

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

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INTERVIEW WITH DAVID WILKERSON

COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 11

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 11
Interview with David Wilkerson
Conducted by Jay Lutz, William Walker and Robyn Gagne
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Location: Georgia Room, main Cobb County Public Library, Marietta, Georgia

JL: Thanks for coming in this morning on a Saturday and doing the interview with us. Let's get started with a little bit about your background, where you were born and what your birthday was?

DW: I was born in Ft. Dix, New Jersey, the son of an army sergeant and a stay at home mom. That was in 1969. I am forty years old, I guess approaching forty-one as my kids remind me. I grew up my whole life in New Jersey and ended up going to college in North Carolina at North Carolina A&T and then graduated in '91 with an accounting degree and then moved to Georgia right after that.

JL: How did you decide on North Carolina?

DW: A lot of people in my area went to North Carolina A&T, one of the historically black colleges and I ended up going there. I was torn between accounting and engineering and they had good programs in both. My brother was going to A&T and so I ended up going down there as well.

JL: Did you grow up on the base or were you outside?

DW: Outside the base. We spent a lot of time on the base. I worked at the commissary growing up, you know, I remember going to the gym and next to the gym was a church and a movie theater. So I remember those days growing upon the base. We lived off the base but spent a lot of time on.

JL: What was it like growing up the son of a military man?

DW: I ended up being born on the tail end so he didn't have to travel a lot. He had gotten out of Vietnam and then after that he was pretty much local and then he ended up retiring in '75. It was nice going to the swimming pool and the movie theater and paying seventy-five cents while all of my cousins off base were paying \$3.00 so it's unique. It's very integrated on a military base so I enjoyed that as a child.

JL: What did he do in the army?

DW: Infantry.

JL: What rank did he make?

DW: Sergeant major. He finished retirement with an E-9.

JL: Do you remember any stories about your grandfather?

DW: Not a lot because he was older and I just remember seeing him a lot. A really tall guy. But my dad did start a Boys Club in his father's name, the John Addison Wilkerson Boys Club and he started that in New Jersey after retiring from the military.

JL: What town in New Jersey?

DW: Pemberton.

JL: That's midway between Philadelphia and New York.

DW: It's about forty-five minutes from Philadelphia and it's kind of a farm kind of town. I realize that now going back, not growing up. I didn't realize it but then again, picking blueberries and different things; I guess it was a farm kind of town.

JL: How did you decide on accounting?

DW: I was good with numbers so it was either math or accounting and there seemed to be a lot more accounting jobs out there. So I ended up pursuing accounting and then becoming a CPA.

JL: After graduation, did you go right to Deloitte & Touche?

DW: Yes, finished up, graduated from A&T and then went directly to Deloitte and Touche in Atlanta.

JL: Your bio has Deloitte and Touche as top four.

DW: At the time it was a big six accounting firm and now they're down to four accounting firms. So yes, it's one of the top four largest accounting firms in the world. I interviewed with all of them and ended up liking Deloitte.

JL: I don't know much about accounting firms but I know Deloitte and Touche and KPMG are pretty much the two largest.

DW: Yes.

JL: What type of role did you have there? What types of accounts did you handle?

DW: Auditor. I started off in the auditing, manufacturing clients, I got to go all over Georgia, banks, some credit unions, insurance companies; it was a nice mix of clients, medium sized. I didn't go to one large client all year so that gave me a chance to see different industries in different parts of the state.

JL: Sure. What year did you start with them?

DW: In '91—'91 to '94.

JL: And that's when you moved to Cobb County?

DW: Yes.

JL: When did you start getting involved in politics?

DW: Like a lot of people, probably around the '92 presidential election. Meaning that when I say a lot of people, presidential elections are what draw you out every four years and then you kind of pop in and then you get used to it and then you come back a couple of years later and then you meet more people. So '92 was probably the first time that I actively started getting involved going to some of the Young Democrat meetings.

JL: Did you do anything political while you were at college?

DW: Just vote. That was it. Yes, it's interesting for a person that didn't study, that didn't really care for history a lot or political science, or anything. I think I even tried to get out of political science in college. But you know, just being where I am now and getting involved I guess it's kind of a change.

JL: What was your first step with getting into politics?

