

Twitter Thread by Angela Mayfield



Angela Mayfield

@pinkrocktopus

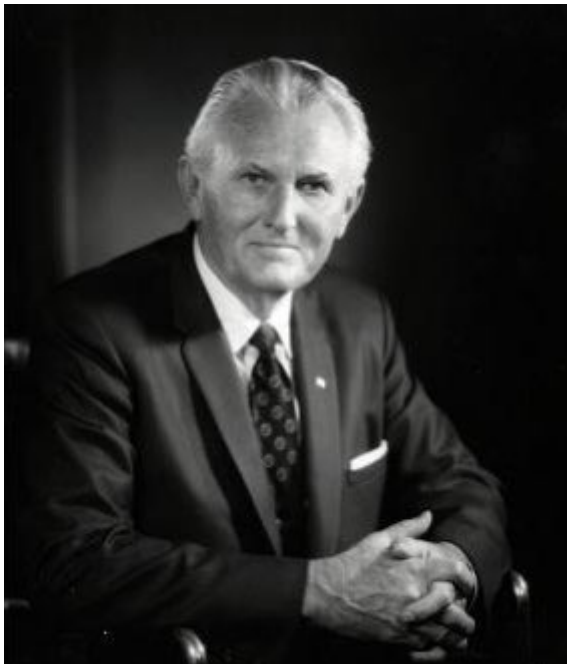


While everybody was losing their minds that @GaSecofState was meeting minimum standards of his job, I forgot to tell y'all a wild-ass story about a *different* GA Secretary of State, fighting a contested election with a whole other pack of racist honking geese!

BEN FORTSON ■■

Ben Fortson was the longest-serving SecState in GA history. TEN governors he served with (90% of whom were total shitbirds, Jimmy Carter being the reliable exception).

I'm not trying to rehab the reputations of old-timey segregationists here, but Ben Fortson was a BAMF.



I'm going to tell you a story from the late 1940's, but the background history you need to know is this:

Georgia did not always elect a Lt. Gov, but in 1946, the state figured there ought to be a backup.

(Of note, Gov/Lt Gov are still elected independently. Not a ticket race.)

So! 1946, Georgia elects a new Governor— Eugene Talmadge. And also elected the state's very first Lt. Gov as well; a dude named Melvin Thompson.

Talmadge was a thoroughbred shit, and I'll hear no arguments otherwise.

He died in December 1946, before he could take office.



The legal protocol would seem clear to us today— newly-elected Lt. Gov Melvin Thompson gets sworn in as Governor, right? Easy peasy, lemon squeezy.

But this is Georgia.

So you know these chicken lip politicians are going to make it difficult difficult, lemon difficult.



So what we've got here is:

- Ellis Arnall, the outgoing Gov, saying the next elected Gov is dead, so he gets to keep the job
- Melvin Thompson, Lt. Gov-elect, ready to step up
- Herman Talmadge, Eugene's son, saying the governorship should go to him because his dad died



I swear I'm not making this up.

It is the wildest real life political shit I have ever heard, second only to the time Congressman Preston Brooks beat the piss out of Senator Charles Sumner in the US Capitol because Brooks loved slavery and Sumner did not.

Anyway. There is a contested election at hand and it must be sorted out immediately and legally.

Enter our principled hero:

@GaSecofState Brad Raffensperger.

LOLOLOLOL just kidding!

