

CHAPTER 2

AMBITION AND AVOCATION: BURRUSS ENTERS PUBLIC SERVICE

Whether it was in business or politics, Al Burruss was a man determined to succeed. He overcame the harsh reality of growing up in poverty. Though his father worked, he was unable to provide a steady income. Thus, Burruss worked hard and did his best to help support the family, working at any job that came his way all through his youth, including working as the school janitor in order to be able to attend high school. Rather than becoming embittered and angry by the harshness of his life and lack of financial means for a college education, Burruss was determined to make a success of his life. He took the skills the US Naval Reserve gave him in the Philippines and turned them to good use once he returned to Georgia by starting up a refrigeration business with an office on the Atlanta Highway. Later, he opened an appliance store in downtown Smyrna. But it was the refrigeration business that took him out into the community. As related in the previous chapter, he designed and built a walk-in freezer for the business owners of a small poultry processing plant in Marietta that led eventually to his purchase of the business from the two partners, E. T. Banks and Vernon Green. He so impressed Banks that he even helped finance the purchase of the plant. One of the most important attributes Burruss had was the ability to make friends and enlist others in helping him succeed.

It was no small matter for Burruss to add the running of a poultry processing plant to his growing list of business successes. And it says a lot

about his character and belief in himself to move into an entirely new field, learning it from the bottom up—he plunged into learning everything, from how to “pluck chickens” to how to find suppliers, to selling his product and figuring out how to draw around him the people who could help him succeed. Of course, it was entirely natural that he would ask his best friend, Chet Austin, to join him in the new business venture; after all, they had worked together as boys and young men and knew each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

The two of them forged a unique partnership with Burruss being the front man, working with customers and the community by doing the buying and selling, and Austin running the financial side of things. Austin learned how to do payroll and the accounting, doing the work, he says, of seven or eight accountants. The original plant saw them “running production lines of 2000–2500 chickens a day.” In short order, they doubled that to four thousand eight hundred a day. In order to grow the business, Austin explains, “Al worked through a feed company in Cartersville. We even grew some chickens. Eventually we started doing business with folks in the county.” Typically, they would call on sellers and customers in “Cartersville, Adairsville, and Calhoun in the early morning, then drive home to work in the plant.”¹

Burruss’s brother Jimmie also eventually came to work for him at Tip Top. In 1970 his brother Buddy joined the firm; Buddy had worked for his father in a successful wholesale egg business until the father sold it. Though Tip Top Poultry had only twenty-five employees when Burruss took over in 1951, within two decades, it had grown to four hundred employees processing six thousand chickens an hour, with plants in Marietta and Holly Springs and nationwide business connections.²

The original processing plant is described by Chet Austin as a “little hole in the wall—radiator shop on one side and mule barn on the other side,” almost in downtown Marietta.³ When the Urban Renewal Program of the 1950s came into Marietta, Austin said he and Al realized their business was “a prospect and they were going to buy us out and we were going to have to move.” Though he and Al began to scout for a new location, Austin points out that “Al did most of this. We walked every sewer line in Cobb County—not many at that time. We had to have a

sewage line because we generate a lot of sewage. We settled on a site on Sandtown Road.” Unfortunately, when they applied for zoning, the owner across the street from the site opposed the application. Austin remembers that at the zoning hearing, the property owner had all his neighbors there to oppose the plan as well, so Burruss and Austin withdrew their proposal. Their next move was a catastrophe that ended well, as Austin recalls:

This time we made a big mistake, bought a piece of property on what’s now part of Southern Poly, just off the four lane, already zoned. We cleared the property, designed the building and ordered the steel. A friend of ours had cleared it and piled up debris and set it afire. All that potash floated up and into a motel swimming pool [owned by] Lance Murray, an old Tech football player. He was going to enjoin us and get rid of us. This time we went to Herbert McCollum, the sole county commissioner and told him we were going to have to leave the county. He said he had 10 acres on Wallace Road (actually the county’s property). Five acres were promised for a school but he agreed to sell the other five to us, at \$1000 an acre. Over the years, we accumulated about 20 more acres.⁴

Because they had already purchased the steel, they moved it to the new location, and Tip Top Poultry’s headquarters is still located today at the Wallace Road facility.

