# Interview with David Gilbert

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Interviewer: Mark DePue



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DePue: Today is Friday, March 14, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today, I'm in Deerfield, Illinois, starting an interview with David Gilbert. Good morning.

Gilbert: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: We're in your home, but I understand you're going to be moving soon?

Gilbert: We're looking forward to moving downtown Chicago. All of our six kids are out of the nest, so we're going to do what we want to do for a while.

DePue: (laughter) I'm sure you're looking forward to being in downtown Chicago, maybe not the move itself, huh?

Gilbert: I am looking forward to being back downtown in the greatest city of the United States, that's for sure.

DePue: Do you prefer Dave or David?

Gilbert: Dave is fine.

DePue: Let's talk about when and where you were born.

Gilbert: I was born in Peru, Indiana, in 1940, June 21. Peru is the county seat of Miami County. It's about fifty miles north of Indianapolis, right in the heart of Indiana. I tell friends that the natives call Peru "Pee-ru," and they call Miami County "Mia-muh County," and we have similar pronunciations of cities in Illinois—"Vaye-enna" and "Vienna," "Cay-ro" and "Cairo," and so on and so forth.

DePue: "A-thens" instead of "Athens."

Gilbert: Right. (laughs)

DePue: The reason we're talking to you is because you're part of the Jim Thompson administration, and were Jim Thompson's press secretary for many, many years, especially in the early years. So we're going to have some fascinating stories to talk about over the next couple of sessions that we'll have. Tell me a little bit about yourself, though. Let's start with your father.

Gilbert: My father grew up on a farm in Chili, Indiana. My parents both grew up on farms, and each of them—Robert L. Gilbert and Mae L. Gilbert; May Lucille Rife was her maiden name—were the first in their families to go to college. They both graduated from colleges in Indiana. My mother graduated from Indiana Central. My father graduated from Manchester College in Indiana, then went on and got the post degree at Indiana Central, and he had two master's degrees in education, one from Indiana University and one from Purdue University. Great rivalries between the schools, and he had degrees from both of them.

DePue: Which way did he lean?

Gilbert: (laughter) You know, I really don't know. It depended on who was playing whom. When it came to the old Oaken Bucket, which is the annual football game between Indiana and Purdue, I really don't know which side he came down on. I always came down on Indiana's side, because I did my graduate work at Indiana.

DePue: Where in that series of educational steps your dad was taking were you born?

Gilbert: I was born in 1940, and my father and mother had been married about five years earlier. He had just completed his graduate work from Indiana University and was teaching high school at Peru High School. During the summer he worked at a cannery, which was a very difficult job. But here he was, a high school teacher, teaching United States history in Peru, Indiana, in 1940, and—

DePue: And you say he's got a master's degree?

Gilbert: He has a master's degree. And during the summers, to subsidize his income, he just had a blue-collar, hard-labor job at a cannery, canning peas and things like that, working long hours.

DePue: Being born in 1940, the inevitable question is what happened to your father during the war?

Gilbert: He would have been drafted in about 1943 or '44, and it was during that time my family had moved to Winona Lake, Indiana. My dad had a job offered to him as superintendent of schools in Riley, Indiana, which is near Terre Haute. And because of that job as superintendent of schools in Riley, Indiana, he was given an educational deferment when his draft number came up to go into the navy. But I'll never forget the day that… I was about four years old. My mother went to the phone. I remember it just like it was yesterday. And all of a sudden she started crying. I knew it was my dad on the phone, because when she answered the phone she said, "Hi, honey," or something like that. But then she started crying, and I said, "What's wrong, Mommy?" And she said, "Daddy doesn't have to go to war."

A few years later the pieces were put together, and I found out it was because of his educational deferment. During the war years, education was one of the top priorities in this country, where deferments were given. They couldn't recruit teachers because so many young people were being shipped off to war, especially the boys. A lot of fighting men from what we now regard as the greatest generation were sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen, even though you had to be eighteen years old to get into the armed services. A lot of them lied about their age, or misrepresented the facts, and were able to go. So that was my father's reason for not serving in the war.

He then went on to Cambridge City, Indiana, in 1945, and became a superintendent of schools at Cambridge City, which included a few small towns around there. At the time we lived in Pershing, Indiana, in a small town one mile away from Cambridge City. Pershing, Indiana, was originally named East Germantown, and during the war somehow that town's—

DePue: During the First World War, I guess.

Gilbert: (laughter) The town's named was changed to Pershing. A few years ago I went back to visit Pershing, and on the sign going into the little town—it couldn't be more than 200 or 300 people—it said, "Pershing, Indiana, also known as East Germantown," and so it now claims both names.

DePue: Did you have any siblings?

Gilbert: I do. I had four siblings: an older sister, Roberta, who now is a psychiatrist and living in Florida—she did live in the Washington, D.C. area—has authored a number of books on psychiatry, family relationships, and things like that.

DePue: Is she retired now?

Gilbert: No, she's still conducting seminars, and she's about four years older than I am. I'm seventy-three, so she would be about seventy-seven. But she's still very active, even in her later years. Probably other people would be retired, but not Robbie—her nickname is Robbie. Very interesting person. I was second in line, and I was the oldest son of three boys. My next sibling is my brother Jan. Jan's an interesting character. He is retired, and lived for many years in California, now living in Maryland. But he and his wife, after graduating from Grace College, in Winona Lake, Indiana, went to Africa to teach in an American high school, English high school in Kinshasa, which used to be the Congo. Next in line would be my brother Steve. Steve lived in Centralia, Illinois. He founded a couple of companies down there. Unfortunately, about five years ago he and his two granddaughters were killed in an automobile/train accident at a crossing that he had crossed hundreds of times, and it's still a mystery to this day how that happened. But he was a wonderful guy. If [Rush] Limbaugh is the arch-conservative of our time, my brother was even probably a little bit to the right of Limbaugh. He was a character, and he and I used to exchange many, many emails debating politics and so forth. But wonderful guy, and I miss him greatly. Then last, and certainly not least, is my little sister, Lana. She's retired now, and she and her husband live in Maryland.

DePue: Was the family religious when you were growing up?

Gilbert: My family was very religious. My parents, I think soon after they were married, were born again Christians, and we were raised in very fundamental Christian homes—no drinking, no dancing, no smoking, no going with girls that did. And out of that fundamental Christian background, as soon as I had the chance I, of course, went the other way, (laughs) which is not an uncommon story.

DePue: When we first met, I had the impression your father was a pastor somewhere along the line.

Gilbert: He was. After being a superintendent at Cambridge City School District, he was recruited to be headmaster of Wheaton Academy, which is a private Christian high school outside of Wheaton, Illinois. He was the headmaster there for four years, and from there he made the leap into the ministry and became the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Wheaton, Illinois. I'm not sure of all that happened during that time. He was offered a teaching position at Wheaton College, but, as he told me at the time, he felt called by the Lord to take the pastor's position in Wheaton.

DePue: How old was he at that time?

Gilbert: I was in eighth grade, so he must've been in his late forties.[1]

DePue: How would you describe his personality?