DW: The first step was probably going to some of the Young Democrat meetings both in Fulton County and in Cobb County. Meeting a lot of the people that I still know today and just volunteer to campaign. Show up, you need some help? And then you pass out flyers, make some phone calls and then you go home and do it again the next time.

JL: Sure. We spoke a little bit before about the gerrymandering case that you were a part of. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got involved in that?

DW: Yes, I had been involved in politics by that time, probably ten years in various forms or fashions and right at the 2000 census you have to redraw the political boundaries and at that time there were four county commissioners in Cobb County, they were all Republican, there were no African-Americans and then there was a chairman. When they (the Legislature) redrew the lines, they basically realized that the southern part of the county, the Six Flags area, the central Cobb area had changed significantly from the last census. Went from 20-something percent African American to over 30 percent. Which means that the electoral make-up would be different. So instead of redrawing the lines and be done with it, they basically took the district from Six Flags all the way up to Acworth. And so seeing that, there's a battle down in the legislature, we fought it and then you know it ended up going to a court. So then they started needing citizens to get involved. In any case you have to have a plan. Myself and two others joined in to try to stop it and just go with keeping districts together.

JL: Do you remember, was this case presented as a class action suit or was it an individual suit?

DW: It was three individuals. It was Mark Bell, Tanya Lawrence, and myself.

JL: And your attorney, do you remember his name?

DW: Lee Parks.

JL: Okay. Does he specialize in voting rights?

DW: Lee Parks is, yes, he's one of the large, I guess, well known voting rights attorneys in Georgia. I want to say he does a lot of political stuff as well. At the time, I want to say he was Mark Taylor's lawyer as well for some different issues that he had when they came up.

JL: And funding from the case came from?

DW: Individuals in the community. I want to say the Cobb County Democratic party did give \$700 out of the \$5,000 that we had to raise, or it might have been \$1100 out of \$5,000 but yes, the majority was just raised straight out of the county and churches, and people giving money.

JL: I know from what I've looked at in the case of *Grogan v. Hunter* is that for a period of time people didn't realized that gerrymandering had occurred because no one on paper had seen the map, the boundaries the way. Was that the same case here and what were people's reactions when they actually saw the make up of the wards?

DW: You're right, because typically what happens is you go to vote on election day and you vote for somebody and the next time you go back and you see the same number and you just vote. You as a voter don't necessarily look at the map because you're not going to see it when you go to vote. In this case we had to make everything visual so what we did was we put up the before and the after and then that told a huge story all by itself so we printed up, you know, thousands of flyers and handed them out but once people saw the visual aspect of it they were just shocked. Even the county commissioners couldn't explain it, they were just saying, we played politics, that's all it's about. They were quoted as saying that.

JL: When the lines were drawn after the census and this was the 2000 census, was it submitted, section 5 for pre-clearance?

DW: Yes, and that's when we got involved, during the pre-clearance stage. If it wasn't for the pre-clearance then yes, we wouldn't have even had a chance because they would have just drawn the maps. So I'm a big fan of the pre-clearance only because I see it's impact, even in districts that you would say are not fifty percent African American —it doesn't have to be a majority/minority district in my opinion. It just needs to be one where you

have influence and significant influence. We determined over the years, as we look at the numbers, it is about 29 percent. I think in this case we ended up proving that out.

JL: Do you remember your attorney that argued a section 5 violation or did he pursue a different route?

DW: Yes. They went the section 5 route, and it was our attorney and I think the commissioners had four or five attorneys on their side and the judge ended up ruling in our attorney's favor.

JL: Do you remember the argument they were presenting?

DW: The argument they presented, was it's political, it's just purely political, that was one. That there's nothing stopping anybody from doing Democrat versus Republican. If we're trying to get a Republican in office, you know, there's nothing wrong with that, which the courts have found is true. They also argued that there was no influence. They argued you can't have influence unless you have 50 percent African American, which the judge didn't agree with. I disagreed with them and the attorney disagreed with it, so I think we were all on the same page except for the other attorneys at the time that said significant influence doesn't start until 50 percent.

JL: What was your reaction when the decision came down?

