

An Oral History Interview

with

GEORGE “BUDDY” DARDEN (part 1)

conducted by
Julie Ferdon

Atlanta, Georgia
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George “Buddy” Darden

George “Buddy” Darden was born in Hancock County, Georgia on November 22, 1943. He received a law degree from the University of Georgia in 1967 and worked as District Attorney for Cobb County from 1973-76, after which he returned to the general practice of law. He served in the Georgia state house of representatives from 1980 until 1983, and in the United States House of Representatives from 1983-1995. While in Congress, Darden worked with Congressman Morris Udall on the House Interior Committee. Darden currently practices law in Atlanta.

JF: This is Tape 48 of the Morris K. Udall Oral History Project. Good afternoon, it's Thursday, November 16, 2000. My name is Julie Ferdon, and I'm in the Atlanta, Georgia, office of former Congressman George "Buddy" Darden.

Congressman Darden, thank you so much for participating in this project.

GBD: Well, thank you. It's a real pleasure to come and talk with you and reminisce about a man that I dearly loved and respected, Mo Udall.

JF: Let's start at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

GBD: I was born in Hancock County, Georgia, on November 22, 1943. And I turned twenty years old on the day that President [John Fitzgerald] Kennedy was assassinated.

JF: Is that right?

GBD: And that, of course, will be next week.

JF: Did that help spur you into politics perchance?

GBD: No, I had previously worked in the Washington office of Senator Richard B. Russell, whose name appears all over Georgia and Atlanta. In fact, the Richard B. Russell Building, that we can see out of—today is the federal courthouse here in Atlanta. And Senator Russell had a program in which he brought young men and women to Washington to work in patronage jobs. That's where I first really became interested in government, and I got involved. And I had just returned from Washington, back to the University of Georgia, when President Kennedy was assassinated. I'd actually seen President Kennedy the prior January when he gave his last state of the union address, and I had attended that, and so I had a very special and deep abiding interest in President Kennedy, the Kennedy administration. Of course I was familiar, at that time, with Mo's brother, Stewart, and of course had heard about him and his participation in the Kennedy administration.

JF: Had you met Stewart at all?

GBD: I had seen him on the elevator. One of the jobs that Senator Russell gave me, in addition to working in his office free, was that he got patronage jobs with us through his colleague, Senator Hayden, who at that time was the dean of the Senate, and the head of the Patronage Committee. So what the senators in those days would work out is they would get us jobs as policemen, as elevator operators, and as doorkeepers in the Senate. And our salary would be paid to do those jobs, and then we gladly worked in the office for free, folding mail and running errands for four or five more hours a day.

JF: What was your job with Senator Russell?

GBD: I had several jobs. I served as a patronage employee on the Capitol elevator bank

for about nine months. And then for about three months, I served as a Senate doorkeeper—basically escorting tourists who came to the gallery for one reason or another, to watch the Senate in session, and to assist managing the crowds in the Senate gallery. I also worked down, briefly, at the Senate reception room, and went into the floor and got senators who had been paged to come outside to see various constituents and others who did not have floor access. But as I said before, Senator Russell saw this as also a very practical way to save a little money on staff. So he asked us, and we were glad to come into the office every day and fold mail, proofread mail, to run errands, and whatever else he wanted us to do.

JF: What a fabulous experience for a young man!

GBD: Oh, it was a wonderful experience. I was a sophomore in college. I also was taking a part-time load at George Washington University at the time.

JF: Now, you graduated from University of Georgia?

GBD: University of Georgia, in 1965, with an A.B. degree; and in 1967, with an L.L.B., which became a J.D. degree, a law degree. I'm what's known as a "double dog"—the University of Georgia Bulldogs—that's our team mascot. And someone who earned both degrees at Georgia is generally referred to as a double dog.

JF: What did you do after law school?

