did anything negative like that. And I also figured I was going to win. So I lost because of that. Never used direct mail campaigns since then. It was a good race, it was a tough race. I engaged Jones in respondings made by August of 1989, and once you have the incumbent respond to you, you got an advantage.

Mel Steely: 01:08:23 Listen, about the same time you switched from being a dentist to a financial consultant-

John Linder: 01:08:29 I started the business in 1977, financing Sam Treat's company, my friend Sam, and found there was a very large niche in this town for people who wanted to borrow fifty thousand dollars on their receivables and inventory. And we started doing very modest, and it grew to a quite large company. So we're asset-based lenders. Ultimately, I had to get out of dentistry. I didn't have time to do both. So, in 1979 I think it was, I sold my practice to my associate, worked part-time for another couple of years. They said I couldn't even do that, so I went full-time for Linder Financial Corporation, and then during the next period of time we built several other companies as a direct result of things we were financing.

Mel Steely: 01:09:18 Can you remember the moment when you realized you were a millionaire?

John Linder: 01:09:25 No, I guess I can't. I can remember when Lynne and I talked and said, we don't worry about money anymore.

Mel Steely: 01:09:34 Yeah, well from someone who's not one I've always thought, at some point you'd be sitting there with your taxes or something and realize, my God...
John Linder: 01:09:43  No, when you're sitting with your taxes, you're only interested in writing checks.

Mel Steely: 01:09:46  Okay.

John Linder: 01:09:50  I want to say it was sometime when I was about forty.

Mel Steely: 01:09:52  Yeah. You didn't let the loss in '90 stop you run again in '92?

John Linder: 01:10:03  I really wasn't sure I was going to.

Mel Steely: 01:10:06  I thought you just continued right on-

John Linder: 01:10:09  No, I took a whole year off. Went off to Big Canoe, tried to start writing a book. About a third of the way through the book, was about the Soviet Union and the changes occurring there, and all of a sudden Gorbachev was defeated, and the theory was that there's been a story in this country since the seventies. A spy has converted to the United States and told a story about the Soviet Union electing a very moderate, Western friendly guy, and we're going to drop our guard, and they weren't. And I started this novel about working that way through that thing, and all of a sudden Gorbachev collapsed and the Soviet Union fell, and that was the end of my book.

John Linder: 01:10:50  That fall of 1991, Bob Varga, who worked in my '90 race, very bright, able guy who had never been involved in politics, but he's the best analyst of it, because he analyzed from someone who's not in the middle of it, came to see me and said if I ran, he'd like to be the manager of my campaign. He built a big business, retired early at a young age, and was just doing nothing at the time. And he kind of nudged me along, and I finally decided in October or November that year that I would run. And he ran my campaign. He'd run a television campaign. I would not make 700 meetings. I would raise money, and we put it on TV. In 1990, what I discovered was I was 700 meetings I was in, I calculated I probably was in front of 40 to 50,000 people personally, half of whom weren't registered. Gets me down to 25,000. A third of those don't live in the district. Gets you down to about 16,000, half of whom voted. But all the rest of those 100,000+ who'd heard of me on TV from Ben Jones, that wasn't flattering.

John Linder: 01:12:06  So in the next campaign, I raised money. We went to events were groups were already organized and we didn't have to get all volunteers again and see if you could get a crowd up. We raised money, we put it on the air, and we won.
Mel Steely: 01:12:22 So TV actually worked for you?

John Linder: 01:12:24 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:12:25 And Zell Miller had pretty well done that in the '90 campaign, hadn't he?

John Linder: 01:12:28 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:12:28 When he leaned heavily on television.

John Linder: 01:12:30 He didn't do yard signs.

Mel Steely: 01:12:31 Yeah.

John Linder: 01:12:35 I really, it was Zell's race that I took my lessons from.

Mel Steely: 01:12:39 He kind of pioneered that. Whoever it was who was advising him just said, "Stay out of everything but television." I remember they had a terrible time holding him down, because he wanted district leaders and county coordinators and all of them.

John Linder: 01:12:53 And the day of the primary election, he had his headquarters, his election headquarters over on Peachtree Road, and that building I think was owned by, I think it's McDonald. A wealthy guy that's a big friend of Zell's, and no, Mac Robinson. And the story was that when the cameras wanted to come in and see the action going on in the headquarters on primary election day, they brought a bunch of new phones in and just had the cords hanging over the back of their tables. Because they wanted to look like there's a whole lot more bustle going on.

Mel Steely: 01:13:26 Yeah.

John Linder: 01:13:27 But they weren't hooked up.

Mel Steely: 01:13:27 Because there was nothing happening.


Mel Steely: 01:13:29 When you won the second time, do you remember what your percentage was?

John Linder: 01:13:35 It was about a percent, about 1,600 votes, 2,000 votes. Interesting part of that, it was Cathy Steinberg was is very well known, popular feminist high-profile women's movement
person, very liberal, very strong with the Jewish community because she's Jewish and good base there. I had to build my base in Gwinnett County, I had defeated several people in the primary, being from Gwinnett, I had to get back and reestablish that campaign there. She was- We were accusing her of using her legislative career to increase her pay and her retirement benefits et cetera, and we had all the votes that she'd cast on, and we just kept harping on that because that was time right after the Congress had voted itself a big pay raise and people were tired of incumbents helping themselves. And that was sort of a thing. And she was beating me up for being, she called me Pat Buchanan with a Southern drawl. I don't have a Southern drawl. She beat me up for being too far right wing, and the papers helped her a good bit. Everything was arch conservative, pro-life. She had a commercial that beat me up for my pro-life stand on abortion, and it's pretty much a pro-choice district, to be honest with you.

