

THE GEORGIA REPUBLICAN PARTY

1856 – 2006: 150 years to Victory

By Sen. Eric Johnson

“Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Speech, Free Men”

A NEW NATIONAL PARTY ENDS SLAVERY

The Republican Party was born in the early 1850s by anti-slavery activist Alvin E. Bovay, a disgruntled Wisconsin Whig. An informal meeting was held on March 20, 1854, in Ripon, Wisconsin, a small town northwest of Milwaukee. The first official Republican meeting took place on July 6, **1854**, in Jackson, Michigan. The name "Republican" was chosen because it alluded to equality and reminded individuals of Thomas Jefferson's Democratic-Republican Party. At the Jackson convention, the new party adopted a platform and nominated candidates for office in Michigan.

In **1856**, the Republicans became a national party when John C. Fremont was nominated for President under the slogan: "Free soil, free labor, free speech, free men, Fremont." Because the Democrats and Whigs represented the two-party system at the time, Republicans were considered a "third party." In spite of that, Fremont received 33% of the vote. Four years later, in **1860**, Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican to win the White House. Georgia seceded from the union in February of **1861**.

The Civil War erupted in **1861** and lasted four grueling years. During the war, against the advice of his cabinet, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves. Republicans worked to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which outlawed slavery; the Fourteenth, which guaranteed equal protection under the laws; and the Fifteenth, which helped secure voting rights for African-Americans.

The symbol of the Republican Party is the elephant. During the mid-term elections in **1874**, Democrats tried to scare voters into thinking President Grant would run for an unprecedented third term. Thomas Nast, a cartoonist for Harper's Weekly, depicted a Democratic jackass trying to scare a Republican elephant - and both symbols stuck. (For a long time, Republicans have been known as the "G.O.P." - the "Grand Old Party." But apparently the original meaning in **1875** was "gallant old party.")

REPUBLICANS HELP WOMEN GET THE RIGHT TO VOTE

The Republican Party held the White House for 24 years until **1884**. We also played a leading role in securing women the right to vote. In **1896**, Republicans were the first major party to favor women's suffrage. When the 19th Amendment finally was added to the Constitution, 26 of 36 state legislatures that had voted to ratify it were under Republican control. The first woman elected to Congress was a Republican - Jeanette Rankin from Montana in **1917**.

1950 - 1980: REPUBLICANS BATTLE COMMUNISM

Presidents during most of the late 19th century and the early part of the 20th century were Republicans. Democrats and Franklin Roosevelt tended to dominate American politics in the 1930s and 40s. But, for 28 of the 40 years from 1952 through 1992, the White House was in Republican hands - under Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Bush. Under Reagan and Bush, the United States became the world's only superpower, winning the Cold War against the old Soviet Union and releasing millions from Communist oppression.

GEORGIA GOP's Early Years: ANTI-LINCOLN & NEW DEAL DEMOCRATS

Immediately after the Civil War, the federal government installed a military governor in Georgia during Reconstruction to manage the state. At this time, the Republican Party was made up of blacks (which were 44% of the state's population) and whites from the mountainous northern part of the state. This coalition of mountaineers and former slaves managed to take control of the state legislature and elect Rufus Bulloch as the state's first Republican Governor in **1868**. But, in **1871**, Bulloch fled into exile before he was impeached. Georgia had not created the office of lieutenant governor so the President of the Georgia Senate, Benjamin Conley, inherited Bulloch's unexpired term and became Georgia's second Republican Governor. He served just 72 days before the legislature called a special election and replaced him with a Democrat. Republicans were rare in Georgia until after WWII.

Post WW II: SOUTH BEGINS TO ABANDON THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

In **1948**, Governor Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, and many other southerners, bolted from the Democratic party after a pro-civil rights platform was adopted at their national convention. Thurmond became the presidential nominee of the States' Rights party (also known as the "Dixiecrats"). Ultimately, Democrat Harry Truman defeated Republican Thomas Dewey, but the failure of the Dixiecrats to win more than a handful of southern states (not including Georgia) set up the effort for Republican General Dwight David Eisenhower to make some inroads into the solid Democratic south, although Georgia went with Democrat Adlai Stevenson in **1952** and **1956**. Georgian golfer Bobby Jones was an Eisenhower backer and, in California, actor Ronald Reagan was a Democrat for Eisenhower.