Gilbert: My father was a very bright man, intellectually. He read a lot. He was an unbelievable family man. He took his work very seriously, but at the same time, coming out of a farming life as a youngster and a teenager, he knew a lot about everything. I mean, he was a very handy man. He taught me things about carpentry and things like that, which most kids my age wouldn't have gotten from their parents—or maybe they would've in my generation. So from that standpoint, he was a wonderful man. He also took us on family vacations. We went to Bemidji, Minnesota, and I caught my first northern pike as a kid up in Bemidji.

We were a close-knit family. My mother, who graduated cum laude from Illinois Central College, was a very bright person, but she put her career on the side to raise her five kids. Then later on, after we had got into school, she went back to teaching. But my dad was very consumed with his work, so I did not see him a lot during the day. I never saw him during the day. But at night we did have family time, and with five kids if I would be acting up, or any of my brothers or sisters, those famous words were from my mom, "Wait 'til your father gets home." (laughs)

DePue: So your dad was the disciplinarian?

Gilbert: He was a disciplinarian, he was, and I don't fault him for that at all. He was a good disciplinarian. He was an honest man, not given to rage. He didn't drink, so there were no issues with alcohol or anything like that. But later on in life—I must've been my late fifties—he and I had a talk. He said, "You know, son, as I look back over the years," and tears began to come down his cheeks. I had never seen my father cry in all the years growing up. And he said, "If there's one regret I have, it is that too many times I came home from my work as a minister, as a pastor, and I was still a pastor at home, and I wasn't the father that I should've been." And of course, that brought tears down my cheeks, to hear him say something like that. It was kind of a mutual forgiveness of each other. Some things that I felt I had been denied because of his strict religious beliefs all kind of went out the window and made sense after that.

DePue: Were you the typical preacher's kid?

Gilbert: I was a typical preacher's kid. I was a PK.

DePue: What does that mean?

[1] Born November 9, 1911, Rev. Robert Gilbert became pastor of First Baptist in 1952. Travis Penn, "In Memory: Dr. Robert Gilbert," Illinois State Association of Free Will Baptists, March 8, 2009, http://www.ilfwb.org/2009/03/dr-robert-gilbert/.

Gilbert: (laughs) It means that you grow up in a bubble. Because you're a preacher's kid, you are being looked at by all the members of the church. If you did things that normal kids do as youngsters or teenagers, kind of the wrath of the church would come down on our family, and my dad would hear about it.

DePue: Well, a lot of times you hear that preachers' kids are the rebellious ones; they're the ones that are kicking up their heels.

Gilbert: That probably happened more with my youngest brother, Steve. He and my father did not talk for a few years, but they eventually became very close in the latter days. But that wasn't an issue in my case. Once I got out of college and went to Indiana University, I just went my own way and then became a newspaper reporter for the *Tribune*. And after that, there was a great deal of pride in my father and my mother of the work that I was doing. But I had established my own lifestyle and my own place.

DePue: Once you got out from the house, were you still involved with the church?

Gilbert: No. I was involved with the church through college, but when I graduated from Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, and before I went to Indiana University, that probably was the break from the church for me. But I later came back; it never diminished my faith in God, through all of that. I always had a strong belief in God, and I knew he was my creator. I knew he had a plan for my life, and that all this stuff that happened through my life was part of the plan.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about your mother, her personality.

Gilbert: My mother was a very creative person. She graduated from Indiana Central with two majors, one in art and one in music. During one little family vacation, we were on the Ohio River in Cincinnati; took a trip on the *Delta Queen*, which was one of the old paddle wheelers up and down the Ohio River. When we got off the boat—gosh, I must've been five or six years old at the time—the Cincinnati Opera was having a rehearsal for their summer concert series, and she took me in to the opera. We more or less just walked in, sat down. And I developed a love of classical music, which I recently have kind of developed a love for since. But even during my growing up years and at Indiana University, which had a great school of opera, that was very important to me, and I realized it was because of that one experience that my mother had given me. Naturally, she emphasized drawing and singing, music—she would play the piano. Our family would sing. We would sing the old gospel hymns. We would sing secular songs, as well. But that was part of our family time, growing up. It was a lot of fun. We all sang in church. We sang in church choirs. I sang in school choirs, and never thought twice about it, because this was part of my DNA. (laughter)

DePue: You have a good voice?

Gilbert: I used to.

DePue: Baritone? Bass?

Gilbert: Baritone and bass. But those were good times. Back to the religious part of my parents: in Pershing, Indiana, my mother started a little afterschool Bible class, just for the kids in the neighborhood. And there were probably fifteen or twenty kids that would come to our house once a week, and she did flannelgraphs. She made most of the figures herself, and she would tell little Bible stories and put them on a flannel-draped board about the size of a bulletin board, on a little easel. And she would tell the story about Noah and the ark, or David and Goliath. The David and Goliath stories, of course, were my favorites. But there were kids in those Bible study groups who I had contact with later in life, who, as a result of those classes, became believers and became churchgoers. They say it changed their life. So you never know when that little spark is going to be lit that will change your life. And my parents could tell hundreds and hundreds of stories about people who they have led to the Lord, or who became believers, as a result of their ministry, both in the church and outside of the church.

Both of my parents were very open in terms of our home. We always had someone not in our family living in our house—a kid who was on hard times, a kid who had run away from home, a classmate of my sister's at Wheaton Academy who couldn't afford to live at the dorm. Same thing happened when my sister went to Wheaton College; we had a classmate of hers who lived with us in our house because she couldn't afford what it would cost to stay in a dorm. But our home was always open, always interesting, lot of discussion. And my mother was always a part of that. She was always very welcoming, "Of course, come on in. Of course you can stay for dinner."

At the same time, she kind of followed the strict, fundamental teachings of the Bible, that a woman should serve her husband, and she lived that to the fullest. She not only helped my father in his work, but later on, the last career my father had was foreign secretary for Baptist Mid-Missions. In that role, he was responsible for the mission work that went on for the Baptist church throughout the world. And I recently came across a letter that my mother had written after the two of them travelled to India and to Africa and places like that, and Israel. They were in Israel in 1978, I think. It was during one of the war years in Israel. They just had a fascinating life. But she was always the helper, and just a brilliant, creative person in her own right.

DePue: Which one of these two do you take after most?

Gilbert: (laughs) Both. There's a creative side that I definitely take after my mother. I love art. I love music. I have a fascination with art. I've been in art museums all over the world, and I know that love of art was because of my mom. My dad was a great facilitator. He was a negotiator. If a husband and a wife in his church were having problems, he a lot of times brought them back together. My mother wrote in one of her letters on their foreign trips that he had to go

into India. They were opening up a new mission work, and he had to see the minister of education or someone like that. And he was told that it usually took four or five days, even, to get an appointment with this man. He not only got in the first day that he went—and he says it was because God was opening doors for him—but he also met with this man for a couple of hours, who approved the mission work that others had said was very unlikely to happen. So he was a great negotiator, facilitator, and I think I picked up some of those skills from him as well.

DePue: We've talked a little bit about the schools you attended, but before we get into some more of that, was politics ever discussed around the dinner table or at home?