GBD: After law school I came to Cobb County, Georgia, to serve as an assistant district attorney for the Cobb Judicial Circuit, which was one of the growing counties in the Atlanta metropolitan area. I'd grown up in a very poor county, a county which only had one lawyer—but frankly, that's all it needed. So I had really no future in rural Georgia, and I'd grown up on a family farm there, and my parents, of course, very strongly believed in the value of education. But after I'd attained my education, unfortunately I could not go back to my home town, because there were just absolutely no opportunities there. So I went to Cobb County, which is in the northwest area of the Atlanta region. It was a fastly-growing county at the time; and now, of course, is the third-largest county in the state, has roughly 700,000-750,000 people in the area. I came as an assistant district attorney. I was the first full-time assistant district attorney for the Cobb Judicial Circuit. And now, I think there's something like fifty.

JF: That was during the time of the '76 presidential election?

GBD: No, that was before. That was '67, when I got out. And of course I became an assistant district attorney.

JF: I guess I was thinking of when you were the district attorney.

GBD: Right. I stayed as an assistant district attorney up until the general election in 1972, when I was elected, as a Democrat, in a predominantly Republican county—or at

least one which was turning Republican, in 1972, after having served as an assistant for five years. Incidentally, during that time, one of my fellow assistant district attorneys was Roy Barnes and he and I worked together very closely. Then he stayed on for a short period of time after I became assistant district attorney. After he left the district attorney's office in '73, I was able to assist him to get elected to the State of Georgia Senate, in 1976, at age twenty-six. Roy Barnes is currently governor of Georgia today, and we have great hopes that he'll be reelected governor in two years for a second four-year term.

JF: I'm just curious myself: During the '76 campaign, your governor, Jimmy Carter, was running for president, and Mo Udall was as well, for the Democratic nomination. Had you heard of Mo Udall before then?

GBD: No, that's where I first heard of Mo Udall, actually. I'd seen his name in the paper, and I knew, of course, that he was the congressman from Arizona. As I recall, he'd replaced his brother in Congress, when his brother joined the cabinet in the Kennedy administration. So I kept up with politics, but no more than that. Since I was running myself for reelection in 1976, I was not that involved in the Carter campaign.

The interesting thing about Jimmy Carter is that he—and I think he'll be the first one to tell you this—was not taken very seriously as a presidential candidate. In fact, he was taken more seriously in other states than he was in Georgia.

JF: That's often the case. It was the case with Mo, too.

GBD: Right. So to assist him, the Georgia Legislature actually made the Georgia Primary in 1976, put it off 'til around May, so he could get up enough steam in other states, so that he would be regarded as a serious presidential candidate by the time he came to Georgia. Of course that strategy worked, and when the Georgia Primary rolled along, he got maybe over 80% of the vote. But he was not regarded as a serious presidential candidate up until around March or April of 1976.

Governor Carter had been elected governor and taken office in '71, left office in '74, and was not an especially popular governor. He had changed his course on several different areas, and I think President Carter would be the first to tell you that he had also run a campaign for election to governor that he would have not been particularly proud of. So Carter, though, ran an outstanding campaign, of course, for president. And his moon and the stars lined up, and to everyone's great surprise—especially the people of Georgia—he eventually was elected president.

JF: You ran for the Georgia House in 1980?

GBD: In 1980. In 1976, I ran for reelection as D.A. So while Jimmy Carter and others were being elected, I went down to defeat. I'd had a very tough and controversial case that had more or less blown up in my face. It involved a murder case of two physicians, and we had convicted the persons who were accused, and their convictions had been

upheld in the Supreme Court. But an accomplice to the murders—or at least an alleged accomplice—after the sentences were being served by the persons who were convicted, she recanted and basically said that the story she'd given to the police was not correct. And so the convictions were reversed. Largely on the basis of that, I lost reelection in 1976, and presumed that that was the end of my political career.

JF: What did you do after that?

GBD: I went into law practice by myself, and had no real plans of ever going back into political life again.

JF: What did you specialize in?