1960s: AuH2O and "BO"

We started the decade with no Republicans elected statewide, no Republican congressmen, and just one state senator and two State House members. Republicans began to build a new image as the "true conservative party," and by the end of the decade we had a Republican president (who didn't carry the state), two Republican congressmen, seven state senators and 25 state representatives.

1960: Democrat John F. Kennedy defeated Richard Nixon and carried Georgia by his second largest margin (63%), trailing only Rhode Island (64%), and exceeding Kennedy's margin in his home state of Massachusetts. As a harbinger of future trouble in the Democratic Party, Governor Ernest Vandiver briefly flirted with the "unpledged elector" movement and held out the possibility that Georgia's Democratic electors might withhold their votes from Kennedy. Future Speaker and GOP nemesis Tom Murphy was elected to the State House. There was only one Republican state senator (Charles William Kiker of Fannin County originally elected in 1935) and two house members in the General Assembly.

1962: State Senator Carl Sanders was elected governor, defeating former Governor Marvin Griffin in the Democratic primary. There was no Republican candidate for governor on the ballot, but successful litigation requiring the redrawing of state legislative districts based on population instead of the "county unit system" brought the number of Republicans in the State Senate up to four (out of 54) and to five (out of 195) in the State House. Future Democratic Governor and President Jimmy Carter was elected to the State Senate. In California, Ronald Reagan switched his registration to the Republican Party.

1964: Democrat Lyndon Johnson won the presidential race in a landslide, but Republican Barry Goldwater won Georgia with 54% of the vote. Goldwater was the first Republican presidential candidate to carry the state since Reconstruction. Howard "Bo" Callaway became Georgia's first Republican congressman since Reconstruction. We elected eight state senators and eight State House members. The Georgia Republican Party Chairman was State Senator Joe Tribble from Savannah.

1966: Bo Callaway was the first modern Republican candidate for governor on the ballot. He was nominated by the Republican state convention because no means existed for Republican primaries. He edged out Democrat Lester Maddox in the general election. Compounded by the write-in candidacy of former Governor Ellis Arnall, no candidate received a majority of the vote, so the election was sent to the General Assembly, which picked Maddox. Eight Republicans, including future U.S. Senator Mack Mattingly, ran for Congress that year to enhance turnout, and two (Ben Blackburn and Fletcher Thompson) were elected. We lost a State Senate seat and dropped to seven of 54. In the House, reapportionment added 10 seats and Republicans climbed to 21 of 205. Frank Troutman was the Republican Party Chairman and was replaced by G. Paul Jones.

1968: Republican Richard Nixon made a comeback, as Republicans nominated him over Ronald Reagan and Nelson Rockefeller. A badly divided Democratic Party nominated Hubert Humphrey at the infamous Chicago convention. Citing the fiasco in Chicago, five elected statewide Democrats (Comptroller General Jimmy Bentley, Agriculture Commissioner Phil Campbell, Treasurer Jack Ray, and Public Service Commissioners Crawford Pilcher and Alpha Fowler) switched to the Republican Party. George Wallace bolted from the Democratic Party to run for president as the candidate of his American Independent Party. Wallace carried Georgia with 43% of the vote and

Nixon placed second here. The shift away from the Democrats in the South continued. Blackburn and Thompson were re-elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, but Wallace's candidacy made it difficult for Georgia Republicans to capitalize on dissatisfied Democrats at the legislative level. The State Senate Republicans hold at seven (of 54) and House Republicans pick up four to total 25 out of 195. The Senate Republican Leader was Oliver Bateman.

1970s: THE DARK YEARS

The Watergate scandal and success of Georgia Democrat Jimmy Carter stunted the growth of the Georgia GOP. We started the decade with two congressmen, seven state senators, and 25 state representatives. We ended the decade with only one congressman, five senators, and 20 House members. Georgia Republicans faced a dark decade, but visionaries like Paul Coverdell and John Linder began to lay the groundwork necessary to win the majority.