Gilbert: It was. The first political remembrance I have was when we lived in Riley, Indiana, and I was probably about five years old. Franklin Roosevelt, President Roosevelt, died.[2] I remember a lot of discussion. My parents were always Republicans. I wouldn't call them dyed-in-the-wool Republicans, but they were Republicans. Growing up on farm communities, I think they came out of Republican families. There's a family photograph that goes back on my mother's side of probably my great-great-grandfather, who fought in the Civil War and met Abraham Lincoln. There's a photo, and he says, "I met Abraham Lincoln." So that was their bringing up. We did discuss politics. I don't think my father was all that sad that Roosevelt had died. I think he had some issues with some of Roosevelt's programs, although Franklin Roosevelt was certainly one of the greatest presidents we've ever had. He tended to vote for Barry Goldwater and strict Republican tickets down the line. But we would discuss foreign affairs. Being a history major in college and a history teacher, he was always interested in history, so politics was part of our dinner table discussions.

DePue: Was it something you were interested in?

Gilbert: Yeah, yeah. When I went to Grace College in Winona Lake, Indiana, I went as a history major, and the only reason I did was because my dad was a history major. Then I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer, but it was during that time that I got interested in journalism and pursued that path.

DePue: I did want to talk a little bit about your high school years. Where were you when you went to high school?

Gilbert: My first two years of high school I went to Wheaton Community High School in Wheaton, Illinois, a school I still love and revere. It is now Wheaton Warrenville South High School. That high school produced a lot of memorable characters, most notably were: Red Grange, number seventy-seven for the University of Illinois, for the Chicago Bears. He was known as the

[2] Roosevelt died April 12, 1945.

Wheaton Iceman, because his father delivered ice back in the day. He had two homes in Wheaton, and, being his son, he grew up carrying these huge blocks of ice, delivering with his dad. That's what made him so strong and so big and so fast and powerful, and one of the greatest football players this state or the Chicago Bears ever knew. Bob Woodward was a graduate of Wheaton High School. [Edwin] Hubble, who developed the Hubble space scope, which has led to so many fantastic discoveries, graduated from Wheaton High School. John Belushi graduated from Wheaton High School.

DePue: (laughs) Those are two different kind of personalities.

Gilbert: Dave Gilbert! No. (laughs) I didn't graduate from Wheaton, but I certainly loved the school. At the end of my—

DePue: Is that a private or public school?

Gilbert: It's a public school. During that time, my father was pastor of First Baptist Church in Wheaton. And then he was called to become pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Erie, Pennsylvania. He came home one day and informed us that we were moving to Erie, and it crushed me. I was playing varsity football and basketball as a sophomore. I felt I had probably good opportunities to excel in both those sports at Wheaton, and go on from there, and all of the sudden I was taken out from my best friends, the sports I loved, the coaches who I idolized, and so forth, and we moved to Erie. The parents of friends of mine during that time offered for me to stay in Wheaton and continue on there, but my parents wouldn't have that at all. So, under protest, I did move to Erie, and went on and graduated from Strong Vincent High School in Erie, which was a school that… You know, I made many friends, and just went back to my fiftieth high school reunion a few years ago. But when I look back at my high school years, Wheaton High School was my school; Strong Vincent kind of came in second.

DePue: Did you do any other extracurricular activities in either of these schools?

Gilbert: Sports really took up most of my time. I excelled mostly in basketball, football, and track. I did play baseball, but track was my springtime sport.

DePue: And you already mentioned one of your favorite subjects was history?

Gilbert: Yes.

DePue: At that time in your life, what did you think you wanted to do?

Gilbert: I really had no idea. Probably, when I was a senior in high school at Strong Vincent, I began to have my great awakening. I read Ayn Rand, *Atlas Shrugged*, and the Ayn Rand books. I read Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*. I read *Death in a Family*. I started reading Ernest Hemingway. And those years, those reading experiences, kind of caused me to start

thinking about what I wanted to do in my life. It didn't lead to a conclusion at that point in time, but what it did create in me was an awareness that there was a huge world out there that I had not experienced, had not seen, and that I wanted to in some fashion. And that thread carried through my life probably until today.

DePue: (laughs) Well, I hope today isn't necessarily a big turning point for you. What did your dad think you should be doing?

Gilbert: He wanted me to be a minister. There was no doubt about that.

DePue: Was he putting some pressure on you to do that?

Gilbert: I wouldn't say pressure. He let me know that's what he wanted me to do. And that's how I ended up at Grace College, which was a private, small college, two or three thousand students in central Indiana.

DePue: A Baptist school?

Gilbert: It was a Church of the Brethren school, which is very similar to Baptist. But no drinking, no dancing, no smoking. I don't recall we had to sign a pledge, but we probably did, just like Wheaton College did up until a few years ago.

DePue: A pledge not to do those things?

Gilbert: Not to drink and dance. They even frowned on going to movies back in the day. I kind of snuck off and went to my movies, and when I would visit my friends over summer vacations I was known to have a beer or two. I hope the people at Grace College would forgive me now for saying that. (laughter) But my senior year at Grace College was when I decided kind of what I wanted to do in life. I had been a history major, planning to go on to law school. During my junior year I was complaining about the student newspaper at Grace College called the *Sounding Board*. I think I kept harping to my roommate, "What a rag this is! They never write anything news or controversial or whatever." And one day he just had enough of it. He said, "Look, Gilbert, if you don't like the student newspaper, why don't you do something about it?" And being kind of a cocky person that I was, I said, "Okay, I will." So I went to the faculty adviser for the student newspaper, Eleaner Norris, and I said, "Miss Norris, any chance I could get on the staff of the paper?" She said, "Why, sure!" You know, it was a small school. So she gave me some writing assignments, reporting assignments, and I found out it wasn't as easy as I thought it would be. But I developed a real love for writing and for journalism. My senior year, I was named editor of the student paper, and it was fun. It was a lot of fun.

DePue: Which part did you enjoy the most, the writing or the investigation and the research side of it?

Gilbert: Both. And I liked the editing part of it too. I liked being able to talk to my staff about things that we could cover, and how we could kind of raise the level of reporting. I don't think the newspaper ever became that investigative or liberal voice that I thought it should be, even when I was there. But during my senior year, my dad and I talked, and he said, "I just feel so strongly, because of your skills, that you should go into the ministry." I said, "Well, I'm not getting the same feelings myself, Dad." And he said, "Would you do me a favor?" I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Would you go to seminary, at least for a year, and see what you think?" Totally out of respect for my dad, I agreed to do that. So before I went to Indiana University I went to Grace Theological Seminary for one year.

DePue: And that was after you'd graduated.

Gilbert: After I graduated from Grace College.

DePue: I want to get a couple dates in here. You graduated from high school in 1958

Gilbert: Right, mm-hmm.

DePue: This is the time when the draft is going on. There's an assumption that young men are going to do something as far as the military is concerned. And it sounds like you didn't have any interruption while you were going to Grace College, and I assume you graduated from there in '62?

Gilbert: Actually, '63 I don't think the draft was invoked in 1958. I think it was a few years later.

DePue: There would've been tons of deferments, because the army, frankly, didn't need all the people.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: So you would've had a student deferment probably.

Gilbert: I had a student deferment, whenever that came into play. And then I went to Grace Theological Seminary for a year, continued my deferment at the end of my first year in seminary, which I must say I enjoyed thoroughly parts of it. (DePue laughs) I took a semester of Greek. I took a semester of Hebrew. I found my course about the life of Jesus the most interesting. What a fascinating character he was. I still believe to this day he was the most influential person who's ever lived on this Earth, and as a result of his life on this Earth, the course of history has changed, and so many things have happened.