Burruss’s numerous business commitments draw a portrait of a man who did not sit still for long. During the 1950s and 1960s, Burruss worked on growing his businesses. In addition to the poultry processing business, he and Austin also acquired an interest in a feed mill in Cedartown.⁵ At one point, while serving as President of Tip Top Poultry, which he would do until his death in 1986, Burruss also managed other firms and sat on their boards of directors: Marietta Poultry Equipment, Inc.; Poultry Specialties, Inc.; Cobb Poultry Transport, Inc.; Kennesaw Mountain Poultry Inc.; Cedar Valley Mills, Inc., where he served as chairman of the board; Cedar Valley Poultry, Inc.; and Cedartown Dairy Products, Inc.⁶ He and a brother-in-law, Gordon Haines, also jointly owned a car dealership in Cornelia for a

time. As if his business responsibilities were not sufficient to keep him fully engaged, he also served as director of the Georgia Poultry Federation and as director and vice president of the Georgia Poultry Processors Association.⁷ In 1962, Burruss was named the Area Young Man of the Year by the Jaycees for his active leadership in many areas, from “church and little league baseball activities” to his directorships.⁸

No one recalls, from his family to his friends and business associates, A. L. ever shirking any of his many duties, whether they be familial or corporate. Even his wife Bobbi Burruss expresses surprise at all her husband managed to do: “There was just no way he could have done everything he did and never let one go. I don’t care if it was a problem or if it was just something good. He had time to deal with it and did. I don’t know where it came from and I lived with the man.”⁹ In a brief interchange during an interview, Bobbi and her daughter Renée relate how Burruss seemed to have an abundance of time for everything:

Bobbi: He just had a great knack for making you feel like I’m here for you.

Renée: And that there was nothing else more important than doing that right.

Bobbi: And never having anything else on his mind or something that I can’t deal with you today. There again came that time element. We don’t know where he got it. It was a gift.

If Burruss worked hard, he also took time to play, too. Introduced to flying in his late teens by his friend Art Godwin, it became an enjoyable part of his life and later played an important role in Jimmy Carter’s two campaigns for governor of Georgia. As mentioned previously, in the late 1940s he courted Bobbi on his weekends off from work by flying up to Cornelia to be with her. Eventually, he earned an instrument-rated pilot’s license and acquired more sophisticated planes. When his son Robin was in his teens, Burruss flew him and his friends to the Bahamas for scuba diving excursions. The family also acquired a houseboat on Lake Allatoona and spent many summers there. Despite his obvious successes and great self-discipline evident elsewhere in his life, the one thing Burruss couldn’t lick

was his lifelong smoking habit. At one point, Burruss decided he wanted to quit smoking (he was, by various accounts, either a two- or four-packs-a-day smoker).¹⁰ In order to do this, he holed up in the houseboat for a week with no cigarettes. Food was brought out to him by his family. But at the end of the week, Burruss acknowledged he just could not quit smoking, so gave up the effort.¹¹

Becoming a successful businessman enabled Burruss to achieve a comfortable lifestyle that far surpassed the lowly expectations of his youth; but being a businessman was just not enough to satisfy him.

As his business acumen grew, he began to look for other opportunities to engage his active mind and restless ambition. By the mid-1960s, the governance structure of Cobb County changed from a single-member county commission to a five-member county commission and thus created an opportunity for successful businessmen, like Burruss, to enter politics. As Thomas Scott, whose history of Cobb County thoroughly covers every aspect of the county's growth and its people during the twentieth century, tells it, times were ripe for change: "The year 1964 was a turning point in Cobb County.... With over 130,000 people, Cobb County was ready for a more representative form of government that could balance the needs of newcomers and old-timers, suburbanites, city dwellers, and a dwindling number of rural residents."¹² Initially, the Cobb delegation representatives to the General Assembly were divided over how to set up the county commission. Joe Mack Wilson wanted a five-man commission with an appointed county manager.¹³ However, the referendum that Cobb County voters eventually rejected in January 1964 was a compromise suggested by Bob Flournoy for a "three-member commission without a county manager."¹⁴ The final bill that went to Cobb voters, who approved it in July 1964, was one Bob Flournoy drew up. Flournoy's bill was modeled on the DeKalb County system, as Scott notes, of "four part-time district commissioners and a full-time chairman who would serve as chief executive officer.... Terms of office were set at four years with one eastern and one western commissioner initially elected for two years to provide staggered terms."¹⁵ As one of Cobb County's most successful businessmen, Burruss believed he had a lot to offer in the form of solid experience and he had ambitions to become more involved in local government.