DW: Looking back on it, almost a year after the process starts, you're happy, you're excited, you're glad that it's over. You're glad that the process worked the way that it's supposed to. I was glad that the commissioners decided to stop where they did because after the first ruling I think the legislature would have kept going. I mean, Earl Ehrhart who sponsored the map is the same one that tried to get rid of affirmative action in all of Georgia. So that just kind of gives you an indication. So I am glad that we had a good attorney. I'm glad that the commissioners backed off. It was also good that one of the commissioners who made this comment. There was a room full of church members, and we waited for a couple of hours because there were other things going on before we had a chance to speak and he said, "I have no idea what this map has to do with section 5 and the voting rights act." So the good thing is it opened up a whole new opportunity to educate somebody. Well, that's what it's about. I mean, you're impacting people's lives by your decision on that board so I think his viewpoints have changed and actually I got a friend out of it.

JL: Sure. It's definitely confusing for someone who is not familiar with Section 5, it can be a little overwhelming at first. Okay, so you've decided, you filed your paperwork in July to run for legislature.

DW: Yes, I decided to run for the legislature. Well, first, after finishing up my chairmanship for the Democratic party, I tried to figure out what I was going to do next and looking at different opportunities. I got a lot of encouragement to seek the seat down in the Thirty-third. It's one of the areas that has changed in the county a lot. People expect the

legislator to be out there and be involved and be visible and so I've been trying to do that. It's been a good process so far.

JL: Tell me a little bit about your district.

DW: The district is probably the most diverse in Cobb County. When I say the most diverse, not meaning one way or the other it's the most diverse as far as registered voters. It is 45 percent African American and 45 percent white and 10 percent other. So it's the most racially balanced district I guess in the county. We've lived there pretty much in that same general area since I moved to Georgia and people have been very receptive. I would be the first African American male legislator in Cobb County so that comes up every once in awhile, but not very often.

JL: You were the Democratic Party leader. How was that? Tell me about your role with that?

DW: I enjoyed it. I started with the Young Democrats of Cobb County and ended up doing the Young Democrats of Georgia as treasurer—I get treasurer a lot because of being a CPA—

JL: You're typecast!

DW: Oh yes. Every time I go somewhere, whether it's church, being an elder, finance committee, you know, but I moved from the Young Democrats to the Cobb County Democratic Committee. I was the treasurer and then I ended up being the first vice chair and then chairman this last term. It was exciting. It was the first time in years that we had a presidential office—got to drive the campaign person around to find two offices in Cobb County, so it was an exciting time.

JL: How closely were you involved with the last presidential election?

DW: Very closely. As a county party our job is to elect local people. But what we did, we had a great job of balancing with Jacob Klein who was with the Obama campaign. Balancing their resources and the two offices they had with our local experience and expertise and it was a great combination. I was in there every day; we could provide some things and give an insight as to where to go and all that. We just had a reunion about a month ago. A one-year reunion with a lot of the Obama campaign. So I kind of lucked out as far as timing but it worked out really well.

JL: Where were you the night of the election? Do you remember?

DW: That was another one of the joint efforts. We ended up sponsoring, the Democratic party, we ended up sponsoring the victory celebration that night so I was down at Zucca's pizza. I just remember that we had the room—my family lives in Virginia—and so we were watching the tv and then tObama is getting closer and getting closer and I think Virginia was right there and pushed it over. I remember being on the phone with my sister in this

little corner while everybody is celebrating in the other room and this little tear popping up a little bit, It was an emotional time to be involved in that and see that and be with all the people that have worked so hard. A lot of these people were new to politics, but they had a lot of energy. So if anything came out of it, it was just getting people more involved in the process.

JL: I know you're also very active in your church. Tell me your role there.

DW: We now attend Macland Presbyterian Church. We are, I guess I would say, active members. Prior to that we attended another Presbyterian church, Calvary Presbyterian in Marietta, where we were both elders. We both served as elders and I think I was on the finance committee over there as well. But we ended up, when we had our children, moving to a slightly larger church with more activities for children, so we attend regularly. We didn't grow up Presbyterian, we basically, before getting married, started looking at different churches and kind of found a home in the Presbyterian church and we enjoy it. The kids are going to be in the Christmas play. One's a shepherd and one's an angel, so I think it's great for the kids to grow up that area.

JL: Tell us a little bit about your family.