At the end of that first year in seminary, where I still was involved with the student newspaper—writing, but not in an editor's position—I called my dad and I said, "You know, Dad, I think we need to talk." So he, living in Erie, Pennsylvania, came to visit, and we took a walk when he got to town. I went

to one of my favorite places, which was around a little pond, and there was a tree, which I used to go and sit under and read and things. My dad and I went out there, and I told him just what my experience had been in seminary, what my thoughts were. And I said, "I've enjoyed seminary. I really do not feel called to be a minister, to go into the ministry. I do feel that I want to go into journalism. I want to study more, and I'd like to go to Indiana University." And Miss Norris had written a recommendation for me at IU—

DePue: They had a journalism school there?

Gilbert: Yeah, one of the best in the country. Ernie Pyle School of Journalism.

DePue: Oh, my.

Gilbert: Ernie Pyle, the great war correspondent.

DePue: Yeah, and especially at that timeframe, that name would've resonated.

Gilbert: It certainly did resonate.

DePue: I wonder how you were paying for these five years of school.

Gilbert: My parents paid for a lot of it. I worked. One year my brother and I formed a painting company, Gilbert Brothers' Painting Company in Erie, Pennsylvania, and we painted houses. I paid for one year in school just from that summer of work. Soon after that, my parents moved to Gary, Indiana. My dad took a pastorate at Glen Park Baptist Church, and so I went there. It was the summer before I went to graduate school, and I worked the night shift, the midnight shift, at U.S. Steel Company, and saved almost enough money to pay for my first year of graduate school at IU. Then I got a scholarship at IU, and that paid for the rest of my graduate school.

DePue: At this timeframe, you're going from Grace College, Grace Seminary, I guess, into Indiana. How would you describe your political philosophy or political views?

Gilbert: I would say I was a conservative Republican, based on my history teachers and political science teachers at Grace College. They were Republicans. One of them was probably a John Bircher, which was really far to the right. And then when I went to Indiana, I wasn't very political during my graduate school years, but I did remain a Republican. Some of my buddies were law school students at Indiana, and some of them were Republicans, some were Democrats. We would sit up nights drinking pitchers of beer and talking politics. It was always an interesting topic for me.

DePue: What kind of journalism were you drawn to? Were you looking at the political side, or business, or sports?

Gilbert: The dean of the Indiana School of Journalism was a man named John Stempel. Stempel was a retired journalist working in New York City. He worked at the *New York Herald*—I'm not sure; I think it was the *New York Herald*.[3] Very wise man, very aware of the world. I always looked at him with a lot of admiration. He and I developed a friendship, and he was the one that leveraged the scholarship for me to finish up my graduate work, although I didn't get my master's degree because I didn't write my thesis, but that's another story. But when I was leaving Indiana, Professor Stemple said, "Well, Gilbert, what are you going to do now?" And I said, "Probably get a job at a newspaper." He said, "What kind of a job?" And I said, "I don't know. What do you mean?" He said, "There are two ways you can go: you can go into advertising and probably make the most money that you'll ever need in your life, or you can go into editorial and probably have the most fun, the most exciting time of your life that you'll ever have." And I said, "Well, that settles it; I'm going into editorial." (laughter)

I soon applied to the *Chicago Tribune*, not having ever worked for a newspaper, other than the *Daily Student* at Indiana. I interviewed with a man named Russell MacFall, and Russell MacFall was an Indiana graduate, so he liked Indiana students. He told me, "You know, Gilbert, I would like to give you a job, but you just don't have enough experience. So what we'll do, we'll get you a job at City News Bureau." And I did; I went to City News Bureau.

DePue: Is that a newspaper or a position?

Gilbert: City News Bureau was a local wire service in Chicago, owned by all four daily newspapers in Chicago—the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago's American*, *Chicago Daily News*, and the *Chicago Sun-Times*—as well as the major TV stations in the city. We would cover everything that daily reporters didn't cover. I started out covering crime on the south side of Chicago, and had a night editor named Arnold Dornfeld. You never asked where something was. He would say, "There's been a bombing down on the south side of Chicago at 83rd and Cottage Grove," or whatever, and you would take that assignment slip, and you didn't say, "Where's 83rd and Cottage Grove?" Although one of my cohorts did tell me, "You just go down to 83rd Street until you see the Mars lights, the blue police lights, and you'll know you're there." I worked nights doing crime reporting. Then I did some education reporting. But my final assignment—I only worked at City News Bureau for six months—was being the reporter at the Criminal Courts Building at 26th and California. I worked in the press room with reporters Bob Enstad from the *Tribune*, Jae Meare from the *Daily News*, Joe Reilly from the *Sun-Times*, and a big press room, and you can imagine what that was like. The Panczko Brothers, Peanuts and Pops Panczko, who were well-known burglars in Chicago, would come

[3] An Indiana native whose parents were Indiana University faculty, Stempel worked at the *New York Sun* during the first half of the 1930s, then served as the managing editor of the *Express* in Easton, Pennsylvania. He returned to IU in 1938. Frank G. Talbott, "John E. Stempel," Indiana Journalism Hall of Fame, http://indianajournalismhof.org/1970/01/john-e-stempel/.

into the press room when they had trial dates. They'd bring in boxes of donuts and pastries, and they'd sit around and shoot the breeze with reporters. Then they'd go stand before Judge Ryan, and he'd say, "You're going to Joliet for six months."

DePue: I'm going to jump in here, because I've got a couple questions for you, and as I listen to these stories my mind's going a million directions sometimes. (Gilbert laughs) What timeframe did you get to this court reporting job? When was that?

Gilbert: That was in 1965.

DePue: And when did you first land the job at the City News Bureau?

Gilbert: In 1965. That was after I had gotten out of graduate school, just walked in blind to the *Tribune*, applied for a job, and they got me a job at City News Bureau. Now, at this time I did have a draft number, and my educational deferment, which I had relied on for all these years, was now gone. And my number was right in the middle of the pack, so I had a pretty good chance of going to Vietnam if I got drafted. I knew that. So while I was at City News Bureau, and doing court reporting and so forth, I was using my weekends or off days to go to the different National Guard units in the area to see if I could get into a National Guard unit. There was no room in the one at Chicago Avenue Armory. All their positions were filled. I was getting the door shut in my face in every place that I applied, and it looked like I was going to be drafted.

I went to Gary, Indiana, just on a lark, to the 113th Engineer Battalion. I walked in and the Master Sergeant was sitting there, smoking a cigar, and I said, "Do you have any openings? I just finished my graduate degree at Indiana. I'm reporting for City News Bureau in Chicago," blah, blah, blah. And he said, "No, kid, I'm sorry. I don't have any slots." I said, "Okay, thanks." I turn around, I'm walking out the door, and he says, "Hey, wait a minute. Can you type?" (DePue laughs) I say, "Can I type? I can type sixty words a minute!" And he says, "I've got a job for you. We have a slot called 72B20," which was cryptography, encoding and decoding messages, and to encode and decode messages in cryptography you had to know how to type. So he took me in to the 113th Engineer Battalion.