John Linder: 01:14:56 When you're in the middle of this, you can feel where you are. And Bob Varga and I talked about it, and I knew I was dead even. At one point I thought I was ahead by six or eight points, and I felt it slipping. You just feel it when you're out there campaigning. I had a pro-life commercial in the can, ready to go on TV if I felt I was getting beat up too bad on abortion issue. I was ready to do it, and Bob said, "Now, first of all, let's find out." So we commissioned this modest poll, has five or six questions, and one of them was, "Have you ever heard of John Linder? Is your opinion of him favorable or unfavorable, and why?" And we let them give us an open ended response. Same with Cathy Steinberg.

John Linder: 01:15:43 The next day we got those 400 responses, and I started reading the verbatims of this open ended response, and we're just astonished that everybody who disliked her, disliked her for what we were saying. Raised her pay, raised her benefits, her retirement, et cetera. And of the people who disliked me, only two mentioned my stand on abortion. I was too conservative, it was all over the lot. So we decided this is not the time to change the message, and we left that commercial on, and we didn't go on the abortion commercial, and I won by 1,600 votes. I was ahead, went to sleep up 10,000 votes, and then DeKalb County started coming in, late, in particular South DeKalb.

Mel Steely: 01:16:27 Which is heavily black.

John Linder: 01:16:28 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Although the portion that I had of it, I didn't have all of South DeKalb. And...
Mel Steely: 01:16:34 Is it black or Jewish?

John Linder: 01:16:35 Jewish is up around Druid Hills.

Mel Steely: 01:16:37 Okay.

John Linder: 01:16:38 And those came in late too. They voted very heavily, 90% for her. And then I wake up in the morning, Bob didn't go to sleep that night, he was pacing the halls over at the hotel we're in. And he said, "It does not look good." Because we're losing votes, and finally it looked like everything was in, and I had about a 2,000 vote margin, somewhere in that range. And she graciously called me at 10:30 that morning and conceded. That was very close.

Mel Steely: 01:17:03 This was right after the reapportion?

John Linder: 01:17:06 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:17:07 Okay.

John Linder: 01:17:07 And I didn't live in the district. When she raised that issue, I just would come and this district is far more concerned about my values than my zip code. And-

Mel Steely: 01:17:19 Which is a good line. It worked.

John Linder: 01:17:20 It worked.

Mel Steely: 01:17:22 Mm-hmm (affirmative). And she had defeated Ben Jones in the primary.

John Linder: 01:17:26 No, Ben Jones ran in the tenth district.

Mel Steely: 01:17:29 Oh that's right. During the reapportion, but they changed it. That's right.

John Linder: 01:17:33 She defeated Bob Wilson in the primary.

Mel Steely: 01:17:34 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. What was Congress like when you arrived in '93? What were your impressions of the leadership, and just generally, what was going on there that you remember?

John Linder: 01:17:50 There was very partisan, more partisan than it is now. No Republican ever, ever got an amendment allowed on the floor, unless it was an open rule. Any kind of structural was just
Democrat amendments. My favorite way to look at it is this, I spent as a game two years trying to get Henry Waxman to say hello to me, and I walked by him and said, "Hello Henry!" And he'd just turn his head and walk on with an arrogance that was just palpable. It was in committees where I was part of the I was on the Banking Committee that looked into Whitewater with Henry Gonzales, and every time I'd ask a question that he didn't approve of he ruled me out of order. It was terribly arrogant. When we won in '94, we went back if you recall for a special session to rule on GATT, in November 28 or 29 of 1994. And I walked over to, when the bells rang, to the floor of the House, and the first person I saw at the elevator was Henry Waxman. He said, "Hi John! How are you doing?" I said, "Gee, things change."

John Linder: 01:18:56 Yeah, and frankly, we're getting accused of partisanship during the last two years, but one of the first bills we passed was the Unfunded Mandates Bill which is restraining Congress from mandating things to communities that were not funded. The Democrats would never let that bill out of the committee, but the principal sponsor was Gary Condit, a Democrat from California. We allowed him to be the main sponsor, one of the main sponsors on the bill. It passed the House and Senate, got into conference, and Gary asked Dick Gephardt, his leader if he can have one of the seats in the conference committee, and Gephardt said no. So Newt gave a Democrat a Republican seat in the conference. The Contract with America turned into thirty-one separate bills, thirty of which passed the House by large margins, all of which had forty to seventy Democrats voting yes. It was very bipartisan. The anger you saw in the last year was the old guard of the Democrat side, some of those folks just never quite got over losing their control, and just expressed anger throughout the two years. That's going to dissipate.

Mel Steely: 01:18:56 So quickly.

John Linder: 01:18:56 What was the Congressman from Florida?

Mel Steely: 01:20:07 Sam Gibbons.

John Linder: 01:20:09 Gibbons, yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:20:10 He retired.

Mel Steely: 01:20:11 He was my favorite. I would watch him, and he would almost have apoplexy on a daily basis.
John Linder: 01:20:17 He was a terribly angry man.

Mel Steely: 01:20:18 Yes, he was. Very much so.

John Linder: 01:20:20 John Lewis is angry.

Mel Steely: 01:20:22 John's angry. They defeated, what was his name?

Mel Steely: 01:20:26 Yeah. Was Brooks defeated in '94?

John Linder: 01:20:29 Yeah, he was defeated in '94 by Steve Stockman, who's today in Texas in a runoff.

Mel Steely: 01:20:35 We don't know how that's going yet, do we?

John Linder: 01:20:36 I talked to him yesterday, and I think he's [crosstalk 01:20:39]

Mel Steely: 01:20:38 Think he'll be alright?

John Linder: 01:20:40 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:20:45 What committees did you get on at that time when you-

John Linder: 01:20:50 I was, in our freshman class, I never wanted to have a freshman in office, so freshman class, presidential class. It just seemed to me like a burden that got you nowhere in the second term anyway.

