Mel Steely: 00:00:04 I'm Mel Steely with the Georgia Political Heritage Program. Today is January 17, 2007, and we're interviewing Senator Mitch Seabaugh in his office at the Capitol. Okay. Senator, you were-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:00:27 You want to stop that for just a second. You want to get that ... you want to turn that TV off, you might want to close the door.

Mel Steely: 00:00:29 Oh, okay. Can you get that, James?

James: 00:00:31 Sure can.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:00:32 Yeah-

Mel Steely: 00:00:32 What we usually do, and what we've done in the past, is to give you ... We'll do this taping, and then we give it four years, and then we'll do a second taping. We've done this with all the congressmen, and we're now doing it here. You were here at such a ... Well, we can go ahead and put this on tape, now.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:00:53 Yeah. Go ahead.

James: 00:00:53 Yeah, [crosstalk 00:00:54] you're good.

Mel Steely: 00:00:55 We're ready ... you rolling?

James: 00:00:56 Yes, sir.

Mel Steely: 00:00:57 Okay. Senator, you were born in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, on March 18, I think it was 1960?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:01:06 That's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:01:09 Tell us a little bit about your parents, your background, your church, sports and school. All of that stuff. Who were your parents?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:01:19 My parents are still alive as of right now. As a matter of fact, we spent the last weekend with them. Wendell Wayne Seabaugh and Glenda Parker Seabaugh are my parents. They were married in 1959, and shortly thereafter I came along. I'm the
oldest of three boys, and I was born and raised in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Went to high school there at Cape Central High School, where I participated in many athletic programs. I played football, lettering in football in two years, I played on the golf team, I played baseball a year, I ran track a year, and played basketball a year.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:02:03 So, I was quite involved in that. I hurt my knee in the state playoffs my senior in high school, and so then I had to have a knee operation, and that was a first step in ending my football career, and then in my freshman year in college I re-injured my knee, had to have a complete knee reconstruction, and that's when the doctors told me I was not going to make a living playing football so I might as well hang it up. So, that's when I gave up that game. I continue to play golf to this day, it's a game I love very much.

Mel Steely: 00:02:38 You're a real masochist then?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:02:41 Yes, I am.

Mel Steely: 00:02:42 You like pain and suffering.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:02:43 I am.

Mel Steely: 00:02:44 What kind of work does your father do, or your father and mother, if both of them worked?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:02:49 Well, they're both retired right now. My dad worked for years for Dow Chemical. He was a line supervisor for Dow Chemical, and they closed the plant in Cape Girardeau my senior year in high school, and moved it to St. Louis, Missouri. Dad did not want to raise a family near St. Louis, so that's when he moved the family to Magnolia, Arkansas. I stayed back behind, since I was born and raised in Cape to finish high school. Fortunately he didn't make me relocate my senior year, because he had had that happen to him when he was a young man. He had to relocate his senior year and it was quite traumatic, and he didn't want me to go through that.

Mel Steely: 00:03:27 So, you lived with relatives?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:03:28 I lived with a good golfing buddy of my dad's, Gilbert Arnold. Gilbert and Geneva Arnold. I considered Gilbert like a second father. He was one of the wisest and most optimistic individuals I've ever known. To a large degree, the year with Gilbert, he taught me a lot about critical thinking, and he taught me a lot
about really stopping, and analyzing, and looking at things from many points of view, and trying to find the best outcome. So, he had a profound influence on my life in just that one year.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:03:56 But dad moved to a Dow Chemical to Magnolia, Arkansas, and my mother ultimately became an American Express financial advisor in Magnolia. Dad retired, I guess almost ten years ago now, and my mother just retired like five years ago. So, they're both retired.

Mel Steely: 00:04:17 Did she work for American Express IDS people in Fayetteville or any place in Georgia when you all came here?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:04:23 No-

Mel Steely: 00:04:24 Or they stayed there in Arkansas?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:04:25 They stayed in Magnolia, Arkansas. Of course, in Magnolia's where I met my wife, Leah, and we were married in 1980, and from there we moved ... after we graduated college moved to Nashville, Arkansas, lived there for a little while, and then I took a job in ... It was really at that time in Texas in Jewett, Texas, but we had to live in Clear Lake, Texas, for like seven months and then they moved us up. We ended up living in a city called Mexia, Texas.

Mel Steely: 00:05:01 Was that with International Paper?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:05:01 No, that was when I was with Houston Lighting and Power Company. I worked four and a half years for them in building a lignite plant, as we lived in Texas. The job was in and it came time to move to Houston, and basically because of the influence of my father who didn't want to raise a family in St. Louis, I didn't want to raise a family in Houston, Texas. Consider ourselves to be more small town people.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:05:24 So, I left Houston Lighting and Power, and went to work for International Paper Company, and that's when we moved to Arkadelphia, Arkansas. We lived in Arkadelphia for about four and a half years, and then I.P. moved us to Bastrop, Louisiana, and then after two years there they moved that plant to East Point, the East Point facility here in Atlanta, and that's when we moved ... my wife and my two children, that's when we moved here. That was in 1993.

Mel Steely: 00:05:53 Okay, and you graduated high school in '78?
Mitch Seabaugh: 00:05:54 1978.

Mel Steely: 00:05:56 Yeah.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:05:58 And graduated college in 1981. I graduated college in three years in summer.

Mel Steely: 00:06:02 Did you?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:06:02 I got a four year degree in three years in summer.

Mel Steely: 00:06:05 They don’t do that now. It takes a lot longer.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:06:07 My daughter was ... I think she was on the six or seven year plan. I never quite figured it out, but-

Mel Steely: 00:06:13 Almost all of them take at least five now, it’s-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:06:17 But, I paid for my own education, and I tried to do what I could to get the most out of it. So, I worked about thirty hours a week, plus taking very heavy loads to get through in three years of summer.

Mel Steely: 00:06:27 Why did you go into accounting?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:06:29 I loved numbers and I love statistics, and being a sports nut I would be the Tony La Russa type of person, from using statistics and all that, and I really enjoyed working with numbers. There was a time that I could have told you how to calculate every statistic in every sport. I could’ve told you the starting lineups, through their batting averages were and home runs, everything for just about every team in baseball. The only thing that I was aware of that really you could do with numbers was to go into accounting. So, I went into the accounting field, and ultimately became a CPA, but while I love working with numbers, I’m not that ... It’s just not that exciting, really, doing tax work.

Mel Steely: 00:07:18 My wife is the office manager for a CPA, and she, like you, she loves to sit down and work with peoples’ taxes. I says, "I'd go nuts doing that." It just takes a special mindset, I think, but she loves it. It's like a puzzle for her, and obviously you enjoy that kind of thing yourself.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:07:38 Well, I did, but right now I've ... Being in that practice does not work very well serving in the legislature, because tax season, the height ... Even though you can do extensions, you still have to basically work up everybody's estimated taxes to have them
paid by April 15, and that doesn't bode well with the timeframe of being in session. Especially when ... I’ve had an opportunity to chair a committee and serve in leadership, and it's taken an enormous amount of time. So, I've had to scale back, and basically, currently I work for a couple individuals who have four companies, and I do all of their financial planning, their financial work and their tax work, so-

Mel Steely: 00:08:21 Oh, that works out pretty well.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:08:22 ... it gives me the flexibility, because in the construction business and developing business this time of year it's quite slow. It starts picking up about February, and that makes March a difficult month, but basically it's somewhat complimentary.

Mel Steely: 00:08:38 In Carrollton back in the '60s, we had a CPA that went to the legislature, very popular. He only stayed one term. He said, "I had to choose between my business or the legislature, and business comes first."

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:08:49 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:08:50 So, I can understand that. Now, you moved to Georgia, you said, in '93?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:08:57 1993.

Mel Steely: 00:08:57 Okay, and you had been a controller at I.P.-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:09:01 I.P..

Mel Steely: 00:09:02 ... and were you doing basically the same thing when you came here to Georgia? You stayed in that job as-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:09:08 Yeah, I was a plant controller in Bastrop, and they just basically moved the entire operations to Georgia. So, I came along with them, because the business we did was specialty business, and International Paper really wanted to have a heightened presence here in Atlanta for the Olympics that were coming in 1996. So, we moved the operations from Bastrop, which was a lot of export business, and they moved me here because of my familiarity with that specialty business that we did.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:09:39 Generally, in working at a company like that, they put you on a managerial program, they try to move you every two to four years. So, I was in Bastrop for a little over two years, and then moved to Atlanta, keep me there for two years, and they
would've tried to move me again to another operation right around 1996, but I had gotten involved with something in 1996.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:10:02 That was my first attempt to run for the State Senate. I ran for an open seat. The honorable senator Skin Edge had stepped down and was not going to run for re-election, and I ran for that open seat. I didn't get elected, and I mean two days after the election was over with they called me in and tried to moved family to Camden, Arkansas, to become familiar with the container business at International Paper. Basically, I told them we weren't interested in moving to Camden, Arkansas, and we decided at that point in time we wanted to live here in Atlanta for a little bit longer.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:10:39 So, I ended up leaving International Paper Company, and ultimately took a job with Alcan, which has a presence here, and worked with Alcan until I had an opportunity to go into public practice as a CPA with a local CPA firm over in Fayetteville, and I worked with them for about four years. But especially, like I said, when we got into in session, and became in leadership and chairing a committee, it just didn't ... it wasn't complimentary real well with the practice, and that's when I had this opportunity to go to work for this other company.

Mel Steely: 00:11:11 But it gave you, I would guess, a lot of experience as to how business is run, both small business and corporate, dealing with the taxes, and all the buying and selling, and all that stuff. You had a pretty good look at all of that, didn't you?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:11:26 I think I have a unique and well-rounded experience that serves me very well in the legislature. I'm amazed at how many individuals serve up here, legislators that serve up here, are small business individuals, and that's very, very good, but there's a lot of value I gained in working in the corporate world that has really helped me tremendously in building consensus, bringing opposing sides together. To a large degree, I feel that legislature's almost like a large corporation with 236 department heads, and everyone has their interest and what it is that they're trying to accomplish, and have an importance, and they have a good perspective and opinion. You have to try to find a way of balancing that out and molding legislation and working through it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:12:14 So, I think that that corporate experience has really benefited me well in knowing how to work with people, and also in constructing budgets, and also from the PR standpoint, how to deal with the PR and the community, and all that. So, I feel that there's been, while some of the things I went through weren't
very enjoyable at the time, have provided enormously good foundation that I can ... to pull on at any time, and serves me well in trying to accomplish things up here.