Soon after that I got called up and had to go for my basic training. I left City News Bureau, went to Fort Knox, Kentucky. My parents said goodbye to me. I got on the bus. We drove down to Fort Knox, Kentucky. I was there for three days. They woke us up at three o'clock in the morning, said, "Pack up everything, you're out of here." We went to the airport, got on a plane. I had no idea where we were going. I was in the U.S. Army at this time, and we went to Fort Bliss, Texas, and I did my basic training at Fort Bliss. At Fort Bliss, next stop was Vietnam. This is where the infantry was trained, and from there you were sent to Nam. Being in the National Guard, I was to do my basic training then go to AIT, which was your advanced training—

DePue: Advanced Individual Training

Gilbert: And that's when I did my training in cryptography, encoding and decoding messages, learning to type and everything. But when I left basic training, I had finished very high in my platoon. I was a platoon guide, and had scored highest in the written exams and in the PT exams, and I was called in by the company commander. They tried to get me to go to OCS school. And they told me that I had to go, that now you've finished your basic training, we're going to send you to Officers Candidate School. You'll be a second lieutenant. You'll be a leader of men. And I'm thinking, Yeah, and I'll be in Vietnam, and I knew that story. I told them I couldn't do it. I said, "I just cannot do it." They literally threw me out of the office. I went home for two weeks, then went to Fort Gordon, Georgia, and that's where I went for AIT. While I was at AIT, I got a letter from Russell MacFall saying, "Gilbert, when you're done with your AIT and you're out of your six months' training, we have a job for you at the *Chicago Tribune*."

DePue: Before you get too much farther along, I did want to ask you what you remember about November 22, 1963, when JFK was shot. Where were you?

Gilbert: I was in seminary, and I was going to a student conference in Des Moines, Iowa. I hadn't had a haircut in a long time. I was driving with some other students who were going to the student conference in Des Moines. We stopped at a barbershop. I told them, "I've got to get a haircut. You guys go get a cup of coffee or something." I went in and sat down in this barbershop, and was getting my haircut, when the news came over the television, this little black and white set that they had, that JFK had been shot.

DePue: What was your reaction?

Gilbert: My heart sank. It was… That was tough. I knew what was ahead of me. I knew Vietnam was ahead of me. I didn't know that I was going to have a job at the *Chicago Tribune*. But it was tough. Although I was a Republican, I admired JFK, and I had followed his career. He was young. He was vibrant. He spoke well. Young people loved him. And I was in that group.

DePue: So after you got through this military training, or even while you're going through the training, what were your views about the Vietnam War? Sounds like you had no desire to go there.

Gilbert: I did and I didn't. Being a platoon guide, you are basically the leader of your platoon. You go on road marches. You bivouac in the desert. Because you're a platoon guide, you're exempt from KP, and you have a special room that you get. You don't have to sleep in a bunk in the big bunkhouse. So I enjoyed that part. I liked basic training. I'd never want to do it again—no way I could ever do it again—but I liked it. I liked the physical part of it. I liked the war part of it. I liked the shooting. You know, I fired expert. I liked cleaning my weapon.

My mother was a crack shot with a rifle, growing up on a farm with three older brothers. She could definitely shoot a squirrel with a .22 rifle out of a tree. And I grew up with that.

One day we were camping out in Pershing, Indiana, in our back yard with my little buddies. We woke up in the morning. There's a blue racer snake sticking his head out of a hole in the ground. Scared to death, I ran into the house. I said, "Mom, Mom, there's a snake, there's a snake!" She didn't say, "Where? What?" She walked into the closet, got her .22 rifle, reached up, put a shell in, walked out on the back porch. She says, "Where is it?" We said, "There it is!" And you could see this snake at the corner of the tent. She went like this, boom, one shot, shot the snake right in the head. She was the hero of Pershing, Indiana, after that. I mean, every kid went home, "Mrs. Gilbert shot a snake!" I grew up with a love of guns because of that.

So in the army, learning to shoot a rifle the right way, and cleaning it—I loved it. There was that part of me, so I knew if I went into active duty I could succeed. The other part was, I just felt there was another thing I'm supposed to do in life, and it's kind of the plan. Again, there is a plan for your life. And my parents had always driven that into me. When I decided to go to journalism school, my dad said, "Well, if that's what you feel your calling is, that's what you should do." So that feeling is what led me to seek the National Guard and not go to Vietnam.

DePue: From everything you've told me, you had these fascinating years when you were growing up, but it also sounds like it was a bit in a bubble—I think you might've used that word yourself—and then you're on the south side of Chicago reporting at 83rd and Cottage Grove. I think I know that neighborhood. It's a little different from where you were growing up, isn't it?

Gilbert: There was a report that came over the police ticker, bomb at 83rd and Cottage Grove. And there were no cell phones. There were no handheld radios in that day. So I go to the address. There are police cars all over the place. There's a couple of fire trucks. And my first instruction was, "Get us information so we can get a bulletin out on the wire." That's what City News did. I was basically to confirm that there was a bombing. When I would do that, they'd put a bulletin out to the *Tribune*, *Sun-Times*, all the newspapers, and then their reporters would come to the scene. So I'd say, "Get the bulletin."

I go up to the cop who's standing outside the building. I say, "I hear there's a bombing here. What's going on?" He says, "Yeah, backyard." I say, "Did it do much damage?" He says, "Yeah, it did. It left a hole about six by twelve." I said, "Thanks, that's all I need. Anybody hurt?" He says, "No, not as far as I know." That's all I knew. Run across the street, knock on the door, guy answers. I said, "Gilbert, City News Bureau. Can I use your phone? There's been a bombing across the street." I call City News Desk, and Dornfeld answers, "Yeah, kid, what do you got?" I say, "There is a bombing. Left a hole, six by twelve. Nobody hurt." He says, "Great, give it to rewrite man," who was Bill Garrett. And Garrett says, "Okay, what do you got?" And I said, "There's a bombing," gave him the address, "left a hole in the backyard, six

by twelve." He goes, "Inches or feet?" And I go, "Um… You know, it has to be feet. I mean, a bomb wouldn't…" So he says okay, puts the bulletin out, and leaves "a hole of six by twelve feet."

I then hang up, thank the guy. I go back, I go into the backyard, and I see that a cherry bomb has gone off and left this small hole, six inches by twelve inches, in the backyard. I didn't even think twice. I went tearing out of the backyard, running across the street. I didn't even knock this time. I go right into his house. I said, "Sorry." I dial City News Bureau. Dornfeld says, "Yeah, what do you got?" I say, "Inches! Inches!" He says, "What do you mean?" I say, "It was six by twelve inches, not six by twelve feet!" He goes, "Oh no!" Slams down the phone. Well, by this time, the bulletin has gone out to all the newspapers and TV stations in Chicago.

So I'm coming out of the house shaking like a leaf, thinking I'm going to be fired for sure. And I see this white Ford Victoria coming down the street with a spotlight, and he's looking at house numbers. Then he sees the police cars, and he comes up. I'm crossing the street. He says, "Hey, kid," rolls down his window. I say, "Yes?" He says, "Sowa, *Tribune*," and it was Tony Sowa, who was the night police reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. He says, "What do you got?" And I say, "Mr. Sowa, I am so sorry, but I sent out a wrong bulletin. It was just a cherry bomb in the backyard." He swears at me, "Ah, you son of a buck." And I say, "You want to take a look?" He says, "Nah, there's nothing to look at," and off he goes. Sowa and I later on became very good friends.