Once the five-member county commission was approved, he threw his hat into the ring for the four-year term for the western district (Post 4). Though his campaign was low-key, he ran ads in *The Marietta Daily Journal* that cited his business experience as his key qualification for a position on the commission. His large, extended family became his most ardent supporters as his campaign staff. The primary ad run by his campaign in *The Marietta Daily Journal*, beginning in August 1964 and running up to the election on November 3, 1964, introduced voters to the young businessman. This ad began by citing his accomplishments, leading off with his personal statistics, “age 37, married and father of two children,” then moved on to his experience, which showcased his background as a businessman, family man, and church leader:

Businessman in Cobb County for 15 years; President-General manager of Tip Top Poultry—a leading Cobb County industry; Past President Georgia Poultry Processors Association; Director of National Broiler Council; Member Board of Stewards, Tillman Memorial Methodist Church—Smyrna; Marietta’s Young Man of the Year, 1962; Past President Marietta Western Little League.

The ad’s focus, “Al Makes One Promise,” emphasized his business acumen and faith, which he was putting at the disposal of Cobb County voters: “To use my extensive business experience and other God Given abilities to administer the affairs of Cobb County in an honorable and efficient manner.”¹⁶ The ad also included a picture of the attractive young man.

Another campaign ad that ran in September of 1964 describes a style of campaigning that Al employed again when he ran for state representative and later for Speaker pro tempore of the House—visiting as many of the constituents as could be seen in the time allowed in order to persuade them that he was the right man for the job. This campaign ad had far more narrative than his other ads, which may explain why it only ran once.

During the few brief weeks of this campaign it has been my pleasure to visit with old friends, renew acquaintances and to make many new friends among the voters of Cobb

County. I earnestly regret that the limited time for the campaign precludes my visiting with each voter in the County's Western District to discuss affairs that are vital to the progress of our County.

What is clear from this ad is how Burruss positions himself as an “honest and impartial” representative on whom the voters can depend, one who fills the need for “experienced, qualified and dedicated men for positions of leadership.”¹⁷ His self-described dedication assures voters not only of his competence but also of his will to do good service: “I am vitally interested in Cobb County and I believe my 15 years business experience here provides me with a background that will be beneficial in solving the problems that face us. I assure you that I can and will cooperate with all other County officials in any endeavor that is in the best interest of and for the benefit of Cobb County.” Again, the long narrative of the ad ends with his “one promise,” a statement that appears in all the ads he ran for county commissioner.

Two other ads also appeared in the Marietta paper, each emphasizing his “one promise.”¹⁸ The second of these small ads—the “Burruss Not Elected!” ad—has a seemingly humorous and catchy opening line, meant to get voters to the poll if they wanted him elected. Yet, the real purpose for such a warning stemmed from the fact that the Republican Party had held its first local primary and was making its first serious races in Cobb that year (Goldwater became the first Republican to carry the county in a presidential election, and Republican Ben Jordan knocked Bob Flournoy out of his county-wide seat in the legislature). Burruss wanted to make sure that Democrats didn't forget to go to the polls. Since the Democratic primary had decided everything in past elections, there would be a tendency for the voters to think that the election was over after the primary.¹⁹

As in earlier campaign ads, this one points out the key attributes Burruss always cited in his political campaigns, and in all his affairs: that his abilities came from God, his management skills would be put to good use for the people, he is a man of his word, and his integrity and business skills would ensure he would serve the people well.

In the final count of the votes, Ernest Barrett won the run-off to become commission chair, and in the other positions were Bill Oliver, Harry

Ingram, Tommy Brown, and Al Burruss.²⁰ Although Burruss, running as a Democrat, faced opposition from Republican F. Y. Dillingham, he won the election for a four-year term beginning January 2, 1965. *The Marietta Daily Journal* posted his winning tally: “Burruss was winner in Acworth 639 to 558, Big Shanty [Kennesaw] 557 to 349, Fair Oaks 1,940 to 1,364, Lost Mountain 94 to 50, Oregon 166 to 145, Powder Springs 561 to 421, Red Rock 96 to 42, Ward Two 961 to 307, Ward Three 696 to 160, Ward Four 288 to 106 and Ward Eight 229 to 138.”²¹ Overall, “Burruss scored a 58 percent victory over Dillingham.”²²

Once the new five-member Cobb County Commission began its bimonthly meetings, Burruss quickly established that he had his own ideas about how an efficient government should be run. At the first meeting, on January 12, 1965, he and Tommy Brown opposed the plan proposed by Harry Ingram to retain a law firm to handle the county’s legal issues; instead, they thought hiring a lawyer at a salary of \$15,000 would be preferable to the open-ended billing of a legal firm. They argued that the county had spent \$25,000 the previous year with such a system. But Ingram’s proposal was approved, three to two, with Burruss and Brown voting against the plan.²³ As Thomas Scott points out in his history of Cobb County, “From the beginning the county commission split its votes on policy questions with Chairman Barrett and eastern district commissioner Bill Oliver (or his replacement, T. L. Dickson) on one side, western district commissioner Al Burruss and Tommy Brown on the other, and eastern district commissioner Harry Ingram the swing vote.”²⁴ Burruss, a fiscal conservative like most Georgia Democrats of the 1960s, was always looking for ways to save money, and he was not afraid to push his own agenda once he became part of the decision-making process.