DW: My wife, Penny, is from Illinois originally, Springfield. She grew up on her family farm. They were tenant farmers in the bean, wheat and corn. She grew up there and when she was ten, she moved to the big city of Springfield from Williamsville and they had a Laundromat. She grew up there and her family was very active in politics on the wrong side, but-no, I'm just kidding! A lot of them were very active on the Republican side in southern Illinois. So she grew up around politics and she grew up going to fairs., They had a booth at the fair all the time, so she enjoys getting out a lot. So the good thing about running for office is that we get a chance to go to different places and meet different people and she loves that, which is very helpful to me because you want your family with you. Because you get to spend time together, and if it's something they enjoy it's kind of nice. My kids are six and seven, David, Jr. and Olivia. David, Jr. is the oldest and they have been licking envelopes probably for five years now. I remember the last election, we were leaving a breakfast because I'll take them with me sometimes, and they're like, "I want to go to knock on doors." And I was like, "Okay, let's go knock on doors." So they like to knock; it doesn't last that long, but they like to do it so they've been working yes. Probably since three and four is when they started, licking envelopes, doing stamps, all that stuff.

JL: How did you meet your wife?

DW: I met her at work. We both worked at World Travel, I was the Divisional controller and she had worked on the IBM project and so we just met and kind of started dating and ended up being married years later.

JL: You are part of the Dad's club and you're also active in the PTA. Tell me about what it means to be a father to you.

DW: It means a lot. I enjoy spending time with the kids and we do a lot of different things together. I mean, like watching them play sports. The Dad's club is something that this guy Ed Richardson started. PTA's are typically not full of a lot of men and he was one of the vice president. He didn't like being the only guy, so he went to this conference and they talked about ways to get dads involved. So he started this dad's club where the dads would come in to the school once a month or whenever Ed tells us to which is pretty much once a month and say, these are opportunities that we have. It can be reading, I think on the seventeenth of this month, we will be reading to the students and then passing out ribbons before school. We have built an outdoor classroom. During the fall festival we were responsible for working the booths, so it's a great opportunity. It makes it easy for the dads to get to school, because they come in at 7:30, get some coffee, donuts and then they go on the morning news with the kids. Nowadays everything is broadcast on television. They have a little television studio and the dads get to come in there and say, "Good morning, David, good morning, Olivia," and wave at our kids and then we go do something for an hour. Like I said, it's a great opportunity to get us in the school, get us out, and then you get familiar with it. Now dads will walk through the school and it's funny, they'll say, "Your so-and-so's dad, you're so-and-so's dad." So it's really cool because even if their dads can't make it or maybe their dad's are not involved, they like seeing male figures in the school. Especially when there are only two male teachers. They appreciate that and so it not only touches you but it touches your children and you see how it brightens them up. I try to get to the school and read as much as possible. My wife is there a lot more than me. Fortunately she's able to do that. A child the other day saw her with a visitor badge and he said, "Why do you have a visitor badge on, you work here." She said, "No, I really don't." But she's there every day doing things. Between the ballet, the gymnastics, the karate, the soccer, you know, we've got to enjoy it because they're already six and seven and it seems like yesterday that they were born.

JL: Is education going to be one of the platforms that you make strong in your campaign?

DW: It is. Unfortunately a lot of times you want to get involved and you don't. Because you're so focused on your own child. So I try to use my political involvement and my community service involvement to get other involved. When we're sitting in a meeting and parents are saying, "What about this, what about that?" And I can talk about how other schools are doing it because I will always look at other schools that are doing things to see if that is something we want to do. So if you get outside your box, you get to see different things, and you get to see what's good about what you're doing, what others are getting that you're not getting that you might need to talk about. I think there still are some inequities in a lot of ways. I think a lot of that is about education too, if you tell people about it, then they'll know. With education, yes, my focus is more on enabling parents, like the Ed Richardson's of the world who want to start dads clubs and be able to do what they want to do in the schools and to give them that flexibility and freedom without getting in their way. Because sometimes they're down at the capital voting and maybe their children have graduated or maybe they're too busy doing something else or maybe they've never had children. So they don't talk to the teachers or talk to the parents that are in the schools. They don't see the impact of votes. Something as simple as, well,

you tell a school they have to take a child and as long as they get transportation but nobody has defined what transportation is. So a parent can stick them on a bus that drops off a mile away, and that child is left with walking to that school and there's nothing that school can do about it. Even though they care about this child, because transportation has never been defined. So things as simple as that that if you got out and talked to people then you might hear,

JL: What do you foresee as maybe some of the challenges of the campaign?