Mel Steely: 00:12:45 I was just thinking the times I've sat in appropriations committee meetings, and flipped through budgets trying to find something, I don't know, do you find that your experience has helped you where you can move rapidly through a budget and identify things quickly, and find-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:13:03 I think so.

Mel Steely: 00:13:04 Yeah, I would think it would.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:13:04 I think so, I think-

Mel Steely: 00:13:05 So, being on appropriations is a good thing for you then?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:13:08 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 00:13:09 Yeah.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:13:10 I think I bring value to that. Of course, in 2003, the first time that we had an opportunity to have the governing majority, and then we had a new governor, and we had the enormous challenge that we had with down revenue, I really felt like the experience I had with struggling businesses, and some of the plants that I worked with were struggling plants, and some of the things that we went through in trying to find ways to manage our cash, and to cut costs and all that, I felt like really provided me with some insight in helping to provide some leadership, and how we could find ways of being able to bridge the gap in that very difficult year.

Mel Steely: 00:13:50 As I remember, you were also rather impressed with I.P.'s health care program, and it ultimately got as far as Speaker Gingrich, and other people used it as saying, "This is a kind of model." Tell us a little bit about that, if you would.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:14:05 International Paper Company became a leader in healthcare in trying to find a way to reduce health care costs, or to control costs, and there's things that they tried and they put into place that seemed to work very well, and we tried to ... If many people remember, in 1993 and 1994, that was a very big issue nationally they were talking about was healthcare, and there was a task force that was formed at the federal level, and looking at what to do, and developing a health care delivery
system. International Paper had a market-forced based approach to it, and we had the opportunity to present that to then-Speaker Gingrich, and some of the things that we were doing.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:14:53 Basically, the philosophy was trying to get the consumer, the individual, personally invested into the decision making process in purchasing of those goods. To do that, you have to give them all the information that they need in order to do that, and that's got to do with the history of the doctors performing it, what the doctors charge, what the hospitals charge, and what the reimbursable rate would be. In that way, you have the person, the consumer, making the choice, making the decision, about where they would have their procedure, and who would do it, and what the cost would be that they could have reimbursed, and if they had to pay anything out of their pocket.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:15:34 For instance, if you had a procedure that cost $10,000, let's say, International Paper would go in, and they would survey the area and all the doctors that did that procedure, and then whatever the fifty percentile of what the doctors were charging, let's say it was $9,000, that's what they would reimburse, but you would know all the physicians for the entire range, and that range could be from $7,000 to $15,000 for that procedure.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:15:59 You knew what the reimbursement rate would be at $9,000, but you chose your doctor. Nobody chose that. You chose the doctor, and if the doctor you wanted to have to perform the surgery charge $10,000 then either you need to negotiate that other $1,000 with the doctor, or you had to pay it, but the choice was yours, instead of having some kind of delivery system that mandated who the doctor would be, and then other people making the decisions for the consumer.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:16:29 So, a lot of the ideas of what you're hearing now, the health savings accounts, and certain premium costs for at-risk behavior, like smoking, high blood pressure, things like that, those were ideas International Paper Company started dealing with back in the late 1980s. It's interesting to hear Newt Gingrich now talk about healthcare, and a lot of the things he talks about is the very ... stuff that we dealt with at International Paper Company.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:16:59 So, I was real pleased to be involved in that discussion way back in the early 1990s, and that's what really got me involved in politics at first, in trying to make a difference in promoting ideas, and trying to work with legislators, this was at the federal level, in trying to bring a good idea that could help a lot of
people. So, it gave me my first taste and exposure to a lot of politicians in the process.

Mel Steely: 00:17:26 I think it was very helpful to him too, because they were looking for models, Gingrich loves models. This has worked, that hasn't worked-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:17:34 Right. That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:17:35 ... and so here you had one that was actually working. I remember the big argument at the time was that most people aren't going to want to do this. They're confused, particularly older people, and so they're going to end up just choosing something without really knowing what they're doing. I remember the Democrats at the time that were opposing him on it were giving him a hard time about that: "What are you doing to these old people, and young married couples, they don't know what they need." And et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. How did I.P. handle that criticism?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:18:09 Well, we were self-funded in doing that, so basically, this was our-

Mel Steely: 00:18:14 So it didn't matter, did it?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:18:15 It didn't matter. This was our insurance plan, and what we found was that when you give people the information and the tools, they really liked it, because they had the power to choose their physician, and that's one very important thing that I have found amongst a lot of people, especially women. They want to choose their physician. They don't want somebody else choosing their physician, or going somewhere, and not knowing who their physician is going to be. They want the ability to choose their physician, someone that they're comfortable with. So, when they had the opportunity to go through the system, most people embraced it, and really liked it, and we thought it was extremely successful.

Mel Steely: 00:18:56 Well, have you found that ... you're ex officio, I guess, still on the insurance committee?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:03 No.

Mel Steely: 00:19:03 Oh, you're not on-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:04 I'm not insurance anymore, no.
Mel Steely: 00:19:05 Okay. I'm not up to date on what you are right now. I know you're on right now. I know you're on Finance, Appropriations, and Rules.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:14 That's correct, and Regulated Industries and Utilities, which I chaired for four years, and then also I serve on the Judiciary Committee, as an ex officio.

Mel Steely: 00:19:23 So, nothing on healthcare directly-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:26 Not directly.

Mel Steely: 00:19:26 Yeah, but those first three touch on it constantly.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:31 Yes, that's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:19:34 When you moved to Sharpsburg ... when was that, '93?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:39 1993.

Mel Steely: 00:19:40 Okay, so you went there first and stayed there?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:42 That's right. We're still in the same house that we originally moved to when we came to Georgia.

Mel Steely: 00:19:49 Did you get involved with local community fairly quickly?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:19:52 No, I didn't, to be honest with you, because when we moved here, again, remember I moved with the facility ... that we moved the Bastrop facility and the operations out here, there was a new plant that was going to be built in eastern Texas, and I was slated to be the top candidate of that. All our family lived back in either southeast Missouri, or southern Arkansas, and so for us to move on the other side of the Mississippi River was like going to another country, and being that far away from our family was kind of a hard thing for us, and we thought we had the opportunity of going back to east Texas in about eighteen months.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:20:36 So, we just ... we came here, and was just basically biding our time thinking that we would have the opportunity to go back. When we were confronted with the fact that we weren't going to be able to go back, that they had given the job to somebody else, that was a hard thing for my family and I to deal with. But at that point in time, my wife and I said, "You know, we need to start living like we're going to live here for the rest of our lives."

Mel Steely: 00:20:39 and that's when I started getting involved in things more locally.
Most notably, the first thing that I did was join Mac Collins's campaign for re-election to Congress. I knew nothing about politics, knew nothing about targeting, knew nothing about how to go door-to-door. My family and I just went and we went door-to-door, and of course now knowing what I know now, most of the people we talked to weren't even registered voters, but we went door-to-door for Mac Collins in 1994 for his re-election. So, that was my first time to go door-to-door, and got a lot of good experiences from that.

Was that the same year you ran the first time-

No, I ran in 1996-

'96, okay.

... was the first time I ran for [crosstalk 00:21:47]-

That's right, when Skin stepped down.

... the Senate when Skin stepped down.

Okay.

So, that was my first taste, and that's how I became aware of local party structure. I didn't know anything about the county Republican Party structure, the state party structure, and that's when I first became aware of that, and then in 1995 became involved in that, and was elected to the leadership position at the Coweta County Republican Party, and became involved in trying to get people to be involved, and grow the party, and get more people to attend meetings, so they could be more informed about the issues, and who their representation was and all that.

Mm-hmm (affirmative), and that's what got you to get into politics, working for Mac, or ... But you said earlier that your first real taste came when you began pushing the healthcare thing for I.P.

That was the first taste that I had to the process, and actually being in touch with elected officials. I guess my real political awakening occurred in November 1992. That's when Bill Clinton was elected president. I lived in Arkansas for a while, and got to know Bill Clinton pretty well, and was very disappointed that the same nation that elected Ronald Regan would elect this
man from Arkansas that I knew to be president after just four years. So, that was like an awakening.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:23:22 My father brought me up on some basic principles, and one principle was, "Don't ever ask anybody to do anything you aren't willing to do yourself." And the other principle being that, "You're either part of the problem, or you're part of the solution." And any time you don't invest yourself and try to be part of the solution, by definition, you're part of the problem. I hadn't been involved ... I mean, I had voted, but I hadn't really been involved in trying to make changes.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:23:45 So, that was ... 1992 was my awakening, but then we went through having to move, so that kind of took a priority on that, and then we thought we'd be moving again shortly, so just treading water, biding time. And when we found out we weren't doing that, that's when I felt the calling to start really getting involved, and went to work for Mac Collins's campaign.

Mel Steely: 00:24:10 So, you felt the calling [crosstalk 00:24:12]-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:24:12 I guess you could say that.

Mel Steely: 00:24:15 Huh?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:24:15 I guess you could say that.

Mel Steely: 00:24:16 Calling by ... who?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:24:19 Calling to get involved.

Mel Steely: 00:24:21 Who called you?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:24:22 Who called me? Well, I have a deep abiding faith, and I really felt like that the Lord led me to get involved in politics. I remember the first discussion I had with my wife about running in 1996. Those who don't know my wife, she is a very shy and reserved lady, and the last thing that she would really want is to have her family out in the forefront where people could pot shots at it, and I think you could understand that she doesn't like being in the limelight, but I felt like that ... The thing that probably ate at me is trying to look at the change of our nation politically, especially if we look at the '60s.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:25:09 I could go to my father, and I could go to my grandfather and say, "What did you all do to make a difference back then?", and them not being able to really answer the question they did
anything. For me to think about the day that comes when my grandchildren would come to me and say, "Grandad, what did you do to make a difference?" I wanted to be able to answer that question that I did all that I could do to try to make a positive influence. So, you put all those together, and I felt that I needed to step forward and offer myself as a candidate to see if I could make a difference.

Mel Steely: 00:25:49 Comes that time when you have to think about that, isn't it?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:25:53 Yes, it ... Well, and some people ... When I go and ... One of the things I enjoy more than anything, is to talk to young people and to students. I love the opportunity that I have in my capacity, because I get invited to go speak to students, and one thing I try to do is to motivate them, and to try to urge them to be a part of public service. But I try to very clear, that what I mean by public service, it doesn't mean that you have to run for office. There are many ways that you can serve the public without doing it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:26:26 As a matter of fact, I would contend that some of our greatest public servants that we have in our nation today are those that are not serving in elective office, because they're not getting any credit, they're not getting any accolades, nobody's standing up and really give them any attention, but yet they tirelessly work for the betterment of a community. So, I try to urge young people to be involved at the local level, whether it be in a civic organization, whether it be in a church, or even in the political process-

Mel Steely: 00:26:57 Or as a fireman, or a cop, or EMT worker, whatever.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:27:01 Absolutely.