Toward the end of his tenure on the commission, he showed great satisfaction from the accomplishments of the airport committee, of which he was chair: “‘I’m as proud of what we’ve done at the airport as anything else we’ve done,’ he said, citing the additional hangar space, the second fixed base operation now located there and the fact that twice as many airplanes are based there now.”²⁵ Yet, he appeared generally pleased with the commission’s work in general, claiming, “I’m extremely proud of what we’ve done. I think Cobb County has a new face and I think we’re partially

responsible for it.”²⁶ However, serving on the Cobb County Commission did not provide Burruss with the reach he desired and midway during his term as a commissioner, Burruss decided to run for a higher political office in the state government. In 1968, he announced he would not be seeking a second term on the commission but instead would be running for a legislative seat in the General Assembly. The legislative seats in the House of Representatives had been reapportioned so that in the November election of 1968, Cobb and Paulding counties were combined into one large district with seven representatives running at-large.²⁷ This change presented Burruss with an ideal opportunity to parlay his experience in county government into a larger forum. Chet Austin doesn’t recall a particular moment when Burruss chose to run for higher office, just that he made up his mind he wanted to go to the state House.²⁸ No one in his family remembers the day he decided to run either; but regardless of the reason, his decision was in keeping with his desire to serve others. It may have been his meeting of Jimmy Carter, the state senator from Plains, Georgia, that encouraged him to run for higher office.

Once Al Burruss met Jimmy Carter the two forged a friendship that would see them through Carter’s presidency right up to Burruss’s death in 1986. In a television program about Burruss produced in 1992, Carter recalled how their friendship developed:

When I began my campaign for governor, I was kind of a lonely candidate without many friends in the state, not very much money, not any way to get around and seek votes except to drive my own car. Then I met Al Burruss who volunteered to help me with the campaign. He had an airplane then, which was a wonderful phenomenon in my life, and he was very generous in helping me to get to know Georgia. It was a very large contribution personally, but the main advantage I derived from it was not just to get from one place to another in the state, but to spend those hours of travel forming a relationship with Al Burruss that was precious to me.²⁹

Though Carter lost his first gubernatorial race, “finishing third to former governor Ellis Arnall and flamboyant restaurateur Lester Maddox,”³⁰ Burruss

continued to believe in Carter's ability to win and govern well the state of Georgia. Burruss supported Carter again in his second gubernatorial run in 1970, the implications of which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Before Burruss determined to run for state representative, however, he first contemplated running for the seat of state Senator Sam Hensley, who was thinking of running for the congressional seat of Representative John W. Davis.³¹ Though he expressed a definite interest in running for the Senate, Burruss himself appeared undecided about staying in politics, saying he had not yet "made up his mind whether to 'run for commissioner, run for the senate or go home.'"³² *The Marietta Daily Journal* reported that he had considered resigning from the commission in early 1967 for business reasons, but changed his mind. In any event, Hensley resolved to seek reelection to the state senate, so Burruss let pass the idea of running for the Senate though not the idea of running for state office.

When Burruss announced in April 1968 that he would not seek a second term on the county commission, it became obvious that he had begun to think seriously of running for state representative. The primary reason for giving up his seat on the commission, as he told *The Marietta Daily Journal* involved his business obligations. He was "developing a new business corporation in addition to several of which he already is an officer."³³ Though others had been aware that he had been reconsidering his position on the commission for some time, he now claimed that his three years on the commission had "been a frustrating time."³⁴ While it could be assumed that the frustration he expressed might have something to do with being too often on the losing side of the decisions being made by the commission, he found it more difficult to split his time between his businesses and the commission. His announcement included the statement that his time might be better spent in the House of Representatives than the commission because, he says, "I can take two months away from the business better than I can take half of every day and half of every night."³⁵ Such a conception of time could have only been a subterfuge to dodge the question of whether or not he would run for state representative, for Burruss was too smart a man not to be aware that the work of a state representative goes on all year long, not just in the two-month General Assembly session. At any rate, he soon declared his candidacy for state representative.