1970: A heavily favored Jimmy Bentley ran for governor in the first ever Republican primary, but lost to Atlanta broadcaster Hal Suit. Judge Jephtha Tanksley was the third candidate. Jimmy Carter ran to the right of Carl Sanders to win the Democratic Party primary, then crushed Suit (59% to 41%) in the general election. Lester Maddox became the lieutenant governor. All of the statewide Democrats who switched parties in 1968 were defeated, except Phil Campbell who had been appointed by Nixon as undersecretary of agriculture and did not run for reelection. Republicans lost another seat in the State Senate and are down now to six. Paul Coverdell was elected to the State Senate and went on to serve 18 years, including 14 years as Minority Leader. The House dropped to 22 (of 180).

1971: Bob Shaw replaced G. Paul Jones as the State Republican Party Chairman.

1972: Republican Richard Nixon defeated George McGovern in a landslide and carried Georgia with a whopping 75% of the vote. But coattails were nonexistent as Nixon's strategy of courting Democrats through "Democrats for Nixon" left down ticket Republicans in the lurch. Sam Nunn emerged from a crowded Democratic primary to narrowly defeat Republican Congressman Fletcher Thompson for the U.S. Senate seat left open by the death of Richard Russell. Andy Young won Thompson's old congressional seat over Republican Rodney Cook. Blackburn was re-elected to Congress and became Georgia's sole Republican in Washington. The State Senate picked up one seat to reach seven and House Republicans gained seven to reach 29.

1973: Tom Murphy was elected Speaker of the Georgia House. Armstrong Smith was elected Senate Republican Leader.

1974: The Watergate scandal forced Nixon to resign. Gerald Ford became president. House Appropriations Chairman George Busbee defeated Lieutenant Governor Lester Maddox in the Democratic primary and was elected governor in a landslide over the Republican Ronnie "Machine Gun" Thompson, the former mayor of Macon. College

professor Newt Gingrich made his first run for Congress, losing to Congressman John Flynt. Blackburn, a staunch defender of Nixon, lost his seat to Elliott Levitas in a Watergate backlash. Georgia had no Republicans in Congress. Democratic State Senator Zell Miller was elected lieutenant governor on a platform of abolishing the office, then went on to serve a total of four terms. In the Watergate aftermath, Republicans lost two seats in the State Senate and five seats in the State House. Republicans held a total of only 29 legislative seats out of 236. Johnny Isakson lost a bid to become a Cobb County commissioner.

1975: Mack Mattingly of Glynn County was elected Republican Party Chairman. He named Richard McBride as the executive director and formed a long range planning committee of Republican leaders that traveled the state to build a new, conservative GOP. The group included Mattingly, Gingrich, John Linder, Bob Irvin, and Paul Coverdell. Paul Coverdell replaced Armstrong Smith as Senate Republican Leader and held this position for 14 years.

1976: Democrat Jimmy Carter was elected President and carried Georgia over Gerald Ford. While the Republican Party was beginning to grow in the south, Carter's presence on the ticket hurt our party at the local level in Georgia. Gingrich lost a second run for Congress. Senate Republicans lost another seat and totaled only four – its lowest level since 1964. Johnny Isakson was elected to the State House and joined 23 colleagues. Georgians approved a new state constitution that allows Governors to serve two consecutive four-year terms.

1977: Andy Young resigned his seat to become Carter's ambassador to the United Nations. Paul Coverdell lost a special election bid for Young's congressional seat to Atlanta City Council President Wyche Fowler (who beat John Lewis in their primary). Coverdell turned his attention to building a stronger state Republican Party. His "kitchen cabinet" included Frank Strickland, Bill Amos, Nolan Murrah and Joyce Stevens along with Mattingly and Gingrich. John Teasley, John Stuckey, and Joe Rogers joined the group. Former Atlanta City Councilman Rodney Cook was elected chairman of the Georgia Republican Party and began an effort to raise money for candidates. He started the annual President's Day fundraiser and attracted national Republican figures, like Ronald Reagan and Jack Kemp, to our state. Betty Jones was the party's first female executive director. Cook formed the first "Kitchen Cabinet" including Coverdell, Linder, Frank Strickland, Alec Poitevint, and Doug Howard. This group committed to electing Newt Gingrich to Congress.