Mel Steely: 01:21:02 Right.

John Linder: 01:21:03 So I sought, this was at Newt's suggestion, I sought a seat on the Steering Committee, at that time the committee on committees, which sits down and places people on various committees and determines who should be on what committee. When I was doing that, I had agreed, there were three of us, Jennifer Dunn, and Bill Baker, and I, and we'd each agreed in our class that we would not personally seek one of the A committees, because if you get in the room, you wind up on an A committee. And it'd be unfair to take advantage of their supporting us to be in the room and then taking all the benefits for ourselves. So I fought for our freshmen class to get them the committees they needed and wanted, and in many cases we gave them the committees that they needed more than they wanted. And then I decided, because I had been on the Banking Committee in Georgia for eight years I think, and I was in the lending business, I knew some of the issues. I asked Newt, "What do you think?" Because I wasn't on the best committees,
I didn't expect to stay on those committees. I knew I wanted ultimately get on another committee. So Newt said, "Well, you got a scientific background, take science. And you'll love working with Bob Walker." So I did that.

John Linder: 01:22:20

As we adjourned the committee on committees, Bob Stout from Arizona said, "Linder, aren't you a veteran?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "You're one of the few left." He said, "Would you be on the Veterans' Committee? I need more veterans." And they voted immediately to waive the rules that you can't have two committees, and I'm the only freshman who got two committees. And I got it because the ranking Republican asked me to do it.

John Linder: 01:22:47

During the summer of '94 Newt and I had a long meeting up in Gwinnett County talking about the plan he had for us to take the majority. He wanted me to read it, see if it was too much. My view was that it was a lot, but it's time we get disciplined. He wanted everybody to contribute sixty-five thousand dollars, or raise sixty-five thousand dollars, and that was going to be our hard pill to swallow. But we did pretty well. And during the course of that he said, "What committees do you want?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to go for either Ways and Means or Commerce, if we're in the minority." And he said, "What do you want to learn, tax law or science?" And I said, "Probably science." And he said, "Commerce would be better for you." And I said, "But if we're the majority, I want the Rules Committee." And he said, "Okay." So I got the Rules Committee.

John Linder: 01:23:35

We were getting an inkling about that. That was July and August. We felt things were moving our way. I'd been on the working group that put together the Contract with America.

Mel Steely: 01:23:50

Whose idea was that? Where did that come from? Newt credits a lobbyist from the earlier period, '80, was it '80 election or '82? '80 election I guess it was.

John Linder: 01:24:02

'80 election. I don't know who gave him the idea, but it percolated up, and we really... There was nothing courageous in that contract. I mean, it was all issues that were supported 60-80% of the American people, it'd just been the old underground by strong committee chairs that didn't want to deal with them.

Mel Steely: 01:24:21

I'm doing a book on Gingrich, I've gone back to his '74 campaign. Almost every one of those issues was something he ran on 1974.

Mel Steely: 01:24:28 I mean they've been there twenty years.

John Linder: 01:24:30 Yeah, probably.

Mel Steely: 01:24:31 And people, oh this is radical. My goodness.

John Linder: 01:24:33 There's an interesting thing about the contract with America. Right after the election, only fifty percent of Americans ever heard of it. It became famous when we actually passed it, and the news outlets would start saying, "Well, Congress is in day seven, and they've now passed three planks in their Contract with America." You remember, originally it was a joke. It was called Contract on America, it was ridiculed. Not only Pat, when we won they said, they can't do it, and we passed it to the House, they said the Senate will never pass this bill, this budget. And we put it on the President's desk, it really became a working famous document after we won. And it also kept us focused. The biggest advantage of the contract was not for the election, but for the first one hundred days it kept us focused in our first majority in forty years.

Mel Steely: 01:25:26 How important was Gaylord in all of this, Joe Gaylord?

John Linder: 01:25:32 Necessary. Wouldn't been done without him. He's one that kept driving Newt, he was the one that- He did all the research work, all the work in terms of election. Joe Gaylord has probably been in virtually every one of the 435 congressional districts. He knows them. But he was, I would say it would not have been done without Joe.

Mel Steely: 01:25:55 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Were you pretty involved in this whole national campaign that was going on?

John Linder: 01:26:01 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:26:02 Did you have a specific role?

John Linder: 01:26:04 No.

Mel Steely: 01:26:05 It's about this time I pictured you, and I don't know whether my image is right but I think so, as moving in almost as a continuation of the old '74 crowd. Somebody who's in the inner, inner circle, that Newt knew and trusted and knew he could rely on. Is that an accurate-
John Linder: 01:26:22 I think he- I don't know, you have to ask him.

Mel Steely: 01:26:23 Without being modest. I mean-

John Linder: 01:26:24 I think he thinks that, yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:26:26 I know he thinks that. I'm saying is that what the relationship was?

John Linder: 01:26:29 I think so.

Mel Steely: 01:26:30 Okay, and so you were just very close to him, and you worked as part of a team?

John Linder: 01:26:34 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:26:35 Okay.

John Linder: 01:26:38 That's probably why I'm Chairman of the NRCC right now. He knows he can count on me.

Mel Steely: 01:26:43 Yeah. I think there's something there, there's closeness there. I use the word bonding while I go. You can count on a number of people for different reasons. When he was picking the Chairman of the Rules Committee, you know the story there.

John Linder: 01:26:59 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:26:59 And he made a commitment to Newt. I mean straight out, I will commit to you on this issue, and you can trust him on that. But it wasn't like that with you. Yours was one that has built over the years.