Naturally, Burruss recruited all his family and friends to help him campaign for the state legislature. Austin tells an anecdote about a campaign handout that illustrates Burruss's type of involvement: "[The] first novelty item was a fly swatter—ordered about 10,000. We handed them out on Saturday morning at service stations and restaurants; we worked hard but got rid of them. Next Tuesday, we came in and there was that many more of them. Al had come in, seen they were all gone and ordered another batch. We realized he was going to do his own thing."³⁶

Just as his earlier ad for commissioner had cited his business experience in support of his candidacy, so too did his ad for state representative, except he now had his experience as a commissioner to add to his credibility. Interestingly, the 1968 campaign ad appears to use the same photograph used in his 1964 campaign. This race would be much tougher than his campaign for county commissioner, for he was attempting to unseat incumbent Homer Leggett of Paulding County.

Shortly before the primary elections, the Women Voter's organization put together a questionnaire asking all the candidates in the House and Senate races about issues important to Cobb voters, then printed the candidates' answers in *The Marietta Daily Journal* on September 8, 1968. In response to the question, "What particular qualifications do you have which you feel would make you the best person for this office?" Burruss cited his very extensive business experience, listing nine firms in which he had 20 years of managerial experience, then listing his term as a Cobb County commissioner.³⁷ For most of the questions, his responses were brief and to the point, usually one sentence and not very provocative. For example, when asked "What is your interpretation of the 'Home Rule for Counties' law as passed by the Georgia State Legislature in 1966, and how can this law be best applied to the problems facing Cobb County?" Burruss gave the careful response, "This bill must be ratified by the voters and probably tested in the courts. If approved many Cobb County problems can be controlled by this law."³⁸ It was the sort of answer that Burruss often provided about an issue when he wanted time to mull the issue over, thus avoiding committing himself before having done so. It is also the sort of answer that one would expect from an experienced businessman, one not given to sudden decisions without forethought, and such studied answers would be



MEET AL BURRUSS

- Age 37, Married and father of two children
- Businessman in Cobb County for 15 years
- President-General Manager of Tip Top Poultry — a leading Cobb County industry
- Past President Georgia Poultry Processors Association
- Director of National Broiler Council
- Member Board of Stewards, Tillman Memorial Methodist Church — Smyrna
- Marietta's Young Man of the Year, 1962
- Past President Marietta Western Little League

Al Makes One Promise

To use my extensive business experience and other God Given abilities to administer the affairs of Cobb County in an honorable and efficient manner.

Help Put Proven Business Policies Into Cobb County Government

Support
AL BURRUSS
for
Commissioner - Western District - 4 year term
You Can VOTE FOR Al Burruss



AL BURRUSS

During the few brief weeks of this campaign it has been my pleasure to visit with old friends, renew acquaintances, and to make many new friends among the voters of Cobb County. I earnestly regret that the limited time for the campaign precludes my visiting with each voter in the County's Western District to discuss affairs that are vital to the progress of our County.

I have found the voters concerned about our County Government and interested in electing to the Board of Commissioners men who have the experience and ability to operate our government on a businesslike basis and on whom all voters may depend for honest and impartial representation. Cobb County Government is important business and it demands experienced, qualified and dedicated men for positions of leadership.

I am vitally interested in Cobb County and I believe my 15 years business experience here provides me with a background that will be beneficial in solving the problems that face us. I assure you that I can and will cooperate with all other County officials in any endeavor that is in the best interest of and for the benefit of Cobb County.

I have made one promise in this campaign and I make it to you — that is "To use my extensive business experience and other God Given abilities to administer the affairs of Cobb County in an honorable and efficient manner."

AL BURRUSS
Candidate For
Commissioner - Western District - 4 year term
You Can VOTE FOR Al Burruss

(Left) The most frequent campaign advertisement that appeared weekly in the newspaper during August–November of 1964. (Right) Another advertisement that appeared on September 8, 1964.

ideal for a state representative. He provided a similar answer to the question, “In your opinion what would be specific advantages and/or disadvantages to including Cobb County in Rapid Transit?” He said, “[MARTA] must tell us what facilities will be provided for Cobb County and also what the true cost will be, then their proposal can be evaluated.” As a fiscal conservative, Burruss was not about to commit the people of Cobb County to increased

taxation unless it was beneficial to them, and this issue had already sparked huge controversy in Cobb County, where voters were gearing up to fight joining the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). In a referendum to approve joining the MARTA, Cobb County had voted the act down in 1965, and its future in Cobb County was unsure at best when Burruss was running for representative.³⁹