Mel Steely: 00:27:01 Yeah.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:27:02 Absolutely, any of those areas basically is helping to make our communities better, but the one thing that we don't need to do is to sit back and just gripe about things, and not invest ourselves in trying to help to improve things.

Mel Steely: 00:27:17 Mm-hmm (affirmative). President Bush is getting dumped on a good bit now for talking about feeling a call. I don't know, do you run into that, where people give you a hard time about your religion, your faith?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:27:31 I haven't really had much of that.
Mel Steely: 00:27:33 You're in a community where that's not really a problem, is it? People understand it?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:27:37 I think people do understand it, and of course, I don't feel that I'm chosen in any way. I don't feel like I'm special in any way.

Mel Steely: 00:27:48 You're not an Obama.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:27:50 No, no. I'm not. I'm just a person who basically offered themselves to run for office, and the people ... That's the first step, is just to go out there and then do everything you can to do that. I'm not serving in a religious capacity. I'm serving in a capacity to serve a community, and I understand that, but I felt the calling, and the getting involved, and doing everything that I can, and I still rely upon my faith in trying to make tough decisions, and try to find guidance, and try to find that urging about what is the right thing to do. Because I love what Lincoln said when someone asked him about, did he hope that God was on his side in the Civil War, and Lincoln's response was, "To me, that's not important, what the important is that I'm on God's side."

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:28:52 In other words, I want to be on the right side, and sometimes I've had to come to grips that that isn't necessarily meant that I was right, and I believe that that's where my faith really helps me at times, to come to the realization that maybe I'm not on the right side, and I need to get on His side and do the right thing. Many times, that is not what is popular, and that's where I have to get the strength to be able to stand up and do the right thing, because I want to be remembered as a person that ... Number one, I want people to say, "You know, if he crawled in a foxhole with you, you didn't have to worry about your backside, because he'll be there."

Mel Steely: 00:29:29 You're covering him.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:29:29 I want to be known as a consistent person, and that basically a person of my word, and that if I'm going to get in a fight, I'm going to get in a fight, and I can be counted on. Now, that doesn't mean that if I have been ... was wrong, and new information came on and I was wrong, sometimes that means standing up and saying, "You know, I was wrong."

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:29:51 I tell my family, I tell my staff, "I make more mistakes than anybody. I am the most imperfect person that I know." And so that helps my perspective, and I believe through my faith that that gives me a perspective in treating other individuals, that
their opinions matter, that they are ... that it's not all about me, it's about them, and that's what true public service is.

Mel Steely: 00:30:16 Well now, in '92 you worked with ... or, '94 you worked with Mac working with him-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:30:23 That's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:30:23 ... and you kind of got the bug, and you saw what it was like, you ran in '96, and you lost. Do you remember-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:30:30 I didn't get elected.

Mel Steely: 00:30:31 Okay.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:30:32 I try to be careful about that.

Mel Steely: 00:30:34 All right, who was your opponent?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:30:35 Opponent that year was an individual from Newnan by the name of Scott Stallings, and the individual that ended up getting elected was Rick Price.

Mel Steely: 00:30:44 Okay, so Scott got the nomination from the party?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:30:48 No, there was not any Democratic opposition. There was three of us that ran in the Republican primary-

Mel Steely: 00:30:54 Oh, okay.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:30:55 ... and so we ran the primary, and I was the third person out. So, those two were involved in the runoff in '96. So, we were outspent four to one by each of the candidates. I had lived in the district at that time for about two and a half years, and we got almost 30% of the vote. It was a pretty tight race between the three of us.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:31:17 So I felt like we were successful. It was a hard pill for me to swallow, because I really felt like we were going to make the runoff, so I'll never forget that night when the realization came that it was over for us. That was kind of tough to swallow at that point in time.

Mel Steely: 00:31:34 I bet it was. I think that's what keeps most people, who would like to get into politics, that keeps them from doing it. They don't want to be rejected. You lay it all out there. I mean, your ego, your ... everything is laid out.
Mitch Seabaugh: 00:31:48 That, and as I like to say a lot is that it's a profession you read about your mistakes on the front page of the newspaper.

Mel Steely: 00:31:55 Oh yeah.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:31:55 When you put those two things together, that's what keeps a lot of people from being involved, and that's sad. That really is sad that we, as a society, have allowed that to happen, because we should be really finding ways to encourage people to be a part of public service, because the more individuals we have involved in it, the better the process is going to be, and the better our community's going to be served by it, in my opinion.

Mel Steely: 00:32:20 So, you think maybe your surrogate father back there in Arkansas ... or in Missouri rather, did you a good turn by teaching you optimism?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:32:28 He did. Gilbert was, as I said, the most optimistic person I have ever met, and if you'll allow me, I'll just you a real quick story. Of course, I love the game of golf, but Gilbert was playing a golf tournament one time with my dad, and he had lost a toe weight. He had iron that used to have these toe weights that were embedded into the back of the club, and his five iron had lost a toe weight on it, so he really couldn't use his five iron.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:32:57 Well, he's playing in a tournament, and he hits a shot with his seven iron, and his shaft breaks. Now here you are playing in a golf tournament, and your shaft breaks, so you've lost a club in the height of competition. Gilbert goes over and picks up the club head, he looks at it, he turns to my dad and he said, "Wayne, I found a toe weight for my five iron." I mean, that is the perspective that he had.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:33:22 In a tournament he and I played in one time, and it looked like it was going to rain, and of course I didn't like playing in the rain at that time, I was very young. And his perspective was, "Hey, I love for it to rain. It's because when it rains it eliminates half the field because all they're worried about is the rain." This is type of the philosophy that he helped to instill into me, and I guess where you're going with that is, how did I deal with 1996, because with Gilbert's optimism.

Mel Steely: 00:33:49 So, not winning didn't deter you from going again?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:33:54 No, it didn't.

Mel Steely: 00:33:56 Did you run in '98?
Mitch Seabaugh:  00:33:57  I thought about running in '98. The person that got elected basically did some things that I disagreed with. I try to follow a biblical principle, I tried to meet with him and talk with him what I felt like should've been done, or a better way of doing it, and basically was talked down to, and was told that I didn't understand things and all that, and it wasn't a very pleasant experience. I did think about running. Of course, at this time, I had just changed jobs, and I didn't know what the impact would be if I got elected in serving, and when I get involved in something I'm all out.

Mitch Seabaugh:  00:34:42  In a campaign, I mean, it is early in the morning with as many events as you can with breakfasts, you try to do your job, you have a lunch meeting, and then in the afternoon you're out door-to-door or doing something, or making fundraising phone calls. I sat in my office on the last day of qualifying, watching the clock tick by, whether or not I should run, or I shouldn't run. I chose not to run in 1998, because of those circumstances, and then 2000 came, and in 2000 he had basically ... There was a lot of people who were dissatisfied in the community with his service, and not-

Mel Steely:  00:35:22  This is Rick you're talking about?

Mitch Seabaugh:  00:35:23  We're talking about Senator Price, and the perception that he didn't respond and all that. There were two other people that I knew that decided to go ahead and run against Rick, and that was a person by the name of Dan Lackley, who's now serving in the House, and Charlie Harper. And so they had already decided to run. They qualified and was running, and for me that satisfied that somebody was going to challenge Senator Price, and so I wasn't going to, and I was at peace with that.

Mitch Seabaugh:  00:35:52  I was at peace with that, and then on Wednesday ... this is qualifying week. Of course, qualifying week is basically one week in the last week in April, and the qualifying time runs from like 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and then ... or I guess it's 9:00 in the morning until 5:00, and then on Friday it's 9:00 until noon.

Mitch Seabaugh:  00:36:19  And on Wednesday night I got a phone call ... or, Wednesday afternoon I got a phone call from a person down in Spalding County, Bud Kelly, who was the chairman of the party down there, and he asked if I was going to run or not. I said, "Bud, no." I said, "There's two other people out there that are running for the seat, and in thinking about the political structure, all the people that we'd call activists, they've already lined up with
somebody, so for me to get in that late it would be very difficult to get anybody to help you with your campaign."

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:36:58 Bud said that he basically felt like that the other two candidates couldn’t win, and that I was the one that needed to run. I told Bud, "Bud, I've already thought about this. I'm at peace with it. I'm at peace not running.", and I was looking forward ... bought me a new set of golf clubs, and was looking forward to a whole summer of really working on my golf game, and coaching baseball with my son, and those types of things. Bud, he said, "Well, promise me ..." He said, "... will you at least ..." He said, "Will you pray about it?" And I said, "Yeah Bud, I'll pray about it," and I have to be honest, I was flippant about it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:37:35 I got some other ... a couple other phone calls that night, and I just kind of just blew them off, and then Thursday I get up ... Now, it's gnawing at me. Now, it's bothering me, and there again, that's where in trying to look at calling upon my faith, and I remember praying that morning that I felt like it was a sign of spiritual immaturity to ask for a sign, but I needed some kind of indication as what was the right thing to do.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:38:12 So, I drove to the office that I was working at at the time, and one of our clients walked in, and he had been a client for two years, and I had known him for quite a while, but he had never come by the office, and he came by that morning. As soon as he walked in, I just said, "I don't need to be seeing you right now," because I knew why he came, he came to talk to me about running. He sat down and he told me that he felt like if I didn’t run that Rick would win without a runoff, and the decision was mine, and now it’s really eating at me. Well, this turns out to be ... This is Thursday, it's also my wife's birthday.

Mel Steely: 00:38:53 Oh boy.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:38:55 So, we go to dinner that night and all we talk about is possibly running for office. The whole family was engaged in it, and in my family if you ask them, should he run or not to run, they would’ve said, "I wish he wouldn't run." But if that was what I felt like I needed to do they were behind me 100%, and 110%, all out. And so ee went home that night and I talked to a couple of other people, and then I ended up talking with my pastor about what to do about this. Sometimes you say things before you think about it, as soon as you say it, it’s like you’re confronted with the reality you didn’t really know that it existed there.
Mitch Seabaugh: 00:39:37 I told Don, I said ... Don asked me, he said, "Mitch ..." He said, "... what are you afraid of? What are you afraid of?" Before I'd even thought about it I said, "Don ..." I said, "... what I'm afraid of is years later regretting the decision I make tomorrow," and as soon as I said it I realized that there was only one decision that I could make that I would regret making, and that's not running, because then I would always wonder what might have been.