DW: Challenges of the campaign. Running against an incumbent that's been there twelve years. Cobb County is still, you have a lot of people that grew up together, a lot of the legislators grew up together and so they have those friendships, Even within the party, someone that's been involved in the party as long as I have, you know, going on parts of two decades. You're still running against an incumbent and they're trying to protect incumbents and their job is to make sure that the incumbent is protected sometimes even though it may not be the best for the district. The incumbent will have a lot more money than I will, but I have a lot more volunteers and we'll raise enough money to run a good race.

JL: Do you foresee race being an issue?

DW: I was asked that. I was asked early on, somebody said, well, you don't have to get a white vote based on the demographics of the primary. It's probably going to be about 65 percent African American in the primary. My only response was, well, the two responses, one, hopefully people won't look at race when they're running because I think everybody wants somebody (their elected official) that's going to be there to answer the phone and talk to them. Two, I get at least one white vote because my wife is white. So I think I'm going to be okay because it's about what's best for the district. Who's going to be there to answer your phone calls, who's going to fight for the commission map, who's going to fight for Milford Elementary when they're trying to run a road through it, I mean those type issues that people care about versus just race. You have to have substance.

JL: In your campaign, will you use the case that you won, the gerrymandering case to raise support?

DW: I think it's important. We haven't really talked about it because well, I'm trying to think if I even have it mentioned on the website yet. We may mention it briefly. I don't know, but I do have it on my business cards, but we'll talk about it just because I think it's part of the education process. What we're trying to do is not only run my race but balance my activist side of my campaign. Education is always important, to see where we've come, where we've been and why it's important to have somebody fighting down there. You want a legislator that's going to be fighting for us versus just having citizens. It was not an easy task to have people from the community trying to organize this, it's a lot easier if you have someone actually sitting at the table and taking part in that process.

JL: One of the things that I'm also looking at in the *Grogan v. Hunter* case is the decision was made in June of '75 and the next year, the next election of '77 Mr. Grogan did use the redistricting as a platform that he ran on.

RG: I do. How is it hard, because, you're kind of introducing yourself as well as running, right, you haven't run before?

DW: Actually being chairman of the party people, at least I have some name ID I was kind of in the background but still communications would go out or we would have different events so they would hear about it and me., I tried to make sure that people knew about the different candidates, so they got to hear about me somewhat. In 2004 I ended up running after the commission map, did not win the primary and ended up losing to Annette Kesting and then, I was treasurer at the time so I just kind of stayed with the party and worked with candidates. As far as introducing myself, it's been pretty receptive, because even people have said they've kind of heard my name or people will say they've met me and know me because they saw me in the Obama office every day or they've seen me working on behalf of other candidates. Even if they say, well, you know what, I've never heard from you but I've never heard from the other guy. He's been there twelve years. You just have to go out, so that's a good start. Worse case scenario I have to explain and introduce myself but then my opponent has to explain where he's been twelve years. That's the big difference.

JL: What are some of the issues that the incumbent has that you think he can take advantage of?

DW: The biggest issue is that people don't know him. It's hard to get him to return phone calls sometimes. That's what people say, and I can believe that, Running against an incumbent is a process and you've got to think about it and I got a lot of encouragement to do it. I called him in November, December, January, April. You know, so I can believe it, I believe it's a little difficult. Like I said, when issues come up, people want someone that's going to take an active role. Even if it's not your responsibility, that may not be the realm that you're in, you need to give people guidance. Because you are kind of the contact person for the community. If something comes up and it's really a county commission issue, you can say, "Well, that's a commission issue and let me call so-and-so and tell them you're calling." I'll give you a perfect example of that. We had a campaign event over at the Ron Anderson community center and somebody had asked some questions about, well, would this be handled by the legislature and I was like no, that's really a local issue. But you don't stop there, this is your county commissioner, give him a call, let me know what you hear and we'll check. So when I see him I'm like did you get a chance to talk to him?" That kind of thing so you follow up because it's not a lot of work but it saves that person a ton of time and it helps that person because you want your elected officials to work well together so I'm glad that some of the school board members support me, we have good relationships. I feel if I come into office, that I'll have good relationships all around because some people can't publicly say we support you but they'll say, well, when you get in I'm sure we can work together. I think July 21

we will coalesce and I'll just run a campaign that's focusing on what I hope to do for the community.