Burruss's humanism can be seen in his response to the question, "Do you favor an increase in the amount of state revenue used to aid urban problems?" because he showed a preference for those whom he thought were truly helpless, which interestingly did not include those on welfare. He answered, "Yes, in mental health and other areas where people are not able to help themselves, not in giveaway programs that encourage people to loaf." But his approach to taxing the people also shows he cared for those with special needs. To the question, "If there is a need for increased State revenue, how would you propose raising it?" he presented sound advice: "(1) By closing loop-holes in our tax laws that allow some people and business [*sic*] to escape paying their fair share. (2) By promoting new industry and business that will increase revenue without increasing the demand for other services. (3) By raising sales tax rate and allocating the proceeds to special needs." The plan he outlined would be one he followed during his long tenure in the House. Raising the sales tax became a favored way for the legislature to pay for services.

Though running against a Democratic incumbent, Burruss had proven himself as a commissioner and *The Marietta Daily Journal* endorsed him for the House seat. Editor Dick West, referring to Burruss as a "guiding force" behind the renewed political life in Cobb County thanks to the work of the new commission, praised him for bringing his successful business practices to bear in his service on the commission: "he has been a leader in guiding the administration of Cobb County onto a more forward-looking, more representative track during the past four years," and "has established himself as a sound thinker, a man of principle and an able exponent of progress."⁴⁰ Moreover, the endorsement claimed Burruss had "earned the privilege of representing Cobb and Paulding counties in the legislature."⁴¹

Whether or not the people of Cobb and Paulding counties agreed with West that Burruss had "earned" his entry into the legislature was not readily

apparent. Though neither Leggett nor Burruss appeared to have any doubts about the outcome, Burruss only narrowly defeated Leggett by 143 votes in the September 11, 1968, Democratic primary election.⁴² In the initial tally, “Burruss received 12,910 votes in Cobb and 980 votes in Paulding for a total of 13,890. Leggett polled 9,453 here and 4,169 in his home county for a total vote of 13,712.”⁴³ Leggett immediately contested the results through his attorney, who claimed that “‘several hundred’ votes incorrectly voided by poll officials would make his client the winner.”⁴⁴ There were some voting discrepancies that seem reminiscent of the twentieth century’s problems with “chads” in the Florida election of George W. Bush. A new ballot was being used that called for voters to mark the ballots to indicate the candidate they were voting for, but numerous voters in Paulding County “improperly marked” their ballots and consequently, these were thrown out. A further complication was reported on the Op-Ed page of *The Marietta Daily Journal*: “questions also have been raised as to why the Paulding County vote count was not completed until midway through the day following the election, and why it was still another day later before the county chairman would certify the Paulding returns.”⁴⁵ Though Leggett initially called for a recount of the votes, the recount of Hiram Precinct ballots only netted him another 35 votes; Leggett went away for the weekend to mull things over, then decided to concede the race to Burruss.⁴⁶ In all probability, he conceded rather than fought for a recount because he had hoped to fill the suddenly vacant Senate seat resulting from the death of Senator Albert Moore,” but did not get elected to the seat by the four-county Democratic committee.⁴⁷

In the general election that November, Al Burruss was elected, along with all other Democratic candidates for the House and Senate.⁴⁸ An ad that ran in *The Marietta Daily Journal* in early November made voting for Cobb Democrats easy to do, telling voters that “By punching hole no. 22 you will be voting the straight State and Local Democratic ticket.”⁴⁹ It was an interesting election though not that unusual for Cobb County, for Nixon was elected president and carried the county, yet all six Republican legislative candidates were defeated. This split was typical, of course, for Georgia and many other southern states at that time—to vote Republican for president and Democratic for other office seekers. Besides Burruss, there were three other first-time legislators, George Kreeger Jr., Howard Atherton, and

Eugene Housley.⁵⁰ Rounding out the nine-member all-Democratic Cobb delegation in the 1969 session were incumbent representatives Joe Mack Wilson, Hugh Lee McDaniell, and Cyrus M. Chapman, and Senators J. H. Henderson and Sam P. Hensley.⁵¹ With this election win, Burruss began the first of nine consecutive terms as a state legislator, remaining in office until his death.