GBD: I had a general practice, kind of a small-town general practice, in which I did a few criminal cases, I did some divorces, I did some civil suits. I had a couple of clients that were rather well-heeled as well. I represented one of the railroads in their accident cases that occurred in Cobb County. So I had a pretty good general practice. It started off very, very small, from the very beginning, in 1977. And then it grew to the extent in 1980, I was looking for some other challenges.

JF: And you decided to run for the state house?

GBD: Ran for the state house, practically unopposed, and won by a very large margin. And then really enjoyed working in the general assembly. It was a wonderful opportunity, which a person liked a lot, the political aspects a lot more than the judicial side and the prosecutorial end, anyway. I'd probably still be D.A. in Cobb County, if I hadn't been defeated in 1976. So fortunately for me, I was nudged into something else.

And then I ran for reelection in 1982 and was again very, very overwhelmingly elected, practically no opposition. Then I was in the middle of my second term when, on September 1, 1983, the congressman who represented our district at that time, Dr. Larry McDonald, was aboard an aircraft on its way from Anchorage, Alaska, to Seoul, Korea. That was Korean Airlines Flight 007. And on board that plane, of course, was Congressman McDonald and 269 other people. And when the plane ventured into what was then Soviet airspace, the fighters from the then Soviet Union shot the aircraft down, killing all those persons aboard. Then-Governor Joe Frank Harris, five days later, called for a special nonpartisan election. And everyone, including me, just thought that the widow, Kathy McDonald, would automatically be elected. The governor, assuming that, set the special election for October 17, which would have been four weeks after the close of qualifying, with the runoff, if one was to be necessary, to be held November 7.

Nineteen candidates, as I recall, filed to run in the special election. And by that time Mrs. McDonald's popularity had begun unraveling somewhat, since she was not from Georgia, and since she had not appeared to be as concerned about the loss of her husband, as she was carrying out his political agenda. He was the national president of the John Birch Society at the time. So she became very vocal and outspoken and

[unclear]. So to make a long story short, on November 17, she only got 30% of the vote at the first nonpartisan special election. I came in second, at 27½%. So that forced us into a runoff, and then three weeks later I was elected on a special election to the United States Congress, where I joined Mo Udall and others, who were already in progress.

JF: So you came into the House and to the Interior Committee as a brand new congressman in the middle of a session?

GBD: Well, not exactly, because for the first term, or partial term, I served from November of 1983, through the end of 1984. I served on the Armed Services Committee, and was a temporary member of Jack Rooks' [phonetic] Government Affairs Committee. However, I always wanted to be on the Interior Committee. So I got to know Mo Udall during the partial term I served. And when I took office for my first full term, in January of 1985, it was then that I was elected to serve on the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, which he chaired at the time.

JF: What were your first impressions of Mo Udall?

GBD: He was clearly one of the most respected and beloved members of the House of Representatives. Everybody knew and liked Mo Udall. Of course we were aware of his having been one of the Young Turks years before, during the Watergate years, and had brought about some of the reforms that the House had adopted years before. But by this time, he had become a rather wise and revered elder statesman. But he always took time to talk to the younger members. Fortunately, I got to know him before his illness began. And I really got to see what I thought was the true essence of Mo Udall. I recall, of course, when he began to fail, but I had an opportunity to serve with him on the committee beginning January of 1985, until the time that his health began to deteriorate so much, which forced him to eventually resign.

We traveled together, we took one memorable trip to Alaska, in particular, that I'll be glad to elaborate more on in a little while. But he ran a good committee, he was very fair, very knowledgeable on all the issues—not overbearing in the least. And it was just a true pleasure and honor to serve on a committee of which he was chairman. He'd already earned his credentials and established his credentials by then, as the father of the Alaskan Lands Bill. ANILCA, I think, was what they called it. He had already become a senior statesman to the environmental community. And I think he was truly enjoying his last few years as a very, as I said, beloved and respected member. All the Democrats and the Republicans all loved him. I don't think I ever heard a bad word about Mo Udall the entire time I was there. Of course he would be fond of saying, with his sense of humor, that everybody becomes a statesman if you outlive your enemies. I think he told me that one time, maybe not quite in those words, but that's how he responded.