1978: Unable to find a candidate to oppose popular Governor George Busbee for re-election, the State Republican Committee waived the rules to allow State Chairman Rodney Cook to run for governor without resigning. Busbee won in a landslide to become the first governor to succeed himself, but Cook's candidacy spared the party embarrassment at the top of the ticket. Congressman Jack Flynt retired and Newt Gingrich was elected to Congress on his third try, defeating State Senator Virginia Shapard. Republicans picked up one seat in the State Senate and lost four in the House. With just 25 Republican legislators, this was the lowest point since 1966.

1979: Atlanta Lawyer (and Reagan backer) Matthew “Matt” Patton was elected Republican Party chairman.

1980s: THE REAGAN REVOLUTION

Ronald Reagan broke the stranglehold of the Democrats on the south. Georgia Republicans increased their strength and their confidence. We went from 20 Republican state representatives to 36 and from five state senators to 11.

1980: Mack Mattingly defeated legendary four-term incumbent Herman Talmadge to become the state’s first Republican U.S. senator since Reconstruction. Mattingly got 51% of the vote, while Ronald Reagan was losing Georgia to native son Jimmy Carter (59%-41%). However, Reagan’s victory finally solidified the south as Republican territory. The Georgia GOP was still weak at the local level. Mattingly began to use his new seat to recruit and train candidates.

1981: Thomasville lawyer and Flowers Industries executive Fred Cooper was elected state party chairman and Waffle House CEO Joe Rogers was elected treasurer. Joyce Stevens became the executive director. Cooper started the Republican Foundation. The Party budget went from \$169,000 in the 1980 cycle to \$1,000,000 in 1981-1982 cycle.

1982: State Senator Bob Bell defeated former Congressman Ben Blackburn in the Republican primary for governor. House Appropriations Chairman (and Speaker Tom Murphy protégé) Joe Frank Harris won a hotly contested Democratic primary against Congressman Bo Ginn and defeated Bell in the general election by a large margin. Guy Millner was Bell’s finance chairman. Republicans ran a field of seven (out of 10) for Congress – Herb Jones in the 1st, Tyrone Elliott in the 3rd, Dave Winders in the 4th, Paul Jones in the 5th, Gingrich in the 6th, Dave Sellers in the 7th, and Charlie Sherwood in the 9th. Only Gingrich won re-election. Republicans picked up two seats in the State Senate and one seat in the State House.

1983: Bob Bell was elected as GOP chairman. Jay Morgan served as the executive director.

1984: Republicans capitalized on Reagan’s re-election prospects. Operation Breakthrough (founded by Nolan Murrah) began to focus on recruiting and funding legislative candidates. Jack Kingston was among the class who won legislative seats. Pat Swindall was elected to Congress in an upset of Elliott Levitas. Joyce Stevens is the first woman on the general election ballot in Georgia as a candidate for the Public Service Commission. She received 42% of the vote on a campaign budget of \$75,000. Republicans continued to grow in the legislature with a gain of two Senate seats and three House seats. Reagan defeated Mondale in a landslide and carried Georgia by 60%-40%.

1985: Coverdell was elected GOP chairman and Tom Hockaday replaced Jay Morgan as the executive director. They imported ORViS (Optimal Republican Voting Strength)

from Texas as a method for targeting races and funding. Public Service Commissioner Billy Lovett, who ran unsuccessfully for governor as a Democrat in 1982, switched to the Republican Party.

1986: In the mid-term elections, Mattingly narrowly lost his U.S. Senate seat to Congressman Wyche Fowler. Nationally, the GOP lost eight Senate seats and control of the U.S. Senate. Republicans picked up one State Senate seat and held even in the House.

1987: Mattingly was appointed Assistant Secretary General for Defense Support at NATO by Reagan. John Stuckey was elected as Party chairman. Cliff Lorick became the first of many executive directors that served under Stuckey.