JL: Has anyone come out publicly yet in support?

DW: I haven't asked a lot of people. I get a lot of advice and people have been very helpful all along. And when I say advice, I mean, helpful thinking like, what do you think, this is what you need to do, kind of advice. But I wouldn't want to put them in that situation because like I said, going down to the capital, running against an incumbent is always tough. Unless they're getting behind the train, so the train's going to start moving first, you know, the different organizations have been supportive saying we think you've got a good shot of winning, we think you can win but we've got to stay back because we have to balance unless we see the tide turning. Alison Bartlett on the school board, we work closely together, she comes to all my campaign events, she's probably the only one right now that's publicly saying we want you in there.

JL: Have any groups come out in support yet?

DW: Not as far as groups. What we're trying to do right now is just talk to everybody and talk to individuals. I am glad that all of the Obama staffers that were in Cobb County are supporting me. There were three paid staffers as well as all the campaign workers and they're pretty much on board. Those are the people who actually got to see me working and had never met Don [Wix]. I mean, that's the one thing, you have a presidential office in your district and you almost lose. You win by a hundred-something votes and you don't show back up after your primary to help out the other Democrats, especially at the top of the ticket. I think people kind of remember that. I think that's a benefit. After the first of the year, what usually happens with groups is they'll look at how much money you raised, and then they'll say, well, you're doing all right so we'll kind of throw it in. Money comes to those that don't need it as much.

JL: The NAACP can't endorse politicians either way for any side of the race, being a non-profit. Have you worked with the NAACP before, what type of interactions if any?

DW: None from a political standpoint. Because I've been so involve in politics, it's more of an informational participation of things that they need to be involved in because you do have to keep those boundaries. I'm a lifetime member of the NAACP. When the case came up I brought Deane up to speed. Ms. Bonner. So I stop by frequently just to see how things are going and kind of let her know what's going on but she has a role and her role is different than my role. We may have the same goals sometimes, but you have to make sure those are separate because she's got to work with everybody and you don't want any tagging of a political type thing. But we invite her to every event that we have. But yes, you know, I think the NAACP definitely serves a significant role in the community. When they had their celebration, we went to a baseball game and I was on the bus with everybody else, so I do participate in the activities of NAACP. But that is separate, just like when I get to my church and I'm an elder., You know, when I was an elder at my old

church, I'm not David the Democrat or candidate so you have to separate those different roles.

JL: Was that the Rome Braves game that you went to?

DW: No, we actually went to the Gwinnett stadium. That was a nice trip over there.

JL: What other local politicians are active in what you're doing?

DW: In what I'm doing? Visibly I would say none really. But like I said, I do have frequent conversations and like I said, people have been very supportive. The other thing they're good about is, if rumors start up they've been good at letting me know the rumors and squashing the rumors because in a campaign like this part of the time is going to be spent, well, does he have an agenda, is he part of a movement by one of the other legislators to take over. Because that was one of the rumors that I was part of a conspiracy by Alisha Morgan to take over the Cobb delegation when I was running as a candidate. Which is kind of funny because I remember when she came on board I had already been involved in party politics for ten years. She's a representative and she wouldn't do that but you know those type of rumors, you stop those. They've been good about letting me know what's going, if something's happening, you know, "You might want to watch out for this" so you know what things are coming up. That's as much as I can ask. Everybody is going to run their own race. You have to focus on your own race but at the same time it's good to have that support.

JL: It's still early too. Our contacts, it's about the people in the community and I think they're the ones that are going to decide it. You'll get mailers, in a situation where a type of campaign mailer will come out, but you'll get mailers and that will speak for the other side, but we'll do mailers door to door and everything.

JL: When you win the election next year what are going to be some of the first things that you do when you get in office?