Mel Steely: 00:40:07 Don was who? Who was your preacher?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:40:08 Don Helms is my pastor. This is real late, it's about midnight, and I like to do over big decisions, I said, "I'm going to sleep on it." So, I basically went to bed, slept about two hours, was back up about 3:00 a.m., went back downstairs to my office, sat in my office and thought about it. I got my family up about 5:00. You could imagine two teenage kids weren't too happy about getting up at 5:00 in the morning to talk about dad running for office.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:40:35 We talked about it, and basically I said, "Here's the ground rules if we're going to do this." I said, "Number one, we're going to focus in on what we can do, not what we can't do. We're going to focus on the positive and not the negative." Because the bottom line was, there's nobody out there to help us, because I thought all the activists would be lined up behind one of the other three candidates, we was all going to have to be on ourselves, and basically if we were going to do it, we were just going to have fun doing it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:40:59 What I didn't tell them is the back of my mind, my thought process, "Okay, I'll run. If I lose, I'll be a two time loser, that way I can consider myself unelectable, and I can go buy a t-shirt and say I'm done with it." And a funny thing happened on the way to the polls.

Mel Steely: 00:41:16 You got elected.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:41:16 We ended up getting elected. Election night, Rick got 44% of the vote, we got like 23%, and the other candidate ... so I was in the runoff now. I did make the runoff, but the difference was just unbelievable. Spalding County, which was one of the counties in the district, had had for the very first time in the Republican primary, a sheriff's race election.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:41:43 So, there's a lot of people that never vote in a Republican primary that voted in that election, and from our analysis we
felt like that Rick picked up a lot of votes just because he was the incumbent in doing that, and when we found out that the sheriff’s race was not going to go to a runoff, that there would be a lot of individuals that voted in that, that wouldn’t be back to vote in the runoff, that we stood a chance to win. We went out, and applied a strategy, and we ended up getting almost 56% of the vote in the runoff, and we got elected.

Mel Steely: 00:42:16 It hadn’t slowed down or turned around, huh?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:42:18 No, as a matter of fact, I will say this, it is infinitely easier to run for office than it is to actually serve. Running for office is very, very simple compared to really struggling and trying to serve.

Mel Steely: 00:42:35 That’s what your friend, Bill Clinton, says too. He enjoys running a lot more than he does serving.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:42:42 I enjoy serving more than I do running now as an incumbent, I mean.

Mel Steely: 00:42:47 But you moved into a position of real influence, where you make a real difference, even the guy that has nothing but his vote though makes a difference if he’ll go use it, and use it wisely. All right, you got elected, you going from between November and January, and you’re trying to figure out, “Okay, I’m going to be a senator.” And you sit around thinking, you say, “Senator Seabaugh, damn, that sounds good,” and so forth. All that. Now, once you’re past that, what happens to you, to get you ready to actually be a senator? Walk through what a new person, first timer, goes through. As far as the party’s concerned, the Capitol, all that stuff.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:43:26 Well, I will say this, when you talk about it, sounding good or feeling good, to some degree there’s a degree of uncomfortableness for me, because all my life I’ve been Mitch, and there’s something very personal and very warming about just that, and when there are people that now feel like they have to call you Senator, or Chairman, or Mr. Whip, it’s not that warmth that I like. I’m just like the Dukes of Hazzard song, I’m just a good old boy.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:44:01 But, on your ... to that, in work ... I remember, after I got elected, the first meeting I got asked to go to was in Moreland, and they were talking about trying to put in a sewer system. So, here I am, "Is this what being elected means, to sit around and talk about sewer systems?" I mean, and I was amazed at how many government bureaucracies and agencies were
Mitch Seabaugh: 00:44:35 We go through an orientation process. We had the biennial that we go through in Athens, and they have a special portion of that just for new legislators to try to help get you orientated, and familiarized with it, but like so many things in life, there's just no way anybody can really prepare you for it. You just have to work through it and do that. It's like going to a college after high school, you could talk all you want about ... and orientate all you want, but until you actually go through the experience and learn it by experiencing it, there's just no way you can convey that to anybody adequately, and [crosstalk 00:45:17]-

Mel Steely: 00:45:17 Go ahead, excuse me.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:45:18 ... of course, when I came up here the first two years, we were in the minority, and that's where I learned the basic expression of you show up, you throw up a little opposition, you ask some tough questions, you try to mend some legislation, you vote no, and you go home. You didn't have to worry about balancing things out, and dealing with what the unintended consequences might be.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:45:44 And then, of course, in 2002, when I was ... my first time of being reelected, all of a sudden we find ourselves in the majority, and you find it's a whole different ball game, because now, what you say matters. You have to find a way of balancing things out, you have to take the responsibility for things. You can't just blame it on somebody else, that you have to shoulder that responsibility to try to deal with it.

Mel Steely: 00:46:05 Now, in your first term you had Governor Barnes, Roy Barnes, was for his last two years, and Mark Taylor was lieutenant governor, and it was the last two years of his first term.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:46:19 That's correct.

Mel Steely: 00:46:21 How did you and the Party get along with them?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:46:25 Well, being a freshman legislator, I didn't learn the good old boy system very well. As a matter of fact, Lieutenant Governor Taylor's first bill priority that first year was to raise the teen driving age to 17. Senator Jeff Mullis and I had decided that we were going to offer some amendments to Senate Bill 1, the lieutenant governor's number one piece of legislation. We were warned that you don't do those types of things. You're
supposed to go along to get along. There's ways you work with things, and we need to pass a strong bill out of the Senate, before it was going to get watered down the house, and all that, and we didn't listen very well.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:47:13 So, we tried to amend Lieutenant Governor Mark Taylor's first bill, SB-1, as freshman, and we were forewarned. Lieutenant governor pulled us aside and warned us, and I will say this, that we were dealing with that piece of legislation, and was talking with, after the meeting I had with our lieutenant governor, I had a little conversation with a senator who was trying to find some advice.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:47:41 A senator from Bonaire, by the name of Sonny Perdue, told me he sat there and he said, "Mitch ...", he said, "... who elected you to come up here?" I said, "Well, the people of the 28th District." He said, "Well, do the people of the 28th District want you to do that amendment? Is that how they feel? Is that what they want?" I said, "Well, I had a town hall meeting, and that's what I believe it is." He said, "Well then, you don't let that big boy tell you what to do. You do your job for your constituents."

Mel Steely: 00:48:07 He was pro tem at the time, wasn't he?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:48:08 No, he wasn't, this was-

Mel Steely: 00:48:09 Oh, he'd already switched sides-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:48:10 He'd already switched sides-

Mel Steely: 00:48:11 ... yeah, that's right.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:48:11 ... and he was part of our caucus, and so we went ahead and we did that in trying to make a difference and a positive influence on the legislation in doing that. Of course, another member of our freshman class that year was Senator Mike Beatty, who led the fight on the video poker machines, and that's where our freshman class, we were called The Untouchables, based upon the movie and the characters that brought down Al Capone, in that we were a band of individuals, of senators, that didn't mind going out there and fighting for what we thought was the right thing to do, no matter what the cost would be.

Mel Steely: 00:48:52 And you had a good time too, didn't you?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:48:54 We did, we did.
Mel Steely: 00:48:55 Yeah. Fifteen years earlier our local Senator Garner had done much the same thing, they had the Gang of Seven that fought the lieutenant governor who was Zell at the time, which was not a good thing to be doing. But anyway, they thoroughly enjoyed it. Didn't get much, but they got a little bit, and made a name for themselves.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:49:17 Well, it was about doing the right thing. I had a constituent of mine, Bill Headley, after I got elected, he told me, he said, "Just remember the do-right rule, and you'll do fine. Just go up there and do right.''

Mel Steely: 00:49:29 Good advice.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:49:30 My pastor gave me some other advice, on top of that, after I got elected, he said, "Just remember this, if you go up there and do the right thing ..." He said, "... don't expect them to stand up and call you blessed,” and how many times I would have to repeat that to myself, in that a lot of times if you're going to stay in and try to do the right thing, there are going to be those that are going to try to take your knees out from underneath you.

Mel Steely: 00:49:52 Sometimes knowing the right thing is difficult.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:49:55 That's true.

Mel Steely: 00:49:55 Sometimes, it's not. I remember, two of the things you walked into your first term with the flag, and the reapportionment thing. Were you on reapportion?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:50:12 No.

Mel Steely: 00:50:13 I wouldn't think a first term would be put on that. But those were very difficult, transportation had problems with the big ... I forget what they call it, the outer circle?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:50:21 The Northern Arc.

Mel Steely: 00:50:22 Northern Arc. It had appeared by the beginning of the second of your first term, that Governor Barnes was waking up each morning saying, "Who can I offend today?" And it was working. I asked him if that was true, and he said no, that he didn't really think that. He said his right hand man did from time to time [crosstalk 00:50:45], but he was laughing about it at the time. He's been away from it far enough now that he can look back on it.
At any rate, there were some fairly interesting issues that had more than one side to them, and a person could be legitimate on a number of areas. The flag, the transportation, a lot of those were ... How did you deal with all of this stuff coming in that first time? Just follow that rule, and try to figure out, "Okay, what's the right thing to do?" and then stick with it?

The one thing that I learned from my corporate training was the importance of being consistent. If you are consistent, which means you have to have certain basic principles that you go on, and you're consistent to those principles, when there are people that disagree with you, and oppose you and what you're trying to do, I have found that, in time, they will respect you more, instead of playing games with your principles, because then not being consistent, nobody has respect for individuals that are that way.

So, when ... I got a real big Baptist, but the teen driving bill was a very big issue in my district, and it was very close at heart to me, because I had teenage children. I mean, I remember Super Bowl Sunday, my daughter had a Super Bowl party upstairs, my son had a Super Bowl party downstairs, and at half-time they both came and lobbied me on the teen driving bill, because it affected all of them.

But, and then came the flag. Right after that came the flag issue, and looking at the principle on that, what was the right thing to do, and what would be the principles to be consistent by. Where I gravitated on that is ... Sometimes you come with a sense about this is the right thing, or this is the way to be, and then when you get the feedback from your district that confirms that, then that really seems to solidify, and to me, that the way it was done, the flag vote, the way it was done was absolutely wrong. And so, from my standpoint, it was never the right thing to do, to do something the wrong way. If it's the right thing, then you should be able to do it the right way and be able to accomplish it.