John Linder: 01:27:10 Yeah, we've been, you know, we don't go out and socialize a lot, but we're friends. I recall when the crime bill was being negotiated all night long, and we had freshmen meeting with Dick Gephardt saying, "This is what we insisted on this part of it." That was when we were in the minority, and they were trying to pass crime bill and we were trying to change it. And I remember I was home, Lynne was in Atlanta, and I was in my house in Washington, and I got a call from Newt's, Rachel was in. Why don't you join down at the club, and we sat there, had a sandwich and laughed and laughed about what was going on. We had the majority in absolute a dither. We were rewriting the crime bill in order to get them enough votes to get passed.
Mel Steely: 01:28:03 It is remarkable. What do you remember about Clinton’s reaction to all of this? I mean, maybe I'd rather take it this way. Look at Clinton in the first two years of his term, and then what happened in '94, and then assess him afterwards and his changes. That’s a big topic.

John Linder: 01:28:21 Yeah, but '92... '92 to '94, Clinton was riding high. Until the health bill. And the health bill came unglued for a couple of reasons. Number one, they tried to do it in secret. Number two, they tried to do too much, and number three, they lied about it. And the person more responsible than any for bringing down the health bill was Betsy McCaughey, who is now the Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York. She was at the Manhattan Institute, and she came home one night and put her daughter to bed. She was at that time, she's married now again, but single mom, and she just thought she'd read this book on the healthcare bill that they're putting out. And she was just amazed at it. She said, she'd all of a sudden get post-it notes and she'd write things and stick them on the wall of her kitchen, and she was tracking this bureaucracy they were creating. And all of a sudden she had this outline, by the next morning, she stayed up all night, by the next morning she had this outline of this bureaucracy on the wall of her kitchen. She said, "This is amazing."

John Linder: 01:29:33 So she wrote an article for the New Republic about it, and Clintons did what they often do. They overreacted. Instead of just letting everything be a magazine article and die, they trashed her publicly. And they wrote a blistering article in the Republic which she got to respond to. By this time, she’d been invited to all the talk shows, and there was the end of that program. They lied about it saying that there was no criminal penalties in the bill, and there clearly were. And that began to unravel.

John Linder: 01:30:07 That was really my view, the incident that caused the glacial shift in this country. From 1860 to 1932, we had a country that pretty much ran itself. We had one of the least consequential presidents of all time, Calvin Coolidge in the middle of that, and he was inconsequential because that’s what he chose to be. He was one who could take a nap every afternoon because he knew the country would survive. And by 1932, after the crash of the stock market and the increasing unemployment, this nation took a look at pain and suffering about it and said, the federal government can do better. We can do something to help those. And they had a national election in 1932, and 1934 affirmed it, just like '96 did to '94, and we began the increasing involvement
of the federal government at the expense of personal freedom and individual responsibility.

John Linder: 01:31:13 I believe it only increased incrementally until 1965 because this country has a culture of volunteerism and individual and community responsibility. And it was going to go too far. Then in 1965, we had what the Chinese would call the “Great Leap Forward.” Johnson moved this nation on the emotion of the Kennedy assassination to do more, and effectively replaced individual and community responsibility and a culture of volunteerism with entitlements. On the day the Great Society path was passed, every doctor in America and every dentist in America had file drawers full of files for patients that they treated for free. That was their community responsibility. And the dentists we went to, over and over I hear them say to people, "Well, pay me when you can." But all of a sudden, Johnson said, "No, that's our responsibility, and we're going to raise your taxes to do that." And they stopped. People who cared about their neighbors in their communities stopped, and it became a system not of caring but of care taking. And it changed America. That lasted for thirty-plus years. Thirty years.

John Linder: 01:32:35 And when the healthcare bill came along and Americans said, "Wait a minute, one sixth of the economy, if this is your idea of making healthcare more accessible, we're on the wrong horse here." And the American people made a national election without a national candidate. They created a mandate for massive change. And that mandate is still there. Let's go back to what we knew worked-

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

John Linder: 01:33:01 Let's go back to what we knew worked. Let's go back to what worked in this country for a hundred and fifty years. We didn't have projects in 1955. We had poor people, but they were helped in their communities as best they could. But they weren't destroyed. I've said for years that we've destroyed the poor people in this country with the same technique that we did when we helped the American Indian. Put them on reservations, replaced the influence of the breadwinner with the bureaucrat and the government check, and the breadwinner left. And you had a culture of crime, violence, alcoholism, teenage pregnancies, no fathers in the homes.

Mel Steely: 01:33:43 And one totally of dependency.

John Linder: 01:33:44 Yes. And we've replicated the reservations throughout America now. We are saying that we need to change that, not because
we’re not compassionate, because we are. This five-trillion-dollar debt that the war on poverty has left us is a tragedy not only for the taxpayer, but for the three generations of children that have been destroyed by it.

Mel Steely: **01:34:11** Why can't we get that message across, John?

John Linder: **01:34:13** I don't know.

Mel Steely: **01:34:13** American people just do not understand. They still think that the Republicans are against education, they're hurting the children.

John Linder: **01:34:21** Let me tell you, it's education. The federal government has 760 education programs and thirty-nine departments and agencies spending 120 billion a year, not including the overhead costs of managing. If we were to just take that money and give it to the states based on the Medicaid formula, Georgia would have enough to pay for its entire higher educational system from junior college through medical school. For any kid who wanted to go to college who could pass the grades and get in, for eight years, could go to college, tuition, books, room, and board paid. And have 500 million left over. That's our approach to education. It's not abolishing the education department, because it didn't work, but we said it wrong. We said it wrong. But I think the first two years we had a majority were very difficult, because we did some very difficult things.