JF: Did he have any opponents on the Interior Committee?

GBD: The only opponents he had on the Interior Committee would have been ones who might have opposed a bill or a proposal he made, for philosophical reasons. Don Young

was a ranking member, even back then, as I recall. And Don Young, I assume, is still chairman of the new-named Natural Resources Committee. But Don and Mo Udall worked together quite well. In fact, Mo Udall worked well with everybody. I remember Mr. John Seiberling was the subcommittee chairman under Mo, and they seemed to have a good relationship. I believe Nick J. Rahall was head of one of the subcommittees, perhaps Energy. They worked together well. He worked quite well with the Republican members. And sure, every now and then, there'd be a contentious issue, but for the most part, it was never personal, never any degree of rancor on their committee. The main thing Mo had to do was referee some of the more outspoken members on each side, and to be sure that their tempers didn't flare up too much. But he really was the essence of civility.

People talk about the Congress now, which was more or less ushered in by Newt Gingrich in the beginning of 1995, as a rather unpleasant place to be. But in those days, I really enjoyed serving in Congress. And one of the reasons I enjoyed serving was because of men like Mo Udall. He was certainly not the only member who exhibited these qualities I've been telling you about, but he really personified the civility and the essence of respecting others' opinions. I can't think of anyone I served with that I had more respect or admiration for. And I think that was universal both among Democrats and Republicans.

JF: Yes. Tell us about the trip you took to Alaska with him.

GBD: Great trip we took. Roy Jones, our chief of staff at the time—I certainly you have a chance to interview him, because I think he could offer some very, very good insights on Mo and how he ran the committee.

JF: I was certainly hoping to.

GBD: He'll probably tell you a lot of things that were done I had no idea were going on. But Mo organized a trip to go to Alaska, and to more or less do—we kidded him and called it a “victory lap” several years after the Alaska National Wildlife Preservation—or whatever ANILCA stands for—it was passed before I came.

JF: I believe it was the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

GBD: Or something like that. But anyway, so I think this might have been one of the first times that Mo had been back to Alaska, since that thing had passed, because he was not exactly regarded as a very popular figure up there. He was somewhat jocular about it. You've heard the joke, I think, he used to tell about everyone always waved at him when he came to Alaska, but they only used one finger.

JF: (laughs) Yes, I remember that.

GBD: But anyway, the people I remember being on the trip were Bill Richardson, of course, who went on to become ambassador to the U.N. and secretary of Energy. But

Bill and I were in the same class, and both junior members on that committee. Let's see, George Miller joined the group and was there, at least for part of the way. We were met by then-Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel, who was a part of the trip.

JF: What year was this?

GBD: This had to be, I'm going to guess—it would either have been '87 or '89, right around that time. There was a congressman from New York, Bob—with an Eastern European surname. I'll think of it later on. But most of the time.... Oh, Jamie McClure Clark and his wife, Elspeth, were along. But the group of us flew by military jet to Anchorage. Then we took a smaller plane into Fairbanks, and then an even smaller plane into a place called Dead Horse. And so for the next week and a half, we worked our way down, beginning at the Arctic Circle, in which we had hearings with Indians and Eskimos about the proposed drilling in YNWR [Yukon National Wildlife Refuge]. That was Arctic Wildlife National Refuge. That was the one area that Congress left in ANILCA up to decide later on. And Mo, as you might recall, was a big opponent of opening up YNWR to drilling. I think the Republican candidate, George W. Bush, brought that up again in the campaign this year.

JF: Yes, he did.

GBD: And I certainly hope that YNWR is never, is never opened up to drilling. But Mo was very much against that. But we started off in the Indian villages around Kaktovik, and then worked our way down over a series of days, to visit virtually every portion of Alaska. In fact, we went to – probably covered more of Alaska than most Alaskans have ever been. We started off up in Prudhoe Bay, in the oil fields there, and stayed in those facilities. We went over to the Indian villages at Kaktovik, came back to Fairbanks and met with some folks there. We came back to Anchorage, where we met a number of officials, and which is where most of the people are, in Alaska, as you know. Stayed at the Captain Cook Hotel, as I recall.