As a matter of fact, I was in Senator Charles Walker's office that morning talking about the flag issue. Like I said, from my corporate background, and trying to find consensus is, how do we find a way to solve this issue? Here I am a freshman legislator in basically the second week of being in the legislature, and trying to work with the majority leader in finding a way to resolve the issue, because it was a very contentious issue.
Mitch Seabaugh: 00:53:48 We met for a little while, and then finally he goes, “Well, here’s what’s happening in House rules right now.” And he showed me the new flag, and what they were doing. They tried to push that bill through so fast that there was no way that we in the Senate would go home back to our districts and listen to our people. They tried to get the vote to occur before we went home. They were unable to do that, because it would've taken a suspension of the rules to make that happen.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:54:15 So, that was a very contentious issue, but my district, the confirmation was overwhelming. I mean, it was more than 90%. I had more people that contacted my office who wanted the flag changed, but this was the wrong way to do it, and wanted me to vote against that, than I had people that said, "Hey, even though this is the wrong way to do it, go ahead and take the opportunity to do that."

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:54:37 And then that summer, as you mentioned, was reapportionment, and that is the most brutal political process, because that is very political, and it’s very personal, and there are always those amongst your colleagues that lose out in that process. For those that go back and look in history, those maps that they put together were ... and I believe that the general public felt like that was such an abuse of power in trying to stack the deck of both the State House and the State Senate that ultimately cost the Democrats their control over both the House and the Senate.

Mel Steely: 00:55:16 Certainly a factor.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:55:18 Basically, what they told you in conventional wisdom was that reapportionment people didn't get that, they didn't understand it, and what they didn't ... for those who overlooked that, or dismissed it, what they didn't understand, were those small rural counties who already struggled for significance, and now when you were taking their small county and breaking it up into three Senate districts, they really had no significant influence in electing a state senator, and that's how they got it. That's how they understood the reapportionment.

Mel Steely: 00:55:49 There was an attitude that went with it that was helpful in defeating them.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:55:56 Yes.
Mel Steely: 00:55:57 I remember, we had a representative at the time, you ran against the Stallings boy, his daddy, or step-father, I guess he is ... No, it's his father-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:56:06 No, it's his father, Tracy Stallings.

Mel Steely: 00:56:07 Yeah, Tracy. Tracy was an old, old friend of mine. I'd known him since I came to West Georgia in '64. He was already there when I got there. Well liked, six term mayor, the whole thing. Republicans voted for him regularly.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:56:22 Right.

Mel Steely: 00:56:23 He stood up in Kiwanis, and he was asked the question, "Why are you doing this? Why are you reapportioning, this is terrible." And he said, "Well frankly, we're doing it because we can. Our first objective is to protect the Democratic Party," just honest as he could be, and one old fellow sitting way back in the back, he said, real loud said, "Well, damn," and that just turned it right there. So many people that liked him just said ... The same Tracey that we know ... and he lost. In fact, we had two Republicans elected, Harper and Butler-

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:57:02 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:57:03 ... came in to replace him. He still didn't understand, "What in the world happen? I know I'm smarter and more experienced than these guys." Tracy, you just got lost along the way somehow. But, it was an emotional time. So, you came in just as the Democratic Party was losing its power, and you were privileged to watch the shift there. Many people weren't, they either left before the saw the Republicans come in, or they didn't get here until the Republicans are already there.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:57:35 That's right.

Mel Steely: 00:57:37 But, you watched both ends of it, and it was an interesting period. Did you think when you went home at the end of 2002 that ... I guess, March or April, whatever it was that year, that you all were going to be in the majority the next year?

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:57:58 No. I have to be honest-

Mel Steely: 00:58:00 I didn't either. Sonny did. He thought it that early.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:58:04 He did, and the way the maps had been drawn, we were guaranteed, I believe it was sixteen or seventeen safe
Republican seats. So for us to be able to pick up enough seats to get to a majority, it was such a long shot. It was just ... it was unbelievable. We were at a disadvantage institutionally, we were at a disadvantage in fundraising, but it just goes to show that sometimes there's surprises that come your way. If you're diligent, and you work very hard, and you execute a good strategy, that things can happen. People started ... they got it, they understood it on the redistricting, and the flag, and the education reform. What happened ... Governor Barnes was a bold initiative governor-

Mel Steely: 00:59:05 Yes he was.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:59:07 ... and if I was a governor I would think that I would be kind of a bold initiative governor, and there's risk that goes along with that. I felt like we had a bold initiative president in George W. Bush. The difference I think in George W. Bush and Barnes, and the Democratic Party at that point in time, is that Bush got out there amongst the people, looked them square in the eye, and told them why he felt like what he was doing was the right thing to do.

Mitch Seabaugh: 00:59:33 The Democratic Party, especially Roy Barnes, basically hid from the people in that election year, and I think that that's what added to what was an appearance of certain arrogance, that they didn't have to get out there and answer to the people. I believe that that contributed when you looked at all the other little pieces in that. But, deep down in our heart, we hoped it, but we really didn't think it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:00:02 Basically, we would've considered success to be anything we would've gotten above what were the safe Republican seats. Then when election night came, Sonny was ... very early in the war room, we were visiting the war room, and there's certain counties that you look at, and there's certain vote counts you're trying to get that give you some kind of trends, and in every case, the trends were very positive. Not just nominally positive, very positive. So, there was an excitement that night that Sonny was going to win. He really was going to win, and then [crosstalk 01:00:33]-

Mel Steely: 01:00:33 He thought ... Excuse me.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:00:35 ... we saw in our Senate races where we were, and the precincts that we targeted to look and all that, that we were very strong, and it was fairly early that night, that we were dealing with the prospects that we were going to be very close to an even
situation with the Senate, but Sonny was definitely going to be elected.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:01:00 I have a picture, I wish I had it with me here, but I have a picture at home where we were in the Senate war room, and there were about six of us that ended up going into the bathroom in that room, because we had to have a private conversation. Eric Johnson, Tom Price, Lynn Westmoreland, Earl Ehrhart, and myself, I think, were the five, and my wife, because my wife took the picture, and started talking about really what was happening and where we go from here, because it was dawning on us that we were getting ready to be the dog that caught the bus.

Mel Steely: 01:01:34 This was in November?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:01:35 This was in November.

Mel Steely: 01:01:36 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Want to stop it now?

James: 01:01:38 Yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:01:38 Okay, we're going to switch tapes here, put a new tape in.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:01:41 All right. Am I talking too long?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:01:51 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:01:52 ... and he said, I'm going to be the [inaudible 01:01:54], and I said, "God, I hope you are-"

James: 01:01:57 I'm back. We're good.

Mel Steely: 01:01:57 You running?

James: 01:01:58 Yep.

Mel Steely: 01:01:59 Okay. You're talking about a heightened expectation that you were going to win during that period, but really the night of the election, I guess, and the leadership more or less got together, and said, "Oh my gosh, we ... like the dog that caught the car, what do we do?"

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:02:23 well, the first thing that happened that night, and it became very obvious that, Sonny was going-

Mel Steely: 01:02:29 Election night.
Mitch Seabaugh: 01:02:29 Election night, that Sonny was going to win. We were not going to have a majority in any chamber, but the Senate did get to 26 seats, which in the Senate there's 56 seats, so it takes 28 for a tie, and so we had to pick up three seats somehow in order to have the majority. That's where Sonny came up to the Senate war room, per se, and started making phone calls to some friends about getting some Party switchers, to get them to switch over Parties to give us the majority in the Senate. Not until we had that solidified were we really able to, as a leadership team, start putting into place that we were going to lead the Senate from a governing perspective. So, that night was all about getting the Party switchers.

Mel Steely: 01:03:24 When you're talking about the war room was it in the hotel [crosstalk 01:03:27]-

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:03:26 It was in the hotel, yes.

Mel Steely: 01:03:27 Which hotel were you in, do you remember?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:03:28 I don't remember the name of it.

Mel Steely: 01:03:33 That was the Republican Party election night party?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:03:39 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:03:39 Okay. Not the one just for Sonny, but for the party itself, or did you have them all in the same one?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:03:45 Well, that night you had Sonny was in one room, and Superintendent Kathy Cox in another adjoining room, so that basically all the Republican faithful could've been there that night.

Mel Steely: 01:04:00 Good.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:04:05 Kathy Cox got elected that night also. So, big victories all around.

Mel Steely: 01:04:10 Yeah it was. All right, it looks like you're going to win, Sonny feels like, "I'm going to be the governor," which is now pretty well confirmed at that stage of the game, and he gets on the phones. Was it his idea, or the idea of the group, the senators, to have him start calling and get party switchers?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:04:31 Well, that was his idea, because now he's governor, and he needs an ally, and he needed at least one of the chambers, and
picking up three seats in the Senate really allowed him the opportunity to do that. So, he's the one that made the phone calls, and was able to get the party switchers. We had a fourth that ended up coming that way, which gave us a 30/26 governing majority in the Senate at that point in time.

Mel Steely: 01:04:58 But then you face the problem you had the votes, but you faced the problem then of a lieutenant governor of the other party-

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:05:07 That's correct.

Mel Steely: 01:05:07 ... who's just been re-elected, has been known to be heavily partisan, and fully expects to appoint committee chairmen and committees.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:05:15 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mel Steely: 01:05:16 Okay, pick it up from there, and tell me what happened there. This is fascinating, that whole thing.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:05:21 Well, what we had ... Well of course, for me personally, it was two days after the election, I get a phone call from Tom Price, who asked if I would consider running for whip, and I hadn't even contemplated or even thought about taking on a role like that with our caucus.

Mel Steely: 01:05:44 After one term?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:05:45 After one term, and he asked if I would consider it, and I said, "Well Tom, I like ... I usually sleep over big decisions like that, but yeah, I'll do it." I mean, I was just ... anything I could do to help serve the caucus of somebody who expressed that kind of confidence in me was overwhelming for me at the time. He's like, "Well, we have to confirm the party switchers first. We have to get them basically to publicly commit that they're switching parties before we start ... okay, we're going to be in the governing."

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:06:20 That week, I can't remember, it was either Thursday or Friday that week, Governor-elect Perdue did a fly-around, and that's where he got Senator Dan Lee, Senator Don Cheeks, to switch parties for him, and then Senator Jack Hill later that day. Senator Rooney Bowen ended up later that afternoon after that, basically announced that he was going to ... but after we had at least the three public commitments that they were switching parties to give us the governance on that, I remember seeing Tom Price at the airport, and Eric, and I said, "We're not
... we’re going to wait until we get everybody lined up that we have governance before we make declarations, he was going to run for president pro tem, and Tom Price for majority leader, and then for me for whip."

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:07:06

So, okay, I’m supposed to wait until I hear from him. It was on Saturday of that week, I was at a fundraising golf tournament for the Northgate High School golf team. We’re on number two, I’m out participating. I get a call ... I’m number two, and I get a phone call from Eric Johnson, "You need to start running for whip."