John Linder: **01:35:17** And I liken it to a train that was on the wrong track for 30 years. I've said for years, I'm not going to meet you halfway on the wrong road. Get on our road. Road to more personal freedom, more individual choices, and less government, and I'll meet you halfway. Newt, largely, and the rest of us helping, wrenched that train off that track in two years and put it on the other track. To the extent that Bill Clinton ran on a balanced budget, welfare reform, the language of the last election was our language. Now it's easy. We're on the right road. Everybody's talking about downsizing. Everybody's talking about-

Mel Steely: **01:35:57** In the early days of the 104th Congress, how involved were you in making decisions on party leadership positions, committee chairmen, deciding what the agenda was going to be? You were in the room, I know.

John Linder: **01:36:13** Yeah.
Mel Steely: 01:36:13 Were you, as an official role here, or just, you were part of the leadership?

John Linder: 01:36:16 I was part of the transition committee. I was part of the transition group.

Mel Steely: 01:36:21 Who chaired that?

John Linder: 01:36:22 Newt. Jim Nussle was his transition chairman, but when we were in the room, it was-

Mel Steely: 01:36:26 Newt ran it.

John Linder: 01:36:27 Newt ran it. One of my responsibilities was personnel, I hired the top officers of the House. This is how Newt operates. We picked the top five officers, and Nussle and I and one other, I think, went into Newt's office on a Friday evening in December, said, we've picked out who we want to be your top four officers, when do you want to interview them? And he said, I don't want to interview them. We said, Newt, you've got to meet them, these people are working here. He said, no, I told you to hire them. You hire them, and then I'll do my ministerial duties, and I'll meet them. That's how he does things. You know that he delegates like crazy. But he made some tough decisions on committee chairs. He wanted an energetic person in appropriations, and we had to sleep over four people in that area, partly because some of the others were, number one, had sent a letter signed by Democrats and Republicans, threatening freshmen with loss of projects in their district if they didn't go along on a certain appropriations bill. This was Democrats in charge, we had Republicans sign all the letters. We felt that was awful cozy.

John Linder: 01:37:46 We had one person who had made an announcement to his community that he was going to be chairman of the appropriations committee. But he never contributed a penny to the process, and he got money out of the NRCC to save his seat, half of which he spent on a new car for his campaign. We said, that's not, probably, a good idea. He didn't get his chairmanship. Another unfortunate circumstance was a gentleman who should've been, could've been, chairman of one of two committees, and got neither one of them, because he wasn't very forceful, and those were tough decisions. Those were tough decisions. And Newt had to make those personal phone calls. But we had agreed on several things. Number one, if you're going to be in the majority and want to be chairman, you better help us get there. Including subcommittee chairs. A decision was made just a few weeks ago on one of those.
Mel Steely: 01:38:48 Did Newt overrule the committee at any point when they were recommending what should be done?

John Linder: 01:38:56 No, not really, but he would make his views heard. Sometimes he was overruled. When we were in the committee on committees, which is now the Steering Committee, two years ago, he wanted to put his voice on the Budget Committee, he named somebody who was in the moderate wing of the party. Wanted that person in leadership to know what the moderate wings were, get direct information. And he was strongly overruled by the people on that Steering Committee, and he backed up, he offered a second choice. And they made reasons why that choice wouldn't work, and he offered a third choice, and his third choice won. But, twenty minutes later, he made a forceful statement. Joe Barton set out to chastise him on trying to be too powerful, and Joe went on and said, you're powerful, Mr. Speaker, but you have to realize, we're still a group of people working together, and you don't get your way all the time, and Newt said, let me see, just twenty minutes ago, you overruled two of my top choices for a committee, and now you're trying to tell me that I'm too powerful? There's a lot of give-and-take in that room.

Mel Steely: 01:40:03 Was it good-natured, for the most part?


Mel Steely: 01:40:12 Describe, if you would, the reaction that President Clinton had to the '94 election.

John Linder: 01:40:21 Crushed. Absolutely crushed. I'm told he sat in the White House that night, just couldn't believe it, just shook his head. Thought he'd lost his presidency. And, for a year, he was, that was a year when he had to say, I am, the president's relevant, do you remember that? He had this press conference to let everybody know he was relevant. He was absolutely crushed, and he offered no initiatives. He just sat back and let us do what we want to do, and at the very end, in August of 1995, a meeting was held in the White House with Secretary Rubin and he, and government employees, union people. As a political strategy, they said that, we know that the Republicans are going to pass the balanced budget, we're going to veto it. How can we keep the country running? Because we're going to run out of money on November 18. Rubin said, I've got 360 billion dollars in retirement funds I can get. Union said, we will get out there and protest in the streets and blame the Republicans. And the rest is history. Newt, I got a message from somebody, I can't remember, who was going to meet with Bob Rubin in
September and have a serious conversation about the debt ceiling, and that they were going to have to agree to a balanced budget to raise the debt ceiling. And I thought, I don't need to go through that meeting.

John Linder: 01:41:46 All of a sudden, I got another call that said, Newt is the one who's said for you to go, he wants Rubin to know he's serious. So, I went to that meeting, and Rubin started to chat a while, and he was a nice guy, and all of a sudden, I felt like I was being had. And I said, Bob, you don't understand something. We're serious. We are serious. You talk about financial markets. They're in your control. All we're saying is, just like the president said he wants a balanced budget, we want it, too, and we want to agree to it. What I didn't know is, he was already planning to raid the pension funds. In January of '96, we were still there in a rules committee meeting about ten o'clock one night, passing one more continued resolution, and I had heard that afternoon that the Treasury and the president wanted us to put a ... the bank insurance fund, the savings association insurance funds, BIF and SAIF, are both in trouble, and we got a fix for it, but it's taken about twelve million dollars out of the pockets of commercial banks. And they were going to put that on continued resolution, and I said, no deal. I'll get it knocked out in rules. I said, it won't win on the floor anyway. It's unfair. And Dick Armey's floor operator, David Hobbs, is up in the rules committee, and Rubin was on the phone. Secretary of the Treasury. And he knew that I was the one leading the opposition on the rules committee. I had four Democrat votes, and I told Jerry Solomon, it'll never be on the bill. I'll get it struck. And Rubin wanted to talk to me about the urgency, and David Hobbs had this cellular phone, and he holds it out, and he said, Mr. Linder, Secretary of the Treasury's on the phone, would you talk to him? I said, no, the last time I talked to that son-of-a-bitch, he lied to me.