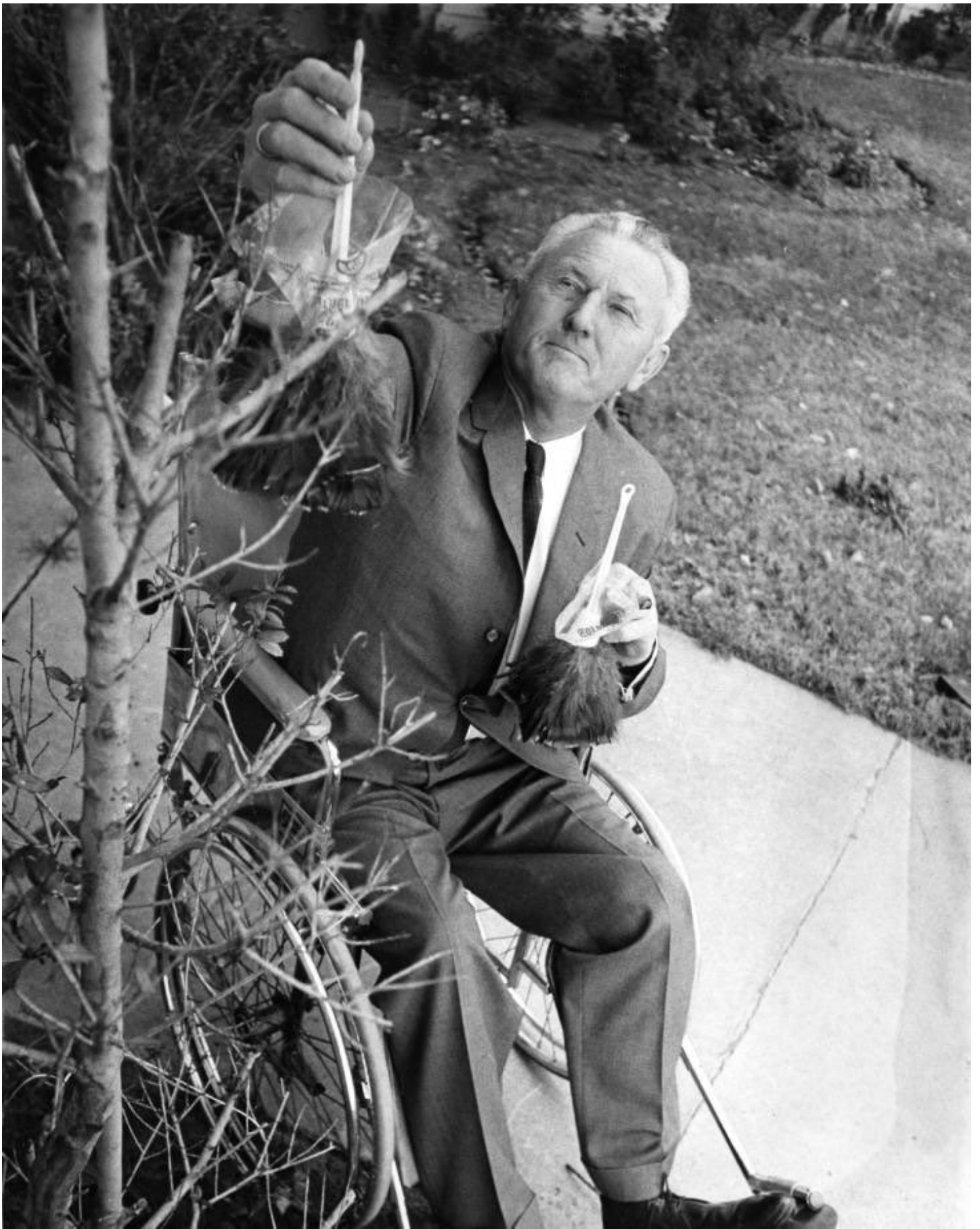
We're talking about Benjamin Wyatt Fortson, Jr., Georgia's 21st Secretary of State.

What's important to know is that Fortson sustained a paralyzing spinal injury at 24, and used a wheelchair thereafter.

It's fascinating to see pics of him taken in the same era when FDR was almost never photographed with mobility devices. Here's Fortson w/ FL Gov LeRoy Collins.



And here's Fortson hand-pollinating a tree with a feather duster, like a hobbyist nurseryman, and also checking out an industrial lathe, and I'm including these just because I like plant genetics and manufacturing, too, and would have liked to have been there.



But in 1947, Fortson took an unexpectedly bold action to save the state during what would become known as the Three Governors Controversy.

He hid the State Seal.

THEE actual physical Great Seal of the State of Georgia.

He hid it in his wheelchair.

Ben Fortson prevented ANY state legislation from being enacted to alter the outcome of the contested governorship until the State Supreme Court had ruled.

Ben Fortson sat on the actual physical State Seal for TWO WHOLE MONTHS, to preserve the will of the people.



Anyway.

That's how you Secretary a State, Brad.

Here's a photo of Fortson shooting fireworks at birds at the State Capitol. I told you Ben Fortson was a BAMF.

-fin-



Oh! Wait! I forgot to tell you how it ended!

Melvin Thompson, the guy elected to be the governor in case the governor died? He was sworn in as governor.

Herman Talmadge would end up governor later, as well. That's a different story.

I mean, to be clear, “preserve the will of the people” is doing some really heavy lifting, since we’re talking about GA in 1947.

Fortson wasn’t, like, a champion of voter enfranchisement or anything. But he saw a cheat coming, and blocked it, and for that, I appreciate him.