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:07:26

Well, a lot of times in politics, making that first phone call, and getting that first commitment can help you not only to solidify your election, but to scare off anybody else running for it. I didn’t know anybody else that would be interested in running for whip. So, here I am on a golf course with these people, and calling everybody that I can trying to shore up votes while I’m trying to play golf. It was kind of funny. What was interesting is I would be on the phone, “Just a second,” lay down the phone, hit a shot, and-

Mel Steely: 01:07:56
What’d you shoot that day?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:07:57

We scrambled. What was interesting is after I had made most of my phone calls I played a phone without being on the phone, and I hit very poor shots, and my partners asked me to get back on the phone, because I played better when I was talking on the phone like that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:08:12

But anyway, after we did that, and getting the leadership in place, then we had to come together and start talking about how do we set up the rules to govern, and be able to run the Senate. We sat down, and we looked at other examples of other states that had situations. I mean, I remember in Missouri one time, they had a perfectly tied Senate, and so they had to find a way of setting the rules and governing in that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:08:42

So, we looked at different examples, and that’s where we came up with the format that basically we would have a committee on assignment, so we do all the committee selections, and that was the president pro tem, the majority leader, and the lieutenant governor. There were all kinds of little things that we had to put in the rules, because we knew that Mark Taylor would recognize a senator for the purpose of some kind of motion that would thwart what we were trying to do.
Mitch Seabaugh: 01:09:08 So, we had to put in simple rules like the fact that if the president pro tem, and the majority leader rose that the lieutenant governor had to recognize them first before any other senator. Just little things like that, that we had to contemplate. It was a great team effort in putting together a way of being able to run the Senate, do the peoples’ business, and allow us to operate as an ally for Sonny Perdue as our governor, because the House was still under Democratic control. So, there's already dynamics that work down here of the House versus the Senate.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:09:44 So, now that you have different parties, and you have a former colleague who was treated very badly when he switched parties, when Sonny switched parties, and was treated very badly by the lieutenant governor and his party. Now, all of a sudden, he's governor in a position of power, and all that, there was a lot of anxiety and very raw feelings that were down here.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:10:11 So, I felt like the effort that we went through in putting those rules together so that we could govern, we could run the Senate, and limit the lieutenant governor’s ability to thwart what we needed to do, because the governor needed a strong ally. And those first two years, we were the ones that had to stand strong to help the governor in pushing any of his initiatives.

Mel Steely: 01:10:35 Mm-hmm (affirmative) how was Eric Johnson to work with?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:10:38 Eric has a great political mind, and he, at times, can be a little sharp with the tongue. Eric doesn't have, as I would say, that benefit, or that corporate training. Eric, small business man, works around a lot of individuals that don't want to make decisions. So, he's always forced to having to make the decision. Then he's in politics, he's the minority leader in the Senate, and he's trying to lead a cause to help build certain vote records, and of certain senators that we can go after, we can target and go after in elections to go from a minority to a majority. A lot of times there were many caucus members in our caucus that weren't as strong with that. They wouldn't stand with the Republicans, they basically would work with the Democrats for the benefit of their re-election, or getting projects in the budget back home.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:11:37 So, Eric was used to being a lone voice in the wilderness. So, when he becomes majority leader, now all of a sudden you have a bunch of individuals that want to be a part of everything, and they want to be a part of all the decision making process, and here Eric's been conditioned to doing it a lot of it on his own. So,
Eric had a time of adjustment in trying to be ... open up from a corporate standpoint of really giving all the caucus input, and the things that we did, and the way we did things, and all that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:12:11 I thought he adjusted very well from that. He has a tendency to really adjust very well, and he continually surprises me in tough situations how he can come up with, as you stated, sometimes it's very difficult to discern what is right, and he has ability a lot of times to see things a little quicker, and a little clearer than some of our other caucus members, about what really is the right thing to do.

Mel Steely: 01:12:40 If I remember correctly, you had difficulty working with the governor's office too, which rather surprised me. Lynn Westmoreland and I are good friends, and I remember Lynn was just so frustrated so many times. He would say, "Sonny is supposed to be on our side. I don't understand this." And a lot of the House members and Senate members had to, I guess you'd say, exert their independence from time to time with some of Sonny's programs.

Mel Steely: 01:13:12 Do you feel that the difficulties he had with that early legislation, came about because of arrogance, or because of ignorance, he didn't know how to do it, or because of inexperienced staff people, or a mixture of what? Describe that whole process for me, of trying to work with a governor who is not working in tandem with the House and Senate of his own party. Have I described that properly, or do you not-

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:13:47 Well ... there was difficulty in working with the governor's office, yes. The reason why, I think, is just the personal makeup of Governor Perdue. We all, every one of us, look at things completely different. We all ... we have a responsibility, and we try to execute that responsibility to the best of our ability. It's a real rarity when you find those individuals who can really use power without it being so apparent that they're using power.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:14:33 Let me give you an analogy. A sports analogy, if you've always ... Many people have heard the analogy about that if a referee in a basketball game does a great job nobody really notices him. Does that mean he doesn't call any fouls? No, but the fouls that he calls, everybody knows the foul should be called a foul so he's not the focal point. So, when it comes to using power, an individual that really is adept at using power the right way, it doesn't become so noticeable that they're using power.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:15:08 But when you're trying to learn how to use power, sometimes it may come across that you're trying to force things down
peoples’ throats. In all fairness, Governor Perdue had basically seen power used a certain way, and now he’s governor, and to get things done, he fell into the trap, I felt like, of the examples that had been set before him. Of course, the difficulty started right off the bat when the governor tried to raise tobacco taxes.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:15:39 Here's a newly elected governor, he's a Republican elected governor, and Republicans traditionally stand for lower taxes. So, in the first year of his first term of the first Republican governor since Reconstruction, and he's going to put on the table a tax increase. And he didn't consult with the legislature on it, he didn't get our input on it, but yet here he's going to do it, and he expects everybody to just go along, because that had been the example that had been set forth before. This is the way it was going to be about leadership, and everybody was expected just to get on board and do that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:16:15 What you find a lot of times, that Republicans tend to be, I would say, a little bit more independently thinking than Democrats. I'm not saying that that's good or bad, I'm just saying that generally they tend to be a little bit more independently thinking. So, that really ran … with the governor doing that, it ran afoul of all of a sudden here's a bunch of people who've who made a bunch of ... ran on elections and all that, and ran on certain basic principles why they want to come up here, and reduce taxes, and things like that. Now we're forced into having to make, choose between supporting our first Republican governor, or our principles.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:17:02 I remember being called into the governor's office, and it was just the governor and myself, and at that time it was Morgan Perry, I don't think she had been married yet. Morgan had worked with the Senate, and loved the Senate. She had worked with Eric for quite a long time, and had helped elect. So, she was the governor's legislative director, per se. The governor didn't want to talk about raising the tax, and I tried to explain to the governor that I got elected on two principles, less government and lower taxes, and he was asking me to violate that here in the first year of Republican control. I try not to use that word control, but having the governing majority, the governing responsibility.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:17:54 The governor … I said, "You know, this is a time, revenues are down, we need to make government smaller." I said, "We need to find out what our true priorities are, and fund those well, and this is the time to get rid of all this stuff in here that really doesn't need to be in there, because those other things that
ultimately are the things that rob valuable resources from our greatest priorities: education, transportation, healthcare."

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:18:21 He told me, he said, "Mitch ..." He said, "... You're looking at it from a business model." He said, "The truth is, when revenues go down the requirement for services goes up, and so that's why we have to raise taxes to get more revenue in," and I, "Wait a minute ..." I said, "... Governor, I feel like a Republican principle was really about getting less people dependent on government," and here was the opportunity that we had to do that. I said, "Let's be honest, when revenue's increase, the size of government is going to increase." I don't care what you do, that's just going to happen.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:18:57 So, I said, "To me, the fundamental question is at what point are we going to start the growing process? Where we going to get down to start that growing process against when revenues come up?" Governor became a little agitated with me, and asked ... basically, he asked for me to reconsider and think about it. Needed leadership. Now, I was the first Republican majority whip ever in the history of the state of Georgia, and he needed for me to stand up and prove leadership and help him in doing this, because he felt like it was the right thing to do.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:19:33 I said, I told him, I said, "Governor ..." I said, "... here's the way I look at it." I said, "I am not going to look in the mirror twenty years for now and see a person who is a part of the first Republican governing majority and see a person who voted to raise taxes." I said, "I'm sorry. I'm not going to do it. I respect your position, I'm not going to be out there publicly criticizing you or criticizing the policy," and I didn't, but I just ... "I can't support it."

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:20:05 So, that created ... and I wasn't the only one. So, that did create some tension between the governor and some of those in the legislature, and I remember a very intimate conversation that I had with Lynn Westmoreland about that, and the struggles that he was going in leading the House in that issue. So, that was some difficulty there, and I think that it was ... like I said, talking about the governor's standpoint, I think it was the example that he'd had before him, and struggling with how to use power, and also in how to lead, and in trying to solve an issue, because we had a daunting task.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:20:47 I mean, we had a billion dollars that we had to find a way to bridge that gap. I diligently worked and was able to come up with some cash management issues, and found some reserve ... That's where my accounting training came in, and I found some
reserves that were overfunded that helped to contribute probably a half a billion dollars of stopgap measures, which did not require any increases in taxes, it was just cash management, in helping to bridge that gap.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:21:22  But, I've personally felt like the governor's held that against me because right out of the gate he took a step, and everybody didn't step in behind him, as we did in the campaign, and I think that he ... Maybe the correct assumption is he had some expectations that were just not realistic, and not knowing his team as well as he should've.

Mel Steely: 01:21:51  Something happens when they get to be governor. I don't know of anyone that knew how to handle a legislature better than Roy Barnes. In his first year he got everything, I mean, literally everything he asked for. It's wonderful for him, and then it all just kind of fell apart, and Sonny comes in, he's been in the Senate, he's been around, not a huge long time, but enough to ... I mean, he was in leadership, and then he does much the same thing. So, I don't know. I don't know how to explain it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:22:23  I haven't sat in the governor's chair, and again, like I said earlier, that it's infinitely easier to run for office than it is to actually govern, because you get all the facts that ... there's many times there's things that we have to deal with and that we can't fund this, or we can't fund that, and some ... I have to find a way of being able to tell my constituents, or somebody else, that we just can't do that, and that's a very difficult thing to do.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:22:49  A lot of people don't understand that because they're not sitting in this chair. They don't have the benefit of having to balance all that, and shoulder that responsibility. They're just looking at a little piece of it. So, there again, from the governor's standpoint, we're not sitting in his chair, so we don't know all that he is dealing with, and a lot of times we're just looking at a little piece of it, but-

Mel Steely: 01:23:10  That's true.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:23:10  ... you would think that someone that served that in the legislature for a long time, definitely would be very, very adept at being able to work with the legislature and through the legislature.