Mel Steely: 01:43:35 Loud enough for him to hear it, huh?

John Linder: 01:43:36 Yes. He heard it. Yup. Once a person in politics lies to you, there's no reason to talk to him again. Because he's going to lie again.

Mel Steely: 01:43:45 That was part of Newt's frustration dealing with the president.

John Linder: 01:43:50 Newt and I were in a meeting with the president in August of '93, I guess it was, on NAFTA, and it was an hour and twenty minute meeting which should've lasted twenty minutes. I came out of that, Newt and I were headed to the airport to come back to Atlanta, and we're headed to the airport, or either at the
airport, and I said, is he always that engaging? He goes from one person to the other, around the room, do you agree? He loves this stuff. He said, he just loves it. He's always that engaging. But remember two things: he never follows through, and he always lies. He's lied to me face-to-face, and I knew he was lying, and he knew I knew he was lying.

Mel Steely: 01:44:32 He just couldn't help it, could he? Well, the Republicans and Newt, as speaker, were very, very popular at the beginning of the '95 period, and through the first, through the spring. Things begin to shift, of course, with the shutdown at the end of the year, but the early part-

John Linder: 01:44:47 Let me ... Newt was never that popular. I was down at the greenroom, seven o'clock in the morning, on CNN, on the first day that they went to the Saturday morning format, it was all news. And they had changed from the previous format, and I was going to be debating, from Atlanta, Charlie Rangel, in New York, on welfare. And Tom Johnson, the president of CNN, came down that morning to see how things were working out, and to watch it. And he's sitting in the greenroom talking to me, and he said, why is that your issues and your programs are so popular in the sixty percent range and Newt's failables are still down in the low 40s? I said, because you trash him. He said, oh, come on, we're fair with him. Between September 20 and Election Day, one hundred percent of the references to Newt Gingrich on the four networks were negative. He didn't believe it. I got back to Washington, I got the references, and I mailed it to him. And the one singled out most was CNN. He has been trashed for a long time. And see, while his programs that were passing were very popular, he was fifteen points below that popularity. Then, he said some wrong things during the course of the conflict with the president.

Mel Steely: 01:46:08 Getting off the back of the airplane, that sort of thing.

John Linder: 01:46:10 Yeah, he shouldn't have said it. It happened, it was an intended slight. He got off the front of the airplane when they landed in Tel Aviv, and landed back here at Andrews, and there was press out there, they told him and Bob Dole to get off the back. They didn't take that twenty-five-hours-in-the-air opportunity to sit down and talk about the budget. President said he was grieving for his friend Yitzhak. He was actually up front playing cards with Mort Zuckerland. Newt shouldn't have said that. We should've been better at ... our continued resolutions were too, we tried to load everything up on them so that the president would have to swallow. Big mistake. We should've just made the only thing on the continued resolution the balanced budget.
Mel Steely: Why did you do that? Was it hubris-

John Linder: Hubris.

Mel Steely: ... that you thought you had it?

John Linder: Hubris. Didn't think the president could afford to veto it.

Mel Steely: But I remember, I was in Washington at one point when all that was going on, and I'd come back from a meeting where Newt and Dole and those were talking, and Newt was trying to decide who should be in the room to meet with the president, I would imagine. And he was just adamant, no Democrat in the room, just us. They have nothing to offer. All they'll do is get him to back down, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And I was in there with Dan Meyer, and Steve Hanser, and myself, and all three of us thought, that's a bad mistake. People won't see it that way, they'll see you being very petty.

John Linder: That's right.

Mel Steely: For three different reasons, none of the three of us said, Newt, that's really dumb. Each of us had our own reason for not doing it. I thought Dan should handle that. Dan said, hey, I'm policy, I don't deal with this. And Hanser says, man's got too much on him right now, I'm not going to argue with him.

John Linder: When that happened, when we loaded up the first CR that the president vetoed, he made it vetoed over a tiny, tiny little, what he said on the next news conference was, I'm not going to let them raise premiums on Medicare recipients. Point was, the premiums were supposed to drop to 25% for two months and go back to 31%, and we decided to leave it at 31% rather than have the drop and the gain. None of that should've been on there. But that's the reason he claimed he was vetoing it. And I went to see Newt the next Tuesday, and he was having lunch by himself in his office, and I sat down there, we talked for about an hour, and I said, Newt, this is crazy, this is nuts. He beat us up last weekend. We lost every show. And he and I disagreed pretty sharply for a while. Finally, Bob Dole walked in, and Pete Domenici, and Kasich, and I decided to take leave, and two hours later, they did exactly what I was arguing for, which was a balanced budget only, and nothing else on it. That's when we got the contract with the president, to have his balanced budget by the end of the year, and, of course, he didn't deliver it.

Mel Steely: How has Kasich performed?
John Linder: **01:49:06** John's good, he knows the budget better than anybody I know. He's energetic. He's passionate. He's a good spokesman for us on TV. He tends to be a little bit of a lone ranger. I had to bail him out of a sticky wicket one time. Newt said, go see Linder, you got problems. When he got entirely out of hand on the prime bill. He was put into the room just to deal with the numbers, the money side of the issues, and all of a sudden, he pretended he was a main spokesman for the healthcare bill, and it really caused him a lot of problems with our conservative wing.