Burruss primed himself to be an assertive, informed legislator. As he did whenever he was faced with learning something new, he made a careful and thoughtful study of each issue that came before him before giving his own opinions. Shortly after the election, he began a study of the Georgia Tax Revision Study Commission report and expressed his opinion freely to the reporters who began approaching him. His disgust with the report is obvious: “the inaction ‘came as a real blow to me. I was depending on them to show me the way. It looks like they wasted a lot of time and a lot of money.’”⁵² One thing he did not care for, especially as a successful businessman, was a waste of time and taxpayers’ money and this was something he felt he could change. Another part of his learning approach was done by attending meetings aimed at educating new legislators. At one such meeting in Athens, held in December of 1968, he was upset to learn that state funds set aside for maintaining juvenile homes across the state appeared not to have been allocated fairly in Cobb County and announced plans to do something about it: “Burruss feels the county is getting short-changed to an extent and told Shipley last week he intends to introduce some kind of legislation that will remedy the situation.”⁵³ We see him here, a new legislator, not even sworn in yet, but ready to do battle for the things he believes in. He studied how to be a legislator and talked to everyone he could to learn how to be effective, but when he did not know enough, he was unafraid to say so:

Rep.-elect Al Burruss said he understood from talking to highway officials that more money was needed for maintenance, but added that he had not had time to study the pro[p]osal being made by the department.⁵⁴ One can see his eagerness to get started when asked his opinion of what the 1969 General Assembly’s business will be, replying that

he was “looking forward to learning the mechanics of the General Assembly, [that] poor legislation is worse than none at all.”⁵⁵

Moreover, his feistiness and his willingness to do what was necessary to get the job done was evident in how he thought the new budget would get approved. As *The Marietta Daily Journal* reported, “He said he thought there would be a ‘lot of head-knocking’ over taxes and the budget which would end in compromise.”⁵⁶

Just as he had done when he first became a commissioner, he developed his own agenda, often based on what he was hearing from his constituents, and presented it. For example, he introduced a resolution addressed to the US Congress to change the ending of daylight savings time in Georgia at “midnight Labor Day instead of the last Sunday of October” because he said “he had heard more complaints about Daylight Savings Time than any other problems, including taxes.”⁵⁷ Nor was he worried about reversing himself, even when his opinions had been expressed in the newspaper. Having told *The Marietta Daily Journal* reporter Bill Schemmel that “he would vote for increases on wine and cigarette tax,”⁵⁸ he shortly thereafter voted against the tax increase on cigarettes.⁵⁹ When the House Urban Caucus organized by Joe Mack Wilson and Howard Atherton proposed a local option sales tax, Burruss showed his independent thinking by saying “he was not certain that the state needs the proposed increase in corporate and individual tax.”⁶⁰ As his first session as a legislator ended in March 1969, Burruss had begun the learning process that would make him one of the most respected legislators in the General Assembly. The next chapter will illustrate his growing confidence and competence as he learned how to the things he wanted to accomplish.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

1. Chet Austin, interview by author, tape recording, Marietta, GA, 27 June 2006.
2. See Celestine Sibley, “Legislative Spotlight: Speaker Pro Tem Burruss Worked Hard to Get There,” *AJC* 27 Jan. 1974, p. 11B.
3. Austin, interview.
4. *ibid.*
5. Sibley, “Legislative Spotlight.”
6. “Women’s Voters’ Questionnaire: Legislative Candidates Give Views,” *MDJ* 8 Sept. 1968, p. 9B.
7. “Jaycees Name A. L. Burruss as Area Young Man of Year,” *MDJ* 25 January 1963, p. 1.
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*
10. Phil Garner contended Burruss smoked four packs a day (See “How a Housewife and a Stewardess Saved the Nonsmokers’ Bill,” 6 April 1975, p. 8–10, p. 26), while Bill Kinney reported Burruss only smoked two packs a day (“This and That,” *MDJ* May 16, 1975). Burruss himself acknowledged his heavy smoking habit but without specifying how many packs a day he smoked.
11. Robin Burruss, interview by author, tape recording, Marietta, GA, 6 July 2006.
12. See Thomas Allan Scott. Cobb County, *Georgia and the Origins of the Suburban South: A Twentieth-Century History*, Marietta, GA: Cobb Landmarks & Historical Society, 2003, p. 387.
13. *ibid.*, p. 387.
14. *ibid.*, p. 388.
15. *ibid.*, p. 388.
16. Ad for Cobb County commissioner, Western District, 1964, *MDJ* 11 August 1964, p. 3.
17. Ad for Cobb County commissioner, Western District, 1964, *MDJ* 8 September 1964, p. 17.
18. Ads for Cobb County commissioner, Western District, 1964, *MDJ*. The “AL Burruss Makes One Promise” ad ran a few times, beginning in August 21, 1964. The “Burruss Not Elected!” ad ran several times in the final week of the county commissioner race, beginning October 25, 1964.
19. Tom Scott, “Critique of A. L. Burruss Biography,” to the author, 11 Aug. 2007.
20. See Scott, *Cobb County*, pp. 393–94.
21. See John Smyly, “Commission Races: Ingram, Brown, Burruss Win,” *MDJ* 4 November 1964, p. 1.
22. Scott, *Cobb County*, p. 397.
23. See Selby McCash, “Commission Splits on Hiring Attorney,” *MDJ* 13 Jan. 1965, p. 1.
24. Scott, *Cobb County*, p. 450.
25. “Burruss Will Not Seek Second Term,” *MDJ* April 7, 1968, p. 2.
26. *ibid.*
27. “Scramble Seen for Vacated Assembly Seats,” *MDJ* Mar. 15, 1968. n.p.
28. Austin, interview.