Then we went off on different trips and planes to some of the national parks. I went to the Wrangell Saint Elias Park, and over to a glacier over at Kennicott. Others went in different directions, and then we met back [at Anchorage]. Then we ended up getting a boat going to Juneau, the capital, and met the governor—at that time, Steve Cooper. Spent a good bit of time with him.

Then from Juneau, I believe we went to Sitka. At least at some time we were in Sitka, which is, as you know, the old Russian capital, with the onion domes. I believe James Michener might have been in residence at the time—or he had been there when he wrote his book, *Alaska*. We went fishing on Sitka Bay, some of us—Bill Richardson and I did, at least.

Then we went from Sitka on down to Ketchikan. And then I believe we flew out of Ketchikan, back to Portland, and then back to Washington, D.C.

JF: What was it like to travel with Mo?

GBD: Oh, he was so entertaining. He always had a story or always had an experience. And of course, as you know, he chronicled a number of these stories in *Too Funny to be President*, which I think I bought about ten copies of that book and had him autograph them. I was very proud of those, and of course I still have my own copy. He always said that once you told a joke, it became part of the public domain, and there was no original story. Nobody had an original joke, it was just one you hear from somebody else and pass along. So he always said he was somewhat shameless about telling somebody else's story. They're all in the public domain.

Most of the time, the stories he told, of course, were self-deprecating, which always put everybody at ease. You've heard the story he must have told a hundred times.... It was funny every time he told it. He could tell the same stories over and over and over, and you'd still laugh, honestly.

JF: That's so true.

GBD: Such as the one about, when he goes in and tells somebody in the barbershop he's Mo Udall, running for president, and the guys says, "Oh, we were just laughing about that this morning." But every time he told it, it was still funny.

JF: How was Mo's health on that trip?

GBD: Mo's health was pretty good on that trip. I remember when he started failing, it was dramatic how quickly. First of all, it started off maybe a little slowly, but then he failed dramatically.

JF: Do you have any sense of when that was?

GBD: You need to help me a little bit. When did he resign? Was that '91?

JF: That was 1991, in April.

GBD: In April of '91. Okay, so we'd just been—to put this in the right order—that means that we had just come into [President George H.W.] Bush's second Congress, and we'd just voted on the Gulf War, or earlier, early in January of that year. All right, I remember him at the end of a previous Congress—I don't believe it was the immediate Congress before then that ended in '90. But it must have been the end of the year in '88 or '89, in which the Congress is trying to wrap up its business. And we did an all-nighter one night, and we finally voted on the last bill around seven o'clock in the morning. And we were all sitting around in our offices, half asleep, and mad and irritable, and I never will forget, as I was leaving the floor, coming back to the Canon Office Building, at seven in the morning, having just voted—and of course the time had not yet expired—I met Mo Udall on the elevator. Here he was, older, beginning to show some signs of failing health, but here he is at seven o'clock in the morning, trudging over there, casting

a vote, just like the rest of us. And I thought to myself, “What do I need to worry about? Here I am”—I was in my mid-forties at the time, or late forties—“If Mo Udall can handle this, I think I can do it and quit complaining.”

But it must have been, if I can elaborate a little bit, if he resigned in ‘91, it wouldn’t have been at the end of ‘90. It probably would have been at the end of a Congress in ‘88. That’s my best guess. Or maybe even at the end of a year in ‘89. But I’m inclined to think it was ‘88, because he still would have had sufficient faculties, even though it would have taken its toll on him, he was still in there swinging ‘til the end. And he tried. That’s the main thing I remember about Mo, up until the time he resigned. He kept on trying until he was just physically unable to do the job. I remember the last Congress in which he served, he was still the chairman, but George Miller began to be—I think George was elected acting chairman.