1988: Georgia Republicans were bitterly divided over the race for the nomination to replace Reagan. George H. W. Bush won the primary in Georgia (and eventually the nomination) over Reverend Pat Robertson. Robertson's supporters dominated the state party conventions and two contested delegations are sent to the national convention in New Orleans. Bush defeated Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis in Georgia by 60%-40%, but Congressman Pat Swindall was defeated by Actor Ben Jones, leaving Georgia with just one Republican congressman (Gingrich). Republicans picked up nine seats in the State House (to 36) and one in the State Senate (to 11) to reach a record high as Democrats in Georgia began to see Republicans as "Reagan conservatives" and Democrats as "Massachusetts liberals"

1989: Coverdell was appointed director of the U.S. Peace Corps by Bush. State Senator Tom Phillips replaced Coverdell as minority leader in the State Senate and former State Representative Mike Egan replaced Coverdell in the Senate. Alec Poitevint was elected party chairman and began his first of four terms. He appointed Bill Thorne as the executive director.

1990s: FOCUS SHIFTS TO THE GOLD DOME

In the 1990s, the Republican Party finally came to prominence in Georgia. It was during these years that the Party truly experienced significant growth. We began the decade with only 11 state senators and 36 House members. By 2000, we had more than doubled our legislators to 24 senators and 78 representatives. We went from one congressman (Gingrich) in 1990 to four in 1992 and to seven in 1994, when Republicans took control of the U.S. House and Gingrich was elected speaker, to eventually eight of the 11.

1990: House Republican Leader Johnny Isakson mounted a credible campaign for governor, besting Greely Ellis and Bob Wood in the primary and winning 44% of the vote against Lieutenant Governor Zell Miller in the general election. Atlanta lawyer Matt Towery ran a spirited campaign for lieutenant governor, winning 34% of the vote against State Senator Pierre Howard. Billy Lovett ran for insurance commissioner, and led the ticket with 49% of the vote against Tim Ryles. No Republican contested Sam Nunn for the U.S. Senate. Sonny Perdue was elected to the State Senate as a Democrat. We held on to our 11 State Senate seats and dropped one in the House, bringing us to 35.

1991: Poitevint was re-elected as the GOP Chairman without opposition. David Shafer replaced Bill Thorne as the executive director. The party created “Breakthrough ‘92” for candidate recruiting and support. Speaker Tom Murphy drew partisan districts designed to end Gingrich’s career and stem the growth of Republicans in the legislature. Coverdell resigned from the Peace Corps and returned to Georgia to explore a race for the U. S. Senate.

1992: Our breakthrough year saw Paul Coverdell elected to the U.S. Senate after a bruising Republican primary and a run-off with Bob Barr. Coverdell then defeated incumbent Wyche Fowler after forcing him into a rare general election run-off due to the presence of a Libertarian on the ballot. Coverdell broke into Democratic strongholds in north Georgia and the coast. Bobby Baker became the first Republican elected to statewide constitutional office, winning a seat on the Public Service Commission in the same general election run-off (Democrats later changed election law to eliminate general election run-offs). Georgia Republicans quadrupled their number of congressmen from one to four and picked up more state legislative seats (six new Senate and 17 new House seats) than any other state party - Republican or Democrat - in the nation. Gingrich was joined in Congress by State Representative Jack Kingston, who won the open 1st Congressional District against Barbara Christmas. State Senator Mac defeated Congressman Richard Ray in the 3rd Congressional District, and former State Representative John Linder won the open 4th Congressional District on his second try. Johnny Isakson was elected to the State Senate. Skin Edge was elected as senate Republican leader and Paul Heard was elected house Republican leader. Bill Clinton squeaked by Bush in Georgia, with Ross Perot and a Libertarian on the presidential ballot. When the DOJ rejected the redistricting plans drawn by the General Assembly, Republicans filed suit seeking court intervention and set the stage for a congressional plan that elected seven Republican congressmen in 1994. Ultimately, the seats will be preserved in the famous “Cynthia McKinney” case, as Newt Gingrich and John Lewis joined forces in that case.

1993: Billy Lovett was elected as state chairman without opposition. David Shafer resigned as executive director and was succeeded by Justin Durrance and then by Don Bolia.