Mel Steely: **01:49:43** For the first time yesterday, I heard press people talking about, he's getting a swell head and seeing visions of President Kasich.

John Linder: **01:49:50** I don't think so.

Mel Steely: **01:49:51** That shocked me, stopped me, when I saw it. I thought, John?

John Linder: **01:49:55** I don't think so. No, I think he's fine. But he did a lot of patching up, and every day he came to see me, he said, how am I doing? I said, well, you haven't talked to Dana Rohrabacher yet, I think you need to do that. And he came around. He's a good guy.

Mel Steely: **01:50:08** Actually, this is a large part of the role you've played, to where Newt will use you-

John Linder: **01:50:12** He does.

Mel Steely: **01:50:13** ... because they know you've got his confidence, and will deal straight with him, and that works pretty well. How would you describe the Georgia delegation, generally, during this period? The 104th?

John Linder: **01:50:28** We are the envy of every state in the nation. We have, now, three members in leadership positions. We have every major committee in the house covered. We have good working relationship, we have a group called the G7, that's the seven members, absent Newt, because Newt didn't have time, but we meet every Wednesday, and we talk about Georgia issues. We don't sign onto delegation letters until we've all talked about it. We don't go trying to go in different directions. We give leadership roles at varying times to different people in our group to follow through on things. I think we're working very well together.
Mel Steely: 01:51:14 You've got three Democrats, Sanford Bishop, John Lewis, and Cynthia McKinney. What is the relationship with them within the delegation?

John Linder: 01:51:25 We don't meet as a delegation like that anymore. Last time we did, I think Sam Nunn called it together for luncheon in his Capitol Hill hideaway, and he's got a hideaway in the Capitol building, and I think John was the only one of them, either John or Sanford, was the only one to show up, of the three. It's hard to sit down and be congenial cooperative when you got two of those three on the floor virtually every day trashing Newt. And they just don't miss an opportunity to do it.

Mel Steely: 01:52:00 They really do hate him that bad, or is this just politics for them?

John Linder: 01:52:03 They hate him because he took away the power from them. Let's just admit something, that this, getting the majority and keeping it, was directly the result of Newt Gingrich's ideas and energy. The money he raised, personally, for the districts he covered, could not have done it without him. Somebody said to me, well, at this time, I sure wish Dick Cheney hadn't been Secretary of Defense, wouldn't he make a great speaker? I said, he'd never have been speaker. Because, if he'd have been in Newt's shoes, and Newt not in the leadership, we'd have never got this far.

Mel Steely: 01:52:46 I think that's accurate. I think people do understand that, which is one of the reasons that those who were griping, grousing, came around, and we did have a unanimous thing there for him to be Speaker again. In 1995, we had a special session of the Georgia legislature to deal with court-ordered reapportionment, and you played a fairly significant role in all of that. Would you tell us about that?

John Linder: 01:53:17 Unfortunately, we couldn't get our Republicans to stick together on the issue, or we'd have solved this a long time ago. My only goal was to get something that didn't hurt our eight members, and get something that the Republicans could stick together on. We got something that passed the House that we could live with. It didn't make anybody happy, Nathan didn't particularly like it, Bob Barr didn't live in his district. Newt had an uncomfortable district that went all the way down through south of Fulton County. And he was traveling with his book tour. I was actually scheduled on a trip to Israel that I hosted. Bill Paxton and Susan took my place, and Newt said, I want you to stay with the legislature. He'd call in a couple times a day from his book tour and say, what's happening, and I'd report. I'd just
keep telling our other colleagues, here's where we're at. And the one I was worried about was Charlie Norwood, because his location was such that he was going to get it. And I was willing to take anything I could get for him that had less than 30% black voting, and keeping as close as I could to his current location and counties, so he didn't have so many new counties.

John Linder: 01:54:34 And, finally, I talked to Newt one night. I said, Newt, I think it's getting late in the day, I'm worried about the judges, I think we should ask the Senate to accept the House map. You're not going to like it. It's got me in great shape, but it saves Charlie that 24 or 25% black map. And Saxby didn't like it entirely, but it was better for him than he's got now. And he said, if that's what you say, do it. The next morning we went down there, and Nathan Deal came in, and Mac Collins, and Charlie Norwood, and I said, here's where we're at. I didn't know that Bob Barr had gone behind my back and tried to get it scuttled with his senators over there.

Mel Steely: 01:55:20 Yeah, Bob was not happy. I called him and told him what was happening at your request. He felt like we'd done him in a little bit.

John Linder: 01:55:27 Yeah. He got the best, he really got the best deal of all of us. And then, we show up on the morning down there, and we speak to the delegation on the Senate side, and I said, this is what Newt wants, this is what we want, and the first question that came to me is, how do we know you can speak for the group? I turned to my colleagues that were there and said, we've asked him to. There was a little testiness in that room. I think Skin Edge had cut a deal with Purhard, and he wanted to stick with his deal. He didn't care about us. But when we left the room, Johnny Isakson told the senators, they asked us to leave rather than staying on the delegation's discussion, Johnny told the senators, he said, I don't believe Linder. He said, I had dinner with Gingrich a week ago, and he hates that map. Well, of course Newt hated the map.

Mel Steely: 01:56:19 A week ago.