29. *A. L. Burruss: A Remembrance*, prod. Peter Kolstad and Rick Westaway, 45 min., Georgia Public Television and Kennesaw State College, GPB-TV, Atlanta, 1992, videocassette.
30. Gary M. Fink. "Jimmy Carter (b. 1924)." New Georgia Encyclopedia Online. <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-676> (accessed October 14, 2006).
31. See "Burruss May Seek State Senate Post," *MDJ* 7 Mar. 1968, p. 1. An article appearing in *The Marietta Daily Journal* on March 15, 1968, also relayed the information that Burruss was considering a run for the senate; see "Scramble Seen for Vacated Assembly Seats," *MDJ* 15 Mar. 1968, p. 1.
32. *ibid.*
33. See "Burruss Will Not Seek Second Term," *MDJ* 7 April 1968, p. 2.
34. *ibid*
35. *ibid.*
36. Austin, interview.
37. "Women Voters' Questionnaire: Legislative Candidates Give Views," *MDJ* 8 Sept. 1968, p. 9B.
38. *ibid.*
39. See Scott, *Cobb County*, pp. 432-433.
40. See Dick West, "Burruss: Proven Caliber," *MDJ* 5 Sept.1968. p. 4.
41. *ibid.*
42. See Bill Schemmel, "Leggett Defeated in Bid for Senate," *MDJ* 27 Sept. 1968, p. 1.
43. See Bill Schemmel, "Court May Pick Post 7 Winner," *MDJ* 13 Sept.1968, p. 1.
44. See Bill Schemmel, "Leggett to File Suit for Recount," *MDJ* 16 Sept.1968, p. 1.
45. See "'Long Count' Unnecessary," *MDJ* 18 Sept. 1968, p. 4.
46. See "Leggett Reduces Gap on Burruss," *MDJ* 22 Sept. 1968. p. 1.
47. See Bill Schemmel, "Leggett Defeated in Bid for Senate," *MDJ* 27 Sept.1968, p. 1.
48. See Bill Schemmel, "All Cobb Demos Triumph," *MDJ* 5 Nov. 1968, p. 1.
49. Ad for Democratic Ticket, November election. *MDJ* Nov. 3, 1968, p. 9B.
50. See Bill Schemmel, "New Faces Dot Cobb Delegation to Legislature," *MDJ* 12 Jan.1969, p. 2.
51. See Bill Schemmel, "Delegation Dislikes Tax Bills," *MDJ* 24 Feb.1969, p. 1.
52. See Bill Schemmel, "Cobb Legislators Rap Tax Group's Inaction; Wilson: Wasted People's Money," *MDJ* 11 Dec. 1968. p. 1.
53. See Jerry Duke, "Legislators Rip 'Unfair' Juvenile Home Funding," *MDJ* 27 Dec. 1968, p. 1.
54. See "Gas Tax Hike OK Foreseen by Legislators," *MDJ* 9 Jan. 1969. p. 1.
55. See "Redistricting Tops Cobb Assembly Bills," *MDJ* 12 Jan. 1969, p. 1.
56. *ibid.*
57. See "Burruss Heads Attempt to Cut Savings Time," *MDJ* 22 Jan. 1969, p. 1.
58. See Bill Schemmel, "Delegation Dislikes Tax Bills," *MDJ* 24 Feb. 1969, p. 1.
59. See Bill Schemmel, "Cobb Forces Help Kill 'Weed' Tax," *MDJ* 6 Mar. 1969, p. 1.
60. Schemmel, "Delegation."