So I went back to City News. Arnie Dornfeld chewed me out that night. I thought for sure I was going to lose my job, but he said, "Okay, kid, that's one. Don't ever let it happen again." I later found out that Arnold Dornfeld had covered a story where there was a young woman on the near south side of Chicago who had an abortion performed by a doctor, and during the abortion something went wrong. She started hemorrhaging or whatever. The doctor literally threw her out of his office. She went down; she passed out on the sidewalk. Another doctor comes along, finds her, picks her up, takes her to her office, and saves her life, and Dornfeld wrote the story. And a photographer came and took a picture, but Dornfeld mixed up the names of the doctors. The good Samaritan who saved her life, he named as the doctor who performed the abortion and threw her out of his office; he switched the names of the doctors. He did lose his job, and he was blackballed from journalism in Chicago until he got the job as a night editor for City News Bureau. So that's what he did for the rest of his career. Now, here comes Gilbert, who makes a stupid mistake, inches, not feet. It's not abortion, and it's not misapplying the names of the two doctors, but still, it was the same principle in his mind. I had not gotten my facts straight. So early on in my career, I learned the most valuable lesson about making sure you get your facts straight before you write your story.

DePue: When you were in journalism school, what were you being taught as far as journalistic ethics were concerned?

Gilbert: John Stemple, that was one of his major, major themes as far as ethics. We had come through the greatest period of journalism, which was the early 1900s, with Ida Tarbell and those people with *McClure's Magazine*. That became known as the muckraking years. And although *McClure's* did an excellent job, there were other newspapers—some of the Hearst newspapers—that developed yellow journalism, where journalists were pretty fast and loose with the facts. That was a big emphasis for Stemple. The chancellor of Indiana University at the time was Herman B Wells, and it was B without a period. B wasn't an initial; it was just a letter, B. That was his middle name. So on the first test we were given, "Who is the chancellor of Indiana University?" everybody would write "Herman B. Wells" and put a period there. We'd all flunk, then he'd point that out. So that's the first lesson you learn. And the second one I learned was inches, not feet. That was a lesson that stuck with me through all of my journalistic life.

DePue: And again, to get the timeframe right, that's '65?

Gilbert: Yeah, that would've been early '65. I was at the *Tribune* from '66 to '75.

DePue: Was that when you went to this court reporting position?

Gilbert: When I was at City News Bureau.

DePue: Okay, that was still City News Bureau.

Gilbert: Yeah. And then I went into—for my six months—

DePue: Anything worth talking about while you had that court position?

Gilbert: Oh, there were so many stories. As a city news reporter in a pressroom with all the major court reporters for the major papers, I had a list and I had to check the docket every morning, kind of check what was coming up for trial. I would find out what interesting trials were going on. I'd come back, I'd report to these other guys, then they'd go cover the most interesting trials. That's how it worked. I really had to cover a lot of ground. In doing so, I would come across some very spicy trials, and that really didn't bear coverage, but they would be sex trials or whatever, rapes and things like that. So after everybody had filed—

DePue: Just what a PK ought to be doing, huh? (DePue laughs)

Gilbert: Yeah, right. So after everybody had filed their stories for the day on the major trials, we would all go and sit in and hear these spicy trials. And I could tell you so many stories that were so funny. But as part of this period, at ten o'clock every morning we would go into Judge Ryan's chambers when he would recess court. All the reporters would go into his chambers, and we'd have donuts and coffee with the judge. He would tell us what's going on. And we would do calisthenics or whatever, just goofing around. At noon, we

would all go over to the Cook County Prison, which was in the same complex. Jack Johnson was the head of Cook County Prison. He was part of the Cook County sheriff's office. He would invite us over for lunch. We would have what the prisoners were eating for the day. He would have the same thing, which was white bread and baloney sandwiches and coffee and milk or water. But Jack Johnson would just regale us with stories.

One time when he was with the sheriff's police he had to follow a mobster around, just to see where he was going and what he was doing. This went on for three or four weeks, and he got tired of doing it. One night the mobster goes into this joint, this bar, and it was a strip club or whatever. So Johnson's tired of doing this. He takes a five-gallon can of gasoline, throws it under the mobster's car, tosses a match in under, and the car explodes in flames. He walks in, taps the mobster on the shoulder. He says, "Hey, buddy, your car's on fire." The mobster goes running out, and he says, "Who did this? Who did this?" Johnson says, "Look, I've been following you for three weeks. I'm tired of it. If I ever see your face in this county again, you're going to be inside that car, not standing out here looking at it." He said, "That was the last time I ever saw him."

DePue: Why did Johnson invite all the court reporters in? Was he just looking for an audience?

Gilbert: That's the way that it worked. Judge Ryan would tip us to good stories, and therefore we would look at him very favorably, the same way with the warden for Cook County Prison. If he got in hot water, we were likely to go to him to get his story first. He was our friend. That's just the way that it was done back then.

DePue: When were you transferred to the *Trib*?

Gilbert: When I got out of my six months active duty with the army, I came back to the *Tribune*, and that's when Russell MacFall had written me a letter saying he had a job for me.

DePue: Doing what?

Gilbert: I started out in neighborhood news. The *Tribune* had north, west, south, and Indiana supplements that went into the regular *Tribune* once a week. I was assigned to the western suburbs, so that's how I really learned to write. Neil Mehler was an editor in neighborhood news who later went on to become political editor of the *Tribune* for a while. He took me under his wing and really taught me how to write—what the inverted pyramid really means and writing style. Although I had learned it in school, I really hadn't applied it.

DePue: I think I know what that means, but why don't you quickly go through that?

Gilbert: The inverted pyramid, as you know, you put the most important parts of the story up in the lead, and then it goes down to the supporting facts that support what your lead paragraph says.

DePue: Being at the *Trib* at that time in American history, was this considered to be the big leagues?

Gilbert: It was the biggest league in Chicago, that's for sure, and the Midwest.

DePue: Bigger than TV or radio news?

Gilbert: Oh, we thought so. Yeah, definitely. TV at the time would pick up a lot of their stories from what the morning *Tribune* had. I'd pick up the afternoon *Chicago's American* and see stories that I had written for the *Tribune*, almost the identical story in the *American* with somebody else's byline on it. So it was *the* paper. In 1966, the *Chicago Tribune* still ran John McCutcheon cartoons on the front page, those color cartoons. "Injun Summer" was the most famous of those.[4]

DePue: McCutcheon… Is that the name?

Gilbert: He was the cartoonist, yeah.

DePue: What was his first name?

Gilbert: I don't remember what his first name was. But a very conservative newspaper, very Republican newspaper. Colonel McCormick had just retired as publisher of the *Tribune*. Don Maxwell was the editor, and he walked in to the city room every day at three o'clock in his three-piece suit with a vest; that was at the time when the *Tribune* sponsored legislation that would create McCormick Place. It was a real exciting time to be part of the *Tribune*. I stayed in neighborhood news for about six months. Neil Mehler, who was kind of my mentor, then went to the western suburbs to be the managing editor of a new *Tribune* publication called the *Trib;* the *Trib* was a weekly supplement with a tabloid style, like the *Sun-Times*. And I was in the western *Trib*, which was based in Hinsdale. I covered school board meetings, city council meetings—everything. I did that for a year, and then I was called downtown into the city room to become a general assignment reporter.