DW: Even prior to taking office and winning, part of the campaign we will start town hall type meetings next year. We'll get out and meet new people, whether people show up or whether they don't we'll have them. And over time, they will start to build but you have to have that ability for people—how can people get involved if they don't know who to get involved with? So what we'll do is we'll start having these meetings where people can come in, voice their opinions and say what's on their mind and try to help people that way. Part of it, is that a lot of people want to get help but they don't even know where to go. The other thing, time will have to be spent, as long as I've been in politics, there will still be certain things about the legislature that I'll have to learn and understand. But votes you can count on for me, I'll be friendly on the environment, and education issues. Like I said, they will be very important, looking at the funding, trying to get a good understanding. Being one of the few CPA's down there, that will be one of the first things is trying to get a good understanding of what actually is in the budget. I came onto the F&T Committee this year, the Facility Technologies Committee for the School board,

and one of the things we've always had an argument over is in sourcing versus outsourcing. The thought is outsourcing is always cheaper, well, coming from the business world that is very rarely the case, especially if—because all they do is take the same people and then add a mark up on it. So we did an analysis, some people on the committee. And we were able to come back and say, "Look, it's a couple million dollars cheaper to do it in-house." We ended up, the people didn't think we would, but we ended up being able to get a vote., The school board said come back with a recommendation, and they didn't think we would but we did and said bring it in-house. So we ended up bringing it in-house and hired somebody and we are projecting three, four, five million dollars savings over the life of the project. Those type of things, simple things that if you put it on paper it's like, okay, this is what we found out, what do you see wrong with it? Well, we still think it's wrong. No, no, what do you see wrong with it? And if you have enough people and the committee, they're only three Democratic school board members out of the seven so on this committee it's comprised of people acquainted by the school board plus the superintendent so you basically have a committee of sixteen people where there were very few Democrats so I was one that made the motion but I was working with a group of other people that didn't matter if they were Democrat or Republican we were able to get it passed. One of the school board members aid, "Well, he's working for the Democratic party." I said, "Oh come on." So you get past those but I like them because it says, one, you've got to be able to work with different people, two, you've got to present the facts, and three, people do what's right if you treat them correctly.

JL: Absolutely. And you had the numbers.

DW: Yes, we had the numbers. That's the key thing, I want to look at those numbers and see if, you know, we talk about education cuts, and talk about increases in funding and we're looking at teacher furloughs, you know, we've got the governor's Go Fish program, you know, you've got all these different things going, money going everywhere so it's good to dig in there and see what's going on.

JL: I can definitely see where you're using your experience as an accountant with what your doing in politics, that's great. Can you tell me a little bit more about some of the aspects of the school system that you think need changing or are in bad shape?

DW: One of the first things that I would like to do. Going back to what I would like to do, as far as the schools, I would like to see those non-partisan races. I look at the school board and when we look at some of the challenges they face, it has nothing to do with party, it has more to do with getting on the board and then forgetting why you're there in the first place and then doing what's right, you see way too many decisions where money's not even considered. You're facing a budget here where they're looking at new cuts in January and they change the school calendar and the question was asked, well what impact does that have financially? They have no idea. How can you make a significant decision to start at the beginning of August when other school systems are pushing it back to avoid the higher air conditioning without even looking at the cost? Then it makes it difficult to go to the legislature and say we need more money when they look at you and say, well, why are you making decisions without looking at cost? It's a great school

system, I really enjoy working, whether it's the Cobb school foundation with the school F&T committee, but at the same time you question some of the things they do which I think is healthy. I think it needs to be questioned, I think if as school board member comes on and says, "I promise to do this,"—for example, the calendar, back to that—that's a basic question. It's not like something that you have to do a lot of research. Some things you'll learn more about when you get on the board but a calendar, I think that's one of the first questions they usually ask in a lot of these school board races and for two of them to change their mind quickly after getting in office makes you just question that. Like I said, for some, qualifications don't matter, it's more about party. Some are Democratic districts, some are Republican districts, but you know that's who will probably get in out of the primary but if you make it non-partisan you make people start focusing on the issues. So I think county commission and school board need to be non-partisan like they are in most places.

JL: You just brought up the issue of predictability with wards and districts. What are the pros and cons of that?

DW: The predictability? It is what it is unfortunately. There's a leeway, you have a small portion that you can influence as far as going one versus the other when you have a partisan race, but you can basically look at a district and determine kind of how it's going to go. It doesn't matter if this person was somebody's brother, they thought the person was great; it's as hard for them to pull a ballot of the opposite party sometimes. On a local level it makes it easier a little bit, but here it's pretty much split in a lot of ways and it takes a lot to swing. Beth Farokhi, when she ran against John Crooks, she was able to pull a lot of Republicans and I think she ended up beating the top of the ticket by 10 percentage points. The problem is the top ticket lost by twenty in that district so you ended up getting 45 percent but that was just going door-to-door to everybody and some people just couldn't pull the trigger and vote for various reasons. It's predictable in some ways but then in other ways people will change and you can influence a little bit through just talking to them and saying, "This is what I present, this is what he represents," and hopefully win them over. It takes a lot of work though.