1994: Another big year for Georgia Republicans. Newt Gingrich became the speaker of the U.S. House as Saxby Chambliss, Charlie Norwood and Bob Barr joined the new Republican majority in Congress. Guy Milner carried a majority of Georgia's 159 counties, but narrowly lost the race for governor to Zell Miller by a margin of 51% to 49% (30,000 votes). Republicans captured a majority of the statewide constitutional offices, including control of the Public Service Commission. Mike Bowers was re-elected attorney general as a Republican after switching parties. John Oxendine was elected as insurance commissioner, and Linda Schrenko was elected as state school superintendent (and was the first woman elected statewide). Nancy Schaefer won 43% of the vote against Pierre Howard for lieutenant governor. Republicans made gains in the General

Assembly with three more Senate seats and 14 more House seats. Bob Irvin was elected the House Republican leader. Skin Edge was the Senate Minority leader.

1995: Congressman Nathan Deal switched parties, creating an eight-member delegation – nicknamed the “G8”. Rusty Paul was elected state party chairman. There are four executive directors during Paul’s four-year service – Brian Slater, Brian Noyes, Joe King, and Kathie Miller.

1996: Bob Dole lost his bid for president against Bill Clinton, but he carried Georgia with 45% of the vote in a three-way race. Guy Milner won the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate over Johnny Isakson and Clint Day, but lost the general election to Secretary of State Max Cleland. Democrat Lewis Massey, appointed by Miller as Secretary of State, defeated Republican David Shafer, who won 44% of the vote in a three-way race for secretary of state. Chuck Clay was elected as Senate Republican leader, succeeding Skin Edge who retires.

1997: Rusty Paul was re-elected as state chairman without opposition. The 1998 cycle began with high hopes as Mike Bowers was "drafted" for governor and a record number of Republican candidates lined up to run for lieutenant governor and attorney general. Guy Millner launched his second bid for governor and the Democratic frontrunner, Lieutenant Governor Pierre Howard, suddenly withdrew. Mitch Skandalakis, Chuck Clay, and Clint Day are among the Republican candidates for lieutenant governor.

1998: Guy Millner defeated Mike Bowers and Nancy Schaefer to become the Republican nominee for governor, but lost the general election to Representative Roy Barnes. Mitch Skandalakis received just 38% of the vote in his race for lieutenant governor. And David Ralston lost to Thurbert Baker for attorney general. With his majority reduced, Speaker Newt Gingrich resigned from Congress, and Johnny Isakson announced he would run for his seat. Coverdell won re-election to the U.S. Senate over Michael Coles, a wealthy businessman. Eric Johnson was elected as Senate Republican leader. State Senator Sonny Perdue switched to the Republican Party. Bob Irvin was the House Republican leader.

1999: Johnny Isakson won the special election to fill Gingrich’s vacant seat. Chuck Clay was elected GOP chairman and appointed Linda Hamrick as the executive director.

THE 21st CENTURY: “W”, PERDUE & VICTORY!

Our final push to the majority involved as much of a legal strategy as it did an election strategy. Our fight took place on two battlefields – with the political grassroots and in the federal courts. Led by the vision of party switcher Sonny Perdue, the State Senate began focusing on winning the majority. Party attorneys Frank Strickland and Anne Lewis led the battles in court. In the end, the hard work of those who came before us paid off as we won victories on both battlegrounds...and ultimately the majority.

2000: George W. Bush was elected president and defeated Al Gore in Georgia by 55%-43%. Republicans picked up two seats in the State Senate, but missed gaining the majority by a total of 1,600 votes in the remaining five seats required. Republicans lost four seats in the House, and Lynn Westmoreland replaced Bob Irvin as House Republican Leader. We began the decade with 24 state senators and 74 House members. Paul Coverdell died unexpectedly in July and Governor Barnes appointed former Governor Zell Miller to his seat. Mack Mattingly was recruited to oppose Miller in the special election.

2001: Democrats drew extremely partisan gerrymandered legislative and congressional districts in an attempt to hold back the Republican tide. They bypassed the Bush Justice Department and went straight to D.C. District Court. The Republican Party supported the efforts of four minority citizens, two Democrats and two Republicans, who were opposed to the plans because they violate the Voting Rights Act. The court upheld the State House and congressional plans, but the Senate plan was found to be in violation of the Voting Rights Act and was sent back to the General Assembly. Republicans filed Johnson v. Barnes, urging federal court intervention on the drawing of a new Senate plan, as time was running out. Democrats quickly drew a new plan and resubmitted it. The plan was precleared, but Democrats still appealed their initial loss on the original Senate plan to the Supreme Court. Ralph Reed was elected GOP chairman and Linda Hamrick, Ralph Gonzalez and Todd Schnick served as executive directors.