JF: In ‘91, after Mo fell down the stairs of his apartment in Arlington, and was in the hospital, and then a nursing home. And I think between that time, and the time he resigned, George Miller acted as chair.

GBD: Right.

JF: Did there come a time, before Mo fell, that you thought perhaps he was no longer able to carry on his duties as chairman?

GBD: Well, I never had that many discussions with anyone. There were a couple of members who were—I won’t say vocal about it, but expressed some concerns. I think Mo tried his best to stay in there. And toward the end, before he fell, I think had not this event specifically precipitated his leaving, I think he probably would have stopped, because it was becoming increasingly difficult for him. My heart went out to him, because he had all of his mental faculties, but couldn’t physically do what had to be done. I remember he had so many difficulties maybe holding his head up, and making a word come out. But it was very clear, he had all of his mental faculties, but his brain could not transmit to his head or to his arms or to his legs, what he was trying to do. So it had to be—I know it had to be especially tormenting and frustrating for him.

JF: Were there any members of the committee who actually approached him and suggested to him personally that he resign his position?

GBD: Not to my knowledge. Now, again, I was not in the hierarchy of the committee. I was among the junior members, even though a few came after I did. There wasn’t that much turnover on the committee—especially on the Democratic side. There was a lot of turnover on the Republican side. In fact, John McCain, I remember, used to be on the committee at one time. I served with him on the Interior Committee. Who, incidentally, I hope you have a chance to interview as well—if you haven’t already—because he’d give a lot of insight into Mo. I think he would be one to tell you how well Mo treated the Republican and minority members, as well. This doesn’t mean he had to roll over to them on the issues or votes or anything like that, but how civilly he treated everyone. But

I never had those discussions, and I heard some talk among a couple of the more—one or two of the more senior members.

JF: Do you remember who those were?

GBD: I remember one. The only person I heard who—as fate would have it, he died the other day—that was Bruce Vento. Bruce was chairman of one of the committees. He expressed some frustration. But he's the only one I think I ever heard make mention.

JF: When Mo resigned, what was the reaction? When he did fall and injure himself, and his health took a real turn for the worse, and he was unable to return to Congress or to the chairmanship of the committee, what was the reaction among members of the committee?

GBD: Well, first of all, we all looked at it as an inevitability. We knew that had he not fallen, or had a precipitating event not taken place, as deeply as we regretted it, everybody knew it was for the best. It's painful to say that, but the Mo that we had come to know and love had just become unable, essentially, to function. So we deeply regretted it. Of course unfortunately we didn't get a chance to spend any time with him, because it just happened. For lack of a better word, there was no closure in this and many of us, who would have liked to been able to talk and say things to him, and spend some time with him, that didn't get that opportunity.

I remember it was, very fortunately, he got married around that time, because it was sad to see someone who'd been so physically strong and virile, to be placed in a situation where he literally had to be helped along everywhere he went. And I know this was so terribly painful for him.

JF: And for his family.

GBD: Yes.

JF: George Miller became chairman after that. How would you compare them as chairmen—their style, their effectiveness?

GBD: Well a couple of major differences. First of all, George was a whole lot younger. And George, philosophically, would probably be more liberal than Mo. Mo was from a public lands state, and he understood not only the merits for the preservation of public lands, but he had also dealt with the other interests. He frankly saw two sides of the public lands issues, better than George did. George, being from California, being a very strong environmentalist himself, didn't see the other side of the resource argument quite as easy as Mo. Now, Mo and George would probably usually come down in the same place, but George was a little more brash, George was a little more—I wouldn't use the word "harsh"—but a little more confrontational than Mo. Of course it didn't make any difference to me, because I was from the eastern United States, and particularly the South. I didn't mind sticking it to the cattlemen on grazing fees, and to the miners and all these other people, whenever I got the opportunity. And George, I assure you, didn't.

But I guess I would say that Mo was a little more measured in his approach, and a little less aggressive in some ways.

JF: How did Mo use his humor as a committee chairman?