DePue: When was that move?

Gilbert: That was in end of 1967.

[4] John T. McCutcheon based his sentimental "Injun Summer" on memories from his youth in Indiana. The first cartoon ran on the front page of the *Tribune* in 1907, and McCutcheon created a new one every fall from 1912 to 1946. The *Tribune* continued to run the strips until October 25, 1992. Sid Smith, "'Injun Summer' Captures Youthful Nostalgia," *Chicago Tribune*, April 14, 1997.

DePue: You mentioned that the *Tribune*, with McCormick there, was still a very conservative newspaper. I think that's the way you said it. What exactly does that mean? Does that mean their editorial page is conservative, or even the selection of the news stories that would be covered had a conservative slant?

Gilbert: Both. The editorial page was definitely very conservative, and it did bleed over into the news reporting. And the way that that happened was the editors of the *Tribune* were also very conservative, and they came out of the old school. Most of them were in their fifties and sixties. And Roland Spokley of the *Trib*, who was just an infamous copy editor, was one of those people.

I was sent out as a general assignment reporter one day to cover one of the first meetings of the Black Panthers. It was in a West Side church, and I went out with Bill Bender, who was a photographer. Photographers had the cars, and we would get an assignment—you know, "Gilbert, go with Bender out to this meeting. There's supposed to be some Black Panthers meeting at a church in this location." So I would go with Bender. Bender was an old-time photographer who grew up using the big box camera with the big flashbulbs and so forth. I think we had moved on past those cameras at the time. Bender, with his felt hat, driving his Ford Victoria with the two spotlights, took me on Lower Wacker Drive. We're going sixty miles an hour through Lower Wacker. I'm going, "Wow!" He says, "Hey, kid, don't worry. I do this every day." He says, "I know every cop on the beat. Don't worry about a thing." We shoot out the Eisenhower Expressway.

We go to this West Side church, and we pull up, and there are some black people out around the church. I said, "Well, let's go inside." And he says, "Are you kidding me? I'm not getting out of my car in this neighborhood. You can go if you want, but I'm staying here." I said, "We've got to get some pictures." He says, "I'm not going in there." And he says, "Look, kid." He pulls out his pistol from under the seat. He says, "I've got old Beanie here. Anything happens, you come out; I'll take care of you."

I go in, and it is a Black Panther meeting, and they all have their red books of Mao. They would hold up the red book of Mao, and their chant was "Right on"; they would say, "Right on, Brother!" And everybody would answer, "Right on, brother!" "Power to the people!" "Power to the people!" So I just stand in the back. Nobody bothers me, and I observe this whole scene. I come back, and I say, "Bender, at least get a picture of the church with these people standing outside," so that he did. We go back. I write my story, and the story describes the meeting of the Black Panthers, and they're using a Communist book, the red book of Mao; they're holding it up, and they're saying "Right on," and "Right on, Brother." So I'm putting this in quotes in the story. Copy editor comes over and he says, "Now, Gilbert, I think you're missing something here. When they're saying 'Right on,' is it like 'Right on, beanie boy,' or is it 'Right…' What do you mean, 'Right on'?" It wasn't in the vernacular at the time. I don't remember if they edited it out, but that was the white, conservative, Republican thinking of the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* at the time.

DePue: I don't want you to get too far forward of the specific question, but I wanted to know if you remember—since we were talking about civil rights issues—when Martin Luther King first came to the city of Chicago.

Gilbert: Yeah, I do. It was in 1966 when he had his infamous march down Cicero [Avenue].

DePue: Infamous?

Gilbert: Yeah. Well, definitely. I mean, that was…

DePue: That wasn't how the black community would have looked at it.

Gilbert: Well, the black community… It was pretty legendary, pretty famous. It was: This is happening; this is our leader; this is changing things. Anyway, there were the stories. I never covered King, but I do remember the day that he was shot, and that was in—

DePue: We'll get to that, eventually. But why do you use the word infamous to describe his '66 trip to Chicago?

Gilbert: Bad choice of words; it should be "famous", because it was setting a new course for what was going to happen for blacks down the road. As it gets into Thompson's administration, he signed legislation making redlining illegal, and open housing, and things like that, but that's down the road. But King started that whole movement, and it was because of Martin Luther King marching down Cicero, which was the great dividing line, and still is to this day. It's a very segregated dividing line into Berwyn and Cicero. But Martin Luther King was the one who had the guts to march down that barrier.

DePue: I guess I keep dwelling on the word because it has a very negative connotation.

Gilbert: I don't mean it in a negative way. I mean it in—

DePue: A transformative way?

Gilbert: Yeah, definitely transformative. This was a stake-in-the-ground time in our history, so "infamous" I don't mean negatively. I mean—

DePue: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but—

Gilbert: —historical.

DePue: —you've already said the *Tribune* would've been conservative at that time. Does that mean that the powers at the *Tribune* would've viewed with a jaded eye this whole incident when he came to town?

Gilbert: I don't know that they would've looked at it as jaded. They certainly would have looked at it from the perspective of Richard J. Daley and the white law enforcement community, but I don't remember all the specifics. I think King was arrested during that time, but I don't… From that point on, through '66, '67, and then the '68 riots, the *Tribune* held a pro-Daley, pro-law-enforcement perspective on all those events. With the Chicago Seven, definitely they [the Tribune editors] were on the side of law enforcement.

DePue: And this is in the timeframe when you're in the downtown beat, is that correct?

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And what does that mean?

Gilbert: I'm in general assignment, so I would go to work, say, at noon, and I would work from like noon until nine o'clock at night. Each reporter would have an assignment book, your day book. I would look up Gilbert, and I would have my assignments for the day. Some of them were rollovers from the day before, and I knew there was not going to be any action that day on that, so I basically continued that to the next day, and then I would go on assignment.

I might be covering a fire at Rush Presbyterian Hospital, which was one of my assignments. Bill Kelly was the photographer on that story. A fire broke out at Rush Presbyterian Hospital, which is just south of the Eisenhower Expressway. Kelly had the car, so I was in the right seat. We come out of Tribune Tower, driving, and we are in the most torrential rainstorm you have ever seen. We get to Rush, and Kelly has his spotlights on. He has his press pass up in the window, so they let us through the police barricade. You can see the smoke and the fire coming out, and all the fire trucks are lined up, and it is pouring so hard. We see other reporters out trying to write, and their notebooks are getting wet. I said, "Bill, just take a drive down." So I drive down, I stop, get the fire chief to come over. "What do you got?" He says, "We've got a 4-11 alarm fire. They're evacuating patients, three hundred patients from the hospital. They're taking them here." And I'm writing all this stuff down. We turn around, and we drive back the other way, so now Kelly is on the right side. He stops, gets his camera out. He's taking pictures. We never got out of the car.

We go back, I write my story, and have done some phone work in the meantime when I get back, Kelly produces his pictures—front page story of the *Tribune*.[5] And nine o'clock, I'm out of there. And we go up to O'Rourke's tavern, where Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel hang out, where all the reporters would go. We'd usually close it down around midnight, and then we'd go home. Ten o'clock the next morning, I'm up, back at the *Tribune*. It was an exciting time, 1968—

[5] For a similar incident, see David Gilbert, "Writer Follows Police to Scene and Winds Up with Fire Story," *Chicago Tribune*, January 25, 1969.