2002: Republicans finally tasted victory. State Senator Sonny Perdue won the Republican nomination for governor over School Superintendent Linda Schrenko and Cobb County Commission Chairman Bill Byrne without a run-off. Perdue went on to defeat incumbent Roy Barnes by 52% - 48% to become Georgia's first Republican Governor since Reconstruction. Congressman Saxby Chambliss defeated incumbent Max Cleland for the U.S. Senate. Max Burns defeated "Champ" Walker in the new 13th Congressional District. Speaker Tom Murphy and Senate Majority Leader Charles Walker are defeated. In spite of the gerrymandered districts, Republicans actually picked up two seats in the Senate (to 26) and convinced four Democrat senators (Jack Hill, Don Cheeks, Dan Lee and Rooney Bowen) to switch parties within a week after the election. Republicans took control of Senate. Senator Tom Price was elected as the first Republican majority leader by the new majority caucus.

2003: Sonny Perdue was inaugurated on January 13, becoming the first Republican governor since 1868. Senator Eric Johnson was elected the first Republican president pro tempore in 132 years. Zell Miller announced that he will not run for reelection to the U.S. Senate. Congressman Johnny Isakson and Congressman Mac Collins announced their candidacies. Glenn Richardson was elected House Republican leader, succeeding Lynn Westmoreland who announced his bid for Congress. Bill Stephens was elected as Senate Majority leader to replace Tom Price who resigned to run for Isakson's congressional seat. The U.S. Supreme Court sent the state's case on the original (rejected) Senate plan back to the trial court. Republicans filed a second case in federal court claiming that the House, Senate and congressional plans violate the constitutional principle of "one person, one vote". Republicans won the second federal court case on legislative districts, but not

the congressional districts. The legislative plan is declared unconstitutional by violating “one-person, one vote”. The trial court immediately dismissed the first case and a three-judge panel drew new districts after the legislature failed to do so. Alec Poitevint was elected Republican Party chairman and appointed Scott Rials as the executive director.

2004: George W. Bush won a second term and defeated Senator John Kerry in Georgia by 58% to 41%. With new, fair districts and the active support of Governor Perdue, Republicans expanded their control of the Senate to 34-22 and took control of the House on election night by winning 96 seats. Within a week, three Democrats had switched parties giving Republicans a 99-81 balance. Jerry Keen was elected by the House Republican Caucus as their first majority leader. Glenn Richardson was nominated for speaker and Mark Burkhalter was nominated as speaker pro tempore. Congressman Johnny Isakson defeated Congresswoman Denise Majette to the open U.S. Senate seat left by retiring Zell Miller. Lynn Westmoreland and Tom Price were elected to Congress. Congressman Max Burns lost his seat to Democrat John Barrow.

2005: Glenn Richardson was elected as the first Republican speaker of the house since reconstruction. Republicans drew new, fair congressional districts. Alec Poitevint was re-elected as GOP chairman and named Paul Bennecke as the executive director. Senator Bill Stephens resigned as the majority leader and Tommie Williams was elected without opposition to replace him after the session.

Now both of Georgia’s U.S. Senators are Republican and seven of Georgia’s 13 congressmen are Republicans. For the first time in 134 years, Republicans control both houses of the General Assembly and the Governor’s Mansion. The stage is set for our 150th year as a national party in 2006 and our growing majority in Georgia.

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Author’s Note: This has been an attempt to briefly document the history of the Republican Party in Georgia and to identify some of the key events and people who helped secure the majority. It is by no means complete and I invite others to add their own notes and memories. I have had help from several people and want to acknowledge their participation – Mack Mattingly, Alec Poitevint, and Senator David Shafer have been particularly helpful. This project began with an interview with Congressman John Linder as I prepared for a speech to the 2005 graduating class of the Coverdell Leadership Institute. One of the things that stands out in my research is how many names are woven throughout this history as party activists and office holders. It is a history that is still being written today.