Mel Steely: 01:23:23  Well, it was interesting because Barnes was a great conciliator when he was in the House and Senate, and then he went just the opposite, and Zell had been the opposite as the lieutenant
governor, he was a contrarian, and he pulled things together, he got the lottery going, got all kind of things going people wouldn't have thought. And Roy has been dedicated to education all his life, and ended up making the teachers so mad, even black teachers voted against him. You got to sit back and wonder about politics sometimes, I tell you. It is fascinating. When you look back on that period ... Let's break it down, say, you came in, in what, 2003? January of 2003? No, 2001?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:24:13 First elected, yeah.

Mel Steely: 01:24:14 First elected.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:24:15 Yeah, I was sworn in January 8, 2001.

Mel Steely: 01:24:18 When you look back, aside from your personal rise through the system very quickly, which is one of the reasons we're talking with you today, because it's unusual to see that kind of thing happen, and my guess is it's a beginning, so we'll be back for more tapes later on, but put that part aside.

Mel Steely: 01:24:39 Look back at the things that have been accomplished, or the things that haven't been accomplished from that period of January of 2001, until this last session, up until now. How would you assess your role personally as a senator? What have you done that's been really good, and you're proud of it, and what has happened that you wanted to do that you weren't able to do?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:25:03 Well, when I ran in 2000, the thing I try to talk about to a large perspective was leadership, and providing positive leadership, and I've tried very hard at doing that since I've been here. While, at this point in time, I'm now in my seventh year, it seemed like twenty years, because of all the things that I've been involved in. Of course, as a freshman legislator, I did not have the opportunity, because that's not the way the system worked at that point in time. Freshman legislators just didn't pass legislature. You were basically expected to sit in your chair, listen, keep your mouth shut, keep your nose clean, and then maybe in your second term, they might allow you to do something.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:25:51 Then things changed, and then we became the majority, and so many opportunities afforded me at that point in time, and because we had a lot of freshman that hadn't even been up here, we were required to play both ways. Offense and defense to perspective, leadership and chairing committees. I chaired
the Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee, so there's a lot of things I got involved in being involved in that, that helped, and there were some other things I got involved in. The thing that I am probably most proud of at this point in time, that I've had an opportunity to do, was to pass the incentive for the film industry to come to Georgia.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:26:34 Georgia used to be the number three state when it came to the amount of film and television production that was done in all of the United States, behind New York and California. Georgia was the third state after that, after those two big states. We had In the Heat of the Night that was filmed here, Deliverance was a movie that was filmed here, Sweet Home Alabama was filmed here. I mean, we had ... Georgia had a real presence, and if you look at it, you can see why.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:27:01 We have a world class airport that you can fly anywhere nonstop just about, and especially when it comes to California, many flights out to California. You look at the ... from that airport, if you just drive ninety minutes from that airport, and look at the diverse geography that's available to you. You've got mountain settings, you can have very urban settings, big downtown settings, and you can have very rural settings.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:27:28 So, there's a lot of flexibility exactly what when it comes to making movies and television to have that kind of exposure, to be able to get that kind of diversity. You don't have that diversity in California, where they have a lot of the film that's done. So, we needed ... There was a lot of states that were passing incentives to bring more production to their states, and it's for Georgia to decide whether or not we were going to be competitive. I started working on this, and worked very hard in trying to do that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:28:03 So, that became my biggest disappointment, because the first year I worked on it, did everything I thought was right in trying to bring it to the forefront to pass it, and the governor wanted to look at it another year, and that was very disappointing for me. So, we had to come back the next year go through the process, and we did pass that in 2005. We've had the opportunity to see a return of a lot of production.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:28:26 There's more that we need to do in that area, but that was probably the thing that I am most proud about, because I felt like it helped promote our state, helped show off our state, it's created a lot of jobs for Georgia, and provided a lot of people that live here in Georgia that are involved in, not just that
industry, but ancillary industries. The catering industry, wardrobe ... There's a lot of ... carpentry, the trades-

Mel Steely: 01:28:56 Oh yeah. All the actors in Georgia.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:28:57 ... and the actors. It allowed a lot of them to now come and work in their home state instead of having to travel to other places. So, I was real proud about that.

Mel Steely: 01:29:06 West Georgia's getting a movie [crosstalk 01:29:08]-

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:29:08 Yes. Other legislation thing that's not very sexy, and what I mean by sexy is that it doesn't grab front pages, and people don't ... but it's an extremely important, was what we did, we called it the “Call before you dig” bill. It has to go with how you go through the process in going out and digging lines, and doing it safely. It was very contentious, because you had cities and counties on one side, and you had contractors on the other side, and it really put a test of my corporate skills, at building consensus and bringing people together, and working through that environment to finally get a bill to the floor that everybody could agree was probably the best thing to do, and that protected a lot of citizens in Georgia. So, that piece of legislation, it was ... I mean, it just, it wore me out. Especially in the session, because you'd always have somebody that got bent out of shape about something, about a word or whatever, and we constantly had to bring everybody together.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:30:14 I had the opportunity of passing, last year, a bill that basically opened free markets for broadband and wireless in the telecommunication industry, that already, didn't know about this at that time, but became extremely important piece of legislation now with AT&T and BellSouth merger. That piece of legislation was often cited by the Justice Department, and by our public service commission, in that merger being able to occur.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:30:45 Fun thing we did is we named a section of Interstate 85 after Alan Jackson. Alan Jackson is from Newnan, Georgia, and it was kind of ... I got an email from somebody said, "You know, he's one of our hometown guys, but we've never named a road after him." And I drive around and see roads named after people, I didn't know who they were, and this is something we ought to be proud of. So, we went through the ... Did that road naming, and got Alan to come down, and [crosstalk 01:31:13]-

Mel Steely: 01:31:14 Wear his white hat?
Mitch Seabaugh: He wore his white hat, came back down to Newnan and got the opportunity to have some fun with that. That was interesting, we went out to the roadside to get some signs, and pull the veil off of the sign, and of course in doing that, we had to block a lane of traffic for safety, and that created somewhat of a traffic situation, but everybody that came by, nobody was upset. They were so excited to see Alan Jackson, and shouted some very positive things, and all that kind of stuff.

Mel Steely: That’s good.

Mitch Seabaugh: He’s a real shy guy. But, another piece of legislation I had the opportunity to have a big part in was the licensing for general contractors and home builders. Right now, in Georgia, you can go build a home and not have to be licensed, so, there’s individuals that’s were out there, and not building quality homes, and not ... What was happening is that people were buying homes that ... and getting stuck with bad product. We had to find a way to be able [crosstalk 01:32:10]-

Mel Steely: Yeah, I bought one of those.

Mitch Seabaugh: Oh, really?

Mel Steely: They ran out of pipe, and just dropped the sewer right in the middle of a room.

Mitch Seabaugh: Are you serious?

Mel Steely: Dead serious.

Mitch Seabaugh: So, we needed to have a way to provide some accountability for that, and that was not an easy piece of legislation, and then we had to come back the following year, because it was one of those things that once we had it funded, then we could go about setting the board and go through that. So, we put the requirement in, but until we found funding ... and I worked real close with a guy by the name of Mark Woodall.

Mitch Seabaugh: Mark is a lobbyist here, but he came up with a great idea, and we worked to provide a self-funding mechanism, where it didn't take any state money, but a self-funding mechanism that allowed for that to get kicked in, to get the board to get the license process started. And so, January 1, 2008, home builders will have to have a license, and that gives us a way of being able to hold them accountable if they don’t build a real good product.
Mitch Seabaugh: 01:33:05 So, I've had an opportunity to be involved in, and there's a lot of other little things that I've had the opportunity to be involved in, but every year you get involved in one major piece of legislation. It can be very taxing, especially the way I work. I'm not the type to just basically try to take something and cram it down peoples' throat. I try to get people around the table from all stakeholders, and we try to work out a consensus.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:33:31 I've worked this last year on a video franchising piece of legislation that will open up the markets for people to have more choice when it comes to their cable. I was shocked to find that in some polls that have been taken, AJC's the one I remember the most, when it comes to customer service, the lowest approval rate is with cable service, even less than flying on airplanes, or their cleaners, or anything like that, cable service was-

Mel Steely: 01:34:00 [crosstalk 01:34:00] understand that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:33:59 ... the last. I've worked for a year with all the industry folks in bringing together a piece of legislation that basically everybody can agree with and that we can benefit Georgians, and ultimately is going to bring a better product to the people of Georgia. That's an example of one of the things that I've done, and that'll be a bill that will not carry my name, and I've spent a year working on it. I believe in the Ronald Reagan philosophy that there's no limit to what a man can accomplish if he doesn't mind who gets the credit. The most important thing is getting it done so that the people benefit from it, not whose name is on it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:34:45 So I've had ... There was a bill that I did sponsor and try to pass, couldn't pass it. We called it Mandate Lite. Had to do with health insurance, trying to find a way to reduce insurance premiums so that individuals could have an opportunity to go and get some kind of health insurance that would fit them, because there are certain state mandates that people have to pay for in their premium, that they don't even need, and I just didn't feel like that was right.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:35:13 So, Senator Tim Golden, he tried to do it a term before that, then I picked it up and did it a term, and then the last two years I handed that off and helped Cecil Staton pass that piece of legislation, and finally, we finally we able to pass that piece of legislation. I was very involved in working on the compromises and getting everybody on the table on that. So, some of the things I've had an opportunity to be a part of were not ones that had my name on it.
Mel Steely: 01:35:39 Cecil seem to be enjoying being a senator now from what you can tell? We used to call him Cecil.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:35:46 Yes. I think everybody that's up here enjoys it.

Mel Steely: 01:35:51 I knew he was terribly disappointed about his congressional race.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:35:55 Yes.

Mel Steely: 01:35:56 Took him a while to get readjusted there.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:35:59 And sometimes, it's like, I didn't win the first election that I did, and a perfect example that I use, or I call on that, is Lynn Westmoreland who ran for the state senate twice, and did remarkably better than anybody ever gave him a chance, but he didn't quite get elected, and he was going for it the third time, and somebody else by the name of Pam Glanton was going to run.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:36:26 They had a meeting, and Lynn decided after that meeting that he would run for the House instead of the Senate. He got elected to the House, and look what happened to him. So, just because you didn't win the first election that you first go after, doesn't necessarily mean that you aren't going to have an opportunity to have a great influence. I mean, Lynn Westmoreland's a good friend of mine, he's a confidant, I respect him, and he is, to me, one of the most politically savvy individuals I have ever known.