John Linder: 01:56:20 But it was the best we could do at the time. I got that word, and I had, within fifteen minutes, Newt on the phone talking to Isakson. But they wouldn't help us, so they left it up to the courts, and by this time, when we realized we didn't have any support in the Senate, we had one, craziest guy in the Senate, Bob Goul. That map would've taken Rockdale County and Newton County into the 11th.
John Linder: 01:56:44 But it was the best we could do at the time. I got that word, and I had, within fifteen minutes, Newt on the phone talking to Isaacson. But they wouldn't help us, so they left it up to the courts, and by this time, when we realized we didn't have any support in the Senate, we had one, craziest guy in the Senate, Bob Goul. That map would've taken Rockdale County and Newton County into the 11th District. And Bob Goul sat there and said, you know what, this is going to cost me my election. He said, I'll never be a senator again. Been great to be down here for three years, he was a special election and then one full term. But he said, if that's what with need to do for our party, I'm willing to do it. I was really quite touched by it. They refused to help us, and then, from that point on, I told Newt, the best thing we can do is get it out of the House and let the courts do it. And that's when we asked them to vote for adjournment. We still are not mature enough as a party to understand the good of the whole. And that will come.

Mel Steely: 01:57:26 Interestingly enough, I had met with Speaker Murphy the Saturday before the special session convened, and, at that time, he outlined for me exactly what was going to happen. We're not going to be able to come to any agreement. Three groups. Black Democrats, white Democrats, Republicans. We can't agree. We're going to end up having the court decide it anyway.

John Linder: 01:57:46 He reads that stuff pretty good.

Mel Steely: 01:57:47 He said, but we can't not go through the process. Because I asked him, if that's what's going to happen, why don't we just let the court do it? He said, we can't do that. He said, people think we're not earning our money if we do that. You got to go through the process.

John Linder: 01:58:00 He's probably right on that.

Mel Steely: 01:58:01 I know. That all played out just like the old man thought. How do you describe the Republican Party and the individual Republicans' relationship with the Atlanta media?

John Linder: 01:58:16 Virtually nonexistent. We have a large black hole over Georgia. Covers about three and a half million people, centered in Atlanta. Paul Coverdell goes to Savannah, he's a front-page story. Or Augusta, or Albany. And speaks to the Rotary Club. And they interview him. And they talk about issues. I'll give you my best example. One weekend last year, about this time last year, Margaret Thatcher was here to receive an award from the Coverdell Good Government Group, and to help Paul raise funds for his campaign. It never made the paper. Margaret Thatcher.
However, that same night, some nondescript politician in Tennessee was doing a fundraiser in Chattanooga, and there was a big story about it in the Atlanta newspapers. That tell you something?

**Mel Steely:** 01:59:06 Sure. It’s the whole thing that they used to tell Newt, if you want something good about you in the paper, buy an ad. Which they did, in the ’94. Bought a full-page ad of the *Marietta Daily News* endorsement. I guess the *Daily News*, isn’t it? Whatever the Marietta paper is. Their endorsement of Gingrich, and they bought that ad, put it in there. They said, we want to buy this, because we want them to read something positive about Newt Gingrich in the *Atlanta Constitution*.

**John Linder:** 01:59:32 You can’t get coverage here, we just don’t try.

**Mel Steely:** 01:59:36 It was almost impersonal.

**John Linder:** 01:59:37 I didn’t take any trouble to go down and meet with their editorial board this year.

**Mel Steely:** 01:59:44 In the 1996 congressional elections, which ... Newt still viewed it as a national effort, and carried on that way. He worked in his own race, but he also spent a lot of time nationally. Were you involved in the national campaign in any way? Doing what?

**John Linder:** 01:59:58 Fundraising. Traveling. I traveled to the elections in Texas. I was the one that got the membership to put up 400,000 dollars for the special election in California, for Tom Campbell’s race. Raised a bunch of money for Texas that’s going on today. My campaign, I’m only a second-termer. Running a district that has eleven new counties in it. Forty-five percent of the district’s brand-new. And yet, I wrote, out of my personal campaign, 250,000 dollars’ worth of checks for other people.

**Mel Steely:** 02:00:38 Were you that confident you were going to win?

**John Linder:** 02:00:41 I knew I was going to win, but we had to help with this generic ads for freshmen who’d been carpet-bombed against. And we just had to do it. It’s not fun being a minority. And, because we did that, members gave, to each other and to the committee, over nine million dollars.

**Mel Steely:** 02:01:06 In essence, money was coming in locally, for local candidates, and it was then being, essentially, put into a pot and used nationally.
John Linder: 02:01:14  I wrote about fifty thousand dollars, maybe sixty, seventy-five thousand dollars' worth of checks to candidates. And I wrote about 175 thousand dollar checks to the committee to use in their generic advertising campaigns. I raised, total, the committee sub and I raised about a half a million dollars for them, is what I raised and gave to them.

Mel Steely: 02:01:36  Did you expect Clinton to win the race in '96?

John Linder: 02:01:39  By October, yeah.

Mel Steely: 02:01:41  Oh. Did you expect the Republicans to lose seats in the House?

John Linder: 02:01:45  No, I actually thought we'd gain one or two.

Mel Steely: 02:01:48  Newt did, too, right up until almost the end. I guess it was the end of October before he-

John Linder: 02:01:53  I started saying we'd gain twelve, and I kept watching the deterioration, and the immense amounts of money the union were putting forth, and I thought we'd gain one or two. What I didn't realize was that Bill Martini would lose his district by 2% while Dole lost it by 26%. Dole had no show in Maine, and Jim Longway lost his seat. Newt had 315,000 votes in his race. George Brown's race in California, where we narrowly missed defeating him after thirty-two years, there was only 100,000 votes cast. On the East Coast, it was the big difference between Dole and Clinton killed us. On the West Coast, nobody voted. We didn't see that happening. That's a dynamic you can't predict.

Mel Steely: 02:02:37  You've now switched over from the 4th to the 11th and won. Why do you think you won in this new district?

John Linder: 02:02:52  My opponent really didn't have much of a campaign, for one thing. He didn't raise any money, and what he did do was just wrote nasty letters to the editor, and not many people read that stuff anymore. I made more visits to the new counties in that campaign, I made more visits to Hart County than I did Rockdale County.

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [02:03:13]