



# The Politics of Trust: Reubin Askew and Florida in the 1970s (Modern South)

*Gordon E. Harvey*

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Florida governor Reubin Askew memorably characterized a leader as “someone who cares enough to tell the people not merely what they want to hear, but what they need to know.” It was a surprising statement for a contemporary politician to make, and, more surprising still, it worked. In *The Politics of Trust: Reubin Askew and Florida in the 1970s*, Gordon E. Harvey traces the life and career of the man whose public service many still recall as “the Golden Age” of Florida politics.

Askew rose to power on a wave of “New South” leadership that hoped to advance the Democratic Party beyond the intransigent torpor of southern politics since the Civil War. He hoped to replace appeals to white supremacy with a vision of a more diverse and inclusive party. Following his election in Florida, other New South leaders such as Georgia’s Jimmy Carter, Arkansas’s Dale Bumpers, and South Carolina’s John C. West all came to power.

Audacious and gifted, Askew was one of six children raised by a single mother in Pensacola. As he worked his way up through the ranks of the state legislature, few in Florida except his constituents knew his name when he challenged Republic incumbent Claude R. Kirk Jr. on a populist platform promising higher corporate taxes. When he won, he inaugurated a series of reforms, including a new 5 percent corporate income tax; lower consumer, property, and school taxes; a review of penal statutes; environmental protections; higher welfare benefits; and workers’ compensation to previously uncovered migrant laborers.

Touting honesty, candor, and transparency, Askew dubbed his administration “government in the sunshine.” Harvey demonstrates that Askew’s success was not in spite of his penchant for bold, sometimes unpopular stances, but rather because his mix of unvarnished candor, sober ethics, and religious faith won the trust of the diverse peoples of his state.

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