Mel Steely: 01:37:00 You going to support him for governor in four years?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:37:02 Absolutely.

Mel Steely: 01:37:02 Okay.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:37:04 Unequivocally, absolutely.

Mel Steely: 01:37:07 Got you on tape here.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:37:08 You got me on tape, and I'll tell anybody that.

Mel Steely: 01:37:11 Okay, what is your biggest disappointment in the Senate in your work here?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:37:16 Well, the biggest disappointment that I have ... From a general disappointment or legislatively? Because legislatively not
passing the film bill the first time was really the biggest
disappointment for me, because I felt like we had our ducks in a
row, and even the bill that we passed wasn't as strong as that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:37:37 Personally speaking, the biggest disappointment that I have is
that is not ... is really having to come to grips with just how
insignificant I really am. What I mean by that is, you come down
here, and you want so hard to do the right thing, and there are
many times when you try to convince people ... I mean, the
facts were on your side, and for some reason you don't
articulate them as well as you should, or you haven't done the
homework that you need to, or the understanding, or ... and it
just constantly ... I tell my family, my staff, that I get humbled
every day. And there are many times I sit and struggle with
whatever the subject matter may be, of why I can't be stronger,
in being a stronger influence in being able to do the right thing,
and being respected for it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:38:29 We had a piece of legislation last year that had to do with Agios
wanting to build a pipeline, and it led to some very bad raw
feelings between the House and the Senate, and I was expected
by the Speaker of the House, and I was expected by the
sponsors of that bill, to get in and force my caucus to vote for
that bill in a certain way, whatever it would take, and I couldn't
do it. I had to represent my caucus, because my standpoint
from leadership is its going to be self-sacrificial, and they came
first.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:39:04 They didn't want the bill on there, because building that
pipeline would have raised everybody's gas bill. It was a very
sensitive issue, it was an election year, the governor already
was considered the father of gas deregulation, and we were
heading into a year for him to be reelected, and that could've
been a big issue, and if we put this gas bill out there, it would
put him in a very bad spot of whether he needed ... he would
sign that bill or he would veto the bill, and-

Mel Steely: 01:39:31 It's bad either way.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:39:32 ... and bad either way, and we were on record, for those who
did it, if we voted for it, then there's a mailer against [inaudible
01:39:41] saying we raised everybody's gas bill, which was a
sensitive issue, or if we voted against it, you'd have the Speaker
of the House out there retaliating against those members in the
Senate that didn't vote. So basically, I felt like Eric Johnson and
myself have taken some big targets by not putting that bill on
the floor. It's very disappointing that there can't be respect
amongst the House and the Senate in trying to do a job. Instead, there's that retaliation factor that's out there-

Mel Steely: 01:40:12 Always has been.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:40:13 ... and that, I guess, if you want to talk about in looking at the process, that is the thing that bothers me the most is that retaliation factor is out there, and that people will use that almost to an abusive standpoint in trying to make sure that they get their way, instead of trying to make their way and articulate the way, because if I go, and I try to convince somebody, like I said, the disappointment I have that I don't feel like I'd articulate it well enough, that's my fault. That's not their fault. If I have the facts on my side, and if I do a good job of presenting it, I ought to be able to get their support.

Mel Steely: 01:40:44 Yeah. The only time I've known it to be different was when Pierre Howard was lieutenant governor, that's been a decade ago. Pierre honestly tried to be bipartisan in his role, and he appointed two or three Republicans as chairman, that kind of thing. And what he got from both Zell and from Murphy was just total disrespect. I mean, the guy just gets pushed around, he's weak, he doesn't know what he's doing, you can't deal with him. I mean, it is hard to take that road. Now, your gut instincts are to try to be as bipartisan and work together as much as you can, but to represent your partisan group at the same time. That's not easy, is it?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:41:33 No, it's not.

Mel Steely: 01:41:34 Yeah.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:41:35 We don't ... A lot of people down here, really don't look at every issue as a Republican/Democrat issue. They look at the issue, and there are different political philosophies, and I think that out of that, those different political philosophies, you'll have those that try to represent their political philosophy, and it's opposition to what the majority's trying to do. So, it's not like you're trying to do something in a partisan way, but basically you're trying to do what you think is the right thing the right way but from your political philosophy.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:42:15 But, there are times that you, from a partisan standpoint, got to throw some bombs to try to send some messages, because the bottom line is, it ain't fun being in the minority, I can tell you that. It is not any fun. You want to be in the majority. Why do you want to be in the majority? Not from this sort of ego
standpoint, you came down here to make a difference, and to make a difference you've got to be in a position of power or a position of influence, to be able to effect changes, and to make things happen.

Mel Steely: 01:42:50 This has been good. What have we left out? The things you know about that need to be on the record, that I don't know to ask about, and I don't know what they are. Is there anything that pops into your mind that you want to get on the record?

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:43:05 Well, the ... Other than just great stories, at some point in time we can go through some of those.

Mel Steely: 01:43:16 We can do that.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:43:21 If I thought about somebody that'd be watching this years down the road-

Mel Steely: 01:43:26 Probably will be.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:43:27 ... what ... when you say that, anything that left out, what would I want them to take away from this?

Mel Steely: 01:43:33 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:43:34 At first blush, you can sit there and I would think about, what would I want them to take away from this about myself, but then again, it really is not about me. It's about service to our community and to our state. There's a story I like to tell, and I don't know why, but I'll gravitate, but there's a story I like to tell when I talk to young people. It's the story of Alexander the Great.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:44:10 Now, I will go on this record in saying that I've had some people, some historians go back and say, it wasn't really Alexander the Great, this time frame, or whatever like that, but the story as it goes to me is Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was fighting ... going into battle, took his army into battle. Alexander was a great military mind, he didn't know what defeat was, and so he and his advisors, they'd go up on a big hill, and they'd look down on the valley down below, and they watch the battle occur.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:44:45 While this battle goes along, Alexander the Great starts to notice that his army's losing. They're losing the battle, and so he turns to his advisors, and what I like to tell young people, it's always good to seek advice, but always look for the right kind of
advice. Look for those that are really looking out for your best interest. If you find somebody that's always telling you what they think you want to hear, that's not the kind of advice you need to get, because you need to have the kind of advice from people that will basically get up in your face when you're going down the wrong road, because those are the types of people you need to value. You need to find those people for those kinds of advisors.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:45:22 Alexander turned to his advisors, and his advisors basically, to a certain degree, were those kind of advisors. While they may be negative people, they thought they needed to retreat, but they told him what basically they thought the situation occurred for, and not telling Alexander what he felt like he needed to hear. Well, he was very discouraged at this, he turned away and looked at the battle a little while longer, and saw that they just kept losing, and kept losing, and kept losing.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:45:45 So finally, he ordered for the army to retreat. Turned to a young bugler boy, about middle school age, and ordered him to sound the retreat on his bugle, and the boy just stood there. Alexander the Great, his attention gone back to the battle, and was so distraught at how in the world that we could be losing the battle, and the bugle didn't sound retreat. So he turned back to the bugler, and he ordered the boy again, "Sound retreat." Boy just stood there.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:46:19 So, Alexander the Great rides over on his big white horse, glares down at the young man, and screams at him, "I ordered you, sound the retreat." And the young boy looked up at this great general, and he said, "But sir, I never learned how to sound retreat." Alexander the Great thought about that a moment, and he turned back to the young man, and he said, "Well then, son, sound the charge." And history recorded on that day that Alexander the Great and his army scored one of the greatest victories they ever had known because of one basic principle, they did not know how to retreat.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:47:04 And so many times in politics, in marriages, with children, or your parents, or in the business world, when it comes down to it a lot of times, people don't attain the dreams that they have because they learned somewhere along how to sound a retreat. If they did not know how to sound retreat, then what they would experience would be a fulfilled dream.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:47:33 So, you asked me what did we leave out, is that politics is a very admirable field. The people in it are not any better or any worse than the general public. They're not any smarter or any dumber
than the general world, because that was a real surprise to me getting up here is just how many really good people there are up here, and how many people look at politics, they think at politicians and lobbyists, and they think of people that lie all the time, and what is so unique when you get up here, that people do not understand, is your word is all you got up here, and when you can't be counted on for your word, you have no influence at all up here, and no respect.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:48:25 As the Whip, that's very important to me, when I go to somebody, "Are you going to vote for this measure?", and if they say, "Yes," and they vote no, they have no respect in my book, and if they deal with other people that way they're the ones that have no influence. Same thing with lobbyists. A lobbyist comes in and they'll tell me their side of the story, and the first thing I ask them is, "Okay, what's the other side say?" And if they cannot articulate the other side's point of view, they've got no respect, because basically they haven't helped me do my job, because my job is taking all the information, all the input, so I can try to do everything I can to find out what the right thing is to do.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:49:01 So, in doing that, and there's been many times I've had struggles up here, and there may be some people that come up here, and go to the chambers and vote, and don't take it as serious as they should, and just enjoy it, and think it's one big party, but I think those people are in the vast minority. I think there's a lot of people up here working very hard in trying to find out what the right thing is to do, and then try to find a way to have the courage to do the right thing. But there's people like that all over our community.

Mel Steely: 01:49:37 You find them everywhere, don't you? All kind of businesses.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:49:40 You find them everywhere. So, this is not any different than what you run into at your local church, or your local hardware store, and the people that you meet and all that. We're just trying to do what we can to do the peoples' business, and it's tough when you have to answer those emails, that you can't support something, but basically I have found that when you respond that you can't just respond, "I'm not going to support it."

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:50:05 You have to give them a well-articulated case of why it is that you are not going to support it, because you have to demonstrate to them that you have done due diligence on the subject matter, and basically not just come up with a vote on whether ... because of how you felt when you woke up in bed
that morning, or just at a whim, or stick your finger in the air and see which way the wind is blowing.

Mel Steely: 01:50:34 A philosophical politician.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:50:38 Gilbert Arnold's the one that taught me that, so-

Mel Steely: 01:50:42 Taught you that, right. This has been interesting, and fun.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:50:46 Well, I hope it was of value.

Mel Steely: 01:50:50 I think it is of value. Thank you, Senator. We appreciate it.

Mitch Seabaugh: 01:50:53 Thank you.

James: 01:50:54 Yeah [crosstalk 01:50:54].

Mel Steely: 01:50:54 Okay. All righty.