GBD: Oh, he could always defuse a potential outburst or a potential serious confrontation. He could do that. And George—and again, you’ve just got a different style, and different person, and different area he represented—but after Mo left—and this is the other side of it, just so we need to be totally fair to George—Is that Republicans, because of Mo’s stature, did not challenge him as often as they would challenge George. And George was a much easier target than Mo would have been. So the Republicans.... The committee became far more partisan after Mo left. But it’s not all George’s fault. In fact, it’s probably more the Republican’s fault than the Democrats, because Mo’s presence—I mean, the aura about the man, you didn’t challenge Mo, and you certainly didn’t confront him on anything of a personal nature, unless it was an extraordinary situation.

JF: Did you ever see Mo again after he resigned?

GBD: No, never saw him again.

JF: In 1994, you were unseated by Congressman Bob Barr. I understand that it was sort of a rough campaign, where he accused you, labeled you as being a Clinton ally.

GBD: Oh, yes.

JF: I just wonder if your friendship with Mo, who had such a liberal image, hurt you at all in that campaign?

GBD: Oh! absolutely not. Oh, absolutely not. That was the year, you know, of the tsunami, they call it, when a large number of Democrats—something like thirty or more—lost their seats. This was a Clinton mid-year, two years after Clinton had come in. For whatever reason, I lost, and I don’t blame anybody for my losses, certainly. I think, if anything, I was a little better candidate, and probably a lot more effective congressman because of Mo. So no, not at all, not at all. Mo was a very strong environmentalist. I became more sensitized to environmental issues because of him. But no, I would say absolutely not.

Of course, President Clinton’s a different story. We had to make some very, very difficult votes during the first two years of the Clinton administration, which turned out to be the right thing, but they were very politically painful at the time. So if there were external factors leading to my being defeated in 1994, it would have been due to that, more than anything else.

JF: So you came back here to practice law?

GBD: Came back to Georgia. See, I never moved to D.C. I always went up on the weekends. That's a very short hop, as you know, from here. You've got Delta leaving every hour on the hour to D.C.

JF: That's convenient.

GBD: I virtually commuted, at least on a weekly basis.

JF: And you're now with Long, Aldridge & Norman?

GBD: That's right.

JF: What kind of law do you practice?

GBD: We're a full-service law firm. We have a Washington office as well, which I occasionally do some work out of. But I've kind of redefined and re-envisioned myself through the years. I stay very active in Democratic politics. I was a delegate to the '96 and 2000 conventions. I mentioned my relationship with Governor Barnes, and in that context, I chair the Judicial Nominating Commission for him, in which when judicial vacancies occur—we have nonpartisan judges in Georgia—and I chair the commission that handles the notices of vacancies, and the qualifications assessment, and eventually we narrow the list of nominees down from three to five for all judgeships for the governor to consider. So that takes about, oh, maybe 25-30% of my time. That's pro bono work, of course. In fact, it costs money for the firm. They end up paying the expenses of doing it, as well. That's an eighteen-person commission I chair, statewide, and that takes a lot of my time.

I represent several major clients on a consulting basis that I give strategic and political advice to. But the main thing I'm working on today—and my experience with Mo and the Interior Committee served me quite well—and that is Georgia and Alabama and Florida are involved in a disagreement over the allocation of the waters, over two major river basins. One is the ACF Basin, which stands for Apalachicola, Flint, and Chattahoochee River Basins, which runs through Atlanta, from north Georgia, and goes down to Florida, and into the Gulf of Mexico. And the other major basin is the ACT, which stands for the Alabama, Coosa, and Tallapoosa Basin, which emanates up in north Georgia, and goes through the state capital, Montgomery, Alabama, and into the Gulf of Mexico.

We are currently, and have been in a long-standing disagreement with Alabama and Florida over the allocation of those waters. And Governor Barnes, and Attorney General Thurgood Baker have appointed me and our firm to serve as special outside counsel for the state. And I'm spending most of my time now trying to work to reach an agreement with those states for the equitable allocation of the waters in those basins, pursuant to a compact that was passed by the states and by the federal government.