JL: Do you have any other questions?

RG: Do you think your background in accounting has hindered you at all since you didn't have that background in law?

DW: I don't think so. I think there are enough lawyers. Now if you talk to a lawyer they'll say there are not enough lawyers down there but no, because we do take a business law class. I deal a lot with SEC reporting, Security and Exchange reporting so I have to file 10-K's and 10-Q's and everything we do gets sent to the lawyer but you have to make it so that it can pass the legal muster because they're for publicly traded companies, these documents, so it gives you that ability to do some research similar to what a lawyer does. You have the ability to community it similar to what a lawyer does and a lot of times I have to go to my clients and talk about different issues that could be complicated so I think that kind of is similar. I think the voting rights case is a perfect example of where I

was able to dig into a law and look at it and determine what the benefits were of that law and how it applied to our case and then to work with the attorneys so I don't think it would necessarily hinder me but, like I said, I think people would say there are enough lawyers maybe.

WW: Obviously you stress education. What do you think were some of the influences in that? Did your parents stress education growing up?

DW: Yes, they did. Both of my parents provided me an opportunity to do a lot of reading. I love reading, I read all the time, I try to do two books a month of different topics, I think I'm reading Vicksburg, the 18-something now. Civil War causes. Being in the South I've started learning more about the Civil War. My dad spent a lot of time in the schools. He spent a lot of time coming by and going to the teachers, talking to the teachers, attending all the conferences. They weren't necessarily PTA families but they were just very active in participating in the process which, like I said, starting the dad's club helped as well because he got to spend time in the schools and doing different things.

WW: So he was very involved with your education?

DW: Oh yes. They didn't tell me where to go to college. I think my brother influenced me a lot on that, he was very helpful and he would talk to the dean before I even got there and see what kind of scholarships were available for me so my brother was a large influence as well.

JL: Eastman Kodak scholar. Tell me a little bit about that.

DW: I went to college on an ROTC scholarship and I had one year and I remember my dad making me sign the paperwork and I was like, "Oh, I'll try it." Basically the dean said if you get a certain GPA, we'll try to help you find a scholarship. I interviewed with Eastman Kodak and part of the scholarship was I had to go there one year after my sophomore year in college and they basically provided tuition for me to continue in school. I guess it's a program they have all across the country, go there for the summer, work in one of the plants or work in the corporate office and get to meet interns from all over the country and so it was a good experience. After my junior year, didn't have to go back, the dean said, you might want to go back, I was thinking about public accounting and he said, "Public accounting will be there when you get done, go back, they're paying for your school." So I went back and got some different experience in another area and it gave me an opportunity to work in the corporate office as well as the plant, see part of Kodak, see one of our big manufacturing sites at the time.

JL: Where were they?

DW: Rochester, New York. I headed up to Rochester and I remember going up there at the end of May and I think at the beginning of May they had a snow storm. So fortunately I never had to worry about snow storms when I was up there but I knew I wouldn't be

going back to work in snow storms! Growing up in New Jersey is nothing compared to Rochester.

JL: Twelve feet of snow.

DW: So that was good. Also, I remember at the time that it was one of the first interviews I had done, that kind of setting and the interviewing was very helpful and that's where I guess you don't get somewhere by yourself. They were like, well, next time you interview you may want to do this, this and this." Academics were there, personality, I think they thought I would be a good fit, all that but there were certain things about interviewing they said you might want to do this, this and this. It was a great learning experience and I try to remember that too when I'm talking to younger people as well to also say, to be able to see through those and say these are the type of things that you might want to look at in the future. It's always easier as you do things to forget how people have helped you along the way but that still sticks in my mind.

JL: Sure. Did that experience help you with the interview with Deloitte?

DW: Oh yes. It was definitely very helpful.

JL: Mr. Wilkerson, I think I've asked all the questions I need for our research to be part of this program but thanks for coming in this morning. Like I said, I'll get in touch with you and we'll get a bound copy of this and we'll see you at the celebration come this spring. Good luck with the campaign.

DW: Thank you. It was good meeting you.

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