DePue: Well, I wanted to go through that in sequence because that's always been a fascination of mine. A lot happened in 1968, so let's start with right at the beginning. This isn't going on in Chicago, but it's certainly catching everybody's attention: the Tet Offensive, right at the end of January, into February. It just builds into the growing antiwar movement. Any recollections of that, or just should we get to the next event here?

Gilbert: Yeah, there are…

DePue: By that time, what were your views about the wisdom of the Vietnam War?

Gilbert: …knowing that I had buddies from the *Tribune* who were in Vietnam, who were coming home—Bill Curry, Phil Caputo, who's a pretty famous author, and several others. The *Tribune*'s editorial position was supporting the administration on Vietnam. And as reporters, our personal beliefs were not to get into our reporting. I didn't cover those stories, but I did play a hand in Watergate down the road. But as far as that went, there were those of us who were reporters for the *Tribune* who did not agree with the editorial policy of the paper, but because we had good jobs, because the *Tribune* was a very powerful newspaper, we did our jobs.

DePue: Were you one of those?

Gilbert: I was definitely becoming one of those, yeah. I didn't like the war, at the end. When I saw the stories about the carpet bombings and the napalm and so forth, I knew that was not right.

DePue: April 4, 1968, was the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis.

Gilbert: In 1968 I had become a political reporter for the *Tribune*. George Tagge was the political editor of the *Tribune*, and I started out as kind of his assistant. So I went to Springfield when the legislature was in session. John Elmer was our head *Tribune* correspondent in Springfield. I would go down when the legislature was in session. And April 4th, I was in Springfield when we got the call from the city desk that Martin Luther King had been assassinated. Then we started getting reaction from the governor, and from other politicians in Springfield, feeding them into the stories.

DePue: So you weren't in Chicago at that time.

Gilbert: No, I was in Springfield. I'd go down from Tuesday to Thursday or whatever and then come back to Chicago.

DePue: Were you still in the Indiana National Guard?

Gilbert: Yes.

DePue: Was there any talk about mobilizing any Indiana National Guard units?

Gilbert: There was during the ’68 convention. They were mobilized.

DePue: Okay, but not for Martin Luther King?

Gilbert: But not for Martin Luther King.

DePue: Were you still attending drills, I assume, on weekends?

Gilbert: I was attending drills once a month, or twice a month, I think, during that time, on weekends.

DePue: What was the morale like in the units? By that time, the reputation was this is where all of the draft dodgers were hiding out.

Gilbert: Yeah. We did get some of that, but we didn’t consider ourselves draft dodgers. The 113th Engineer Battalion had a great history, and we were a support unit. We weren’t infantry, we weren’t frontline, but we took a lot of pride in the skills that we had to be able to build bridges and drives.

DePue: Was this a construction or a combat engineer unit?

Gilbert: A combat engineer.

DePue: Did they get mobilized during Korea?

Gilbert: I believe so, but I’m not sure about that.

DePue: So you were down in Springfield during the ’68 King riots in Chicago.

Gilbert: Right. Well, I was in Springfield just during the week, but I was back in the city. I remember the West Side going up in flames. And when I came home that weekend, that was still going on.

DePue: Where were you living at the time?

Gilbert: I was living on Grant Place and Cleveland, in an apartment. My earlier roommate was another *Tribune* reporter, John Maclean, whose father was Norman Maclean, who wrote *A River Runs Through It*. He held the chair of literature at the University of Chicago.

DePue: The next event, then—June 6, 1968, is when it happened in Los Angeles—is the night that Robert Kennedy was assassinated.

Gilbert: Right. And I was living at Grant Place. I was watching a small TV that we had in our apartment. My roommate at that time was David Young, who was another *Tribune* reporter and who had served with the regular army and worked for *Stars and Stripes* in Korea. And I think he was at work. I was

home working when I saw the reports coming across on Robert Kennedy's assassination, and those famous scenes in the kitchen where he's being shot.

DePue: So you certainly remembered JFK, and then you've got Martin Luther King, and then you've got Robert Kennedy. What's your thought about what was going on in the United States by that time?

Gilbert: As I mentioned before, when we would finish our workday we would go to s. O'Rourke's tavern on North Avenue in Chicago, a journalists' hangout.[6] There were a couple of them. There was one near the *Tribune*, but when famous *New York Times* reporters would come to town they would always end up at O'Rourke's. The feeling there was very antiwar, and that's probably when I began to feel that this country is really on the wrong path, that something's got to be done. But that night, when Robert Kennedy was killed, I don't think I was called out. I was called out during the '68 convention. This was just the eve of the '68 convention.

DePue: Was Mike Royko working in town at that time?

Gilbert: Yeah, he was.

DePue: Was he occasionally coming into O'Rourke's?

Gilbert: He more or less hung out at the Billy Goat Tavern; that's where you would usually see Royko. Royko would come to O'Rourke's now and then, but it was not one of his primary hangouts. I remember sitting at the table with Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel. They were both movie reviewers, but Ebert was definitely antiwar, very left, liberal-oriented, which he was 'til the day he died, which was fine. I've become a lot more mainstream, a lot more liberal in my thoughts than those days.

DePue: That gets us up to August, the Democratic convention that year, which is bound to be pretty lively because of the Vietnam War issue, and especially because Lyndon Johnson had bowed out of the race earlier in the year, to many people's surprise. So I'll turn it over to you and let you talk about your experiences during the '68 convention.

Gilbert: Sixty-eight convention, I was a general assignment reporter and on the street. I did not cover the convention, which was being held at the International Amphitheater, in the stockyards. We had other reporters from Washington who were on the scene covering the convention inside. I was at my apartment, which is on the north side of Chicago. It's in Lincoln Park. I got a call, "Gilbert, get over to Lincoln Park. The police have gone crazy. Call us with whatever you've got." So I go over to Lincoln Park, and this is when Abbie

[6] O'Rourke's was located at 319 W. North Avenue. Roger Ebert explains the bar's importance to Gilbert's generation in "A Bar on North Avenue," *Granta*, September 4, 2009, http://www.granta.com/New-Writing/A-Bar-on-North-Avenue.

Hoffman and the Chicago Seven had camped out in Lincoln Park, and the cops had moved in to clear them out.

I went in. There was teargas in the air, and I knew enough from my Army training that you always stand upwind from the gas. I did get a whiff of it. I later gave a speech and talked about being gassed in Lincoln Park, and they wanted to know if that meant literally or figuratively. (laughter) But that night, I did witness the police moving the campers out of Lincoln Park. I was walking down Wells Street, and the police came up behind me with their billy clubs, and put one in my back. I showed him my press pass. I said, "Gilbert, *Chicago Tribune*." He said, "We don't give a damn who you are," and pushed me on down the street. So I knew enough to get out of there.

Every day, I mean, it was mayhem in the city of Chicago. You literally would go in and get your assignment, you know, "I want you at the Hilton Hotel today. They've taken over the Sherman Monument across the street." At that time, my unit in the National Guard had been called up to come to Chicago. I called my commanding officer in Gary and told him that I was on the street for the *Tribune*, they really needed me. I wanted a pass. Had one of my editors call him, talk to him. He eventually excused me. So I'm standing in front of the Hilton Hotel, the Conrad Hilton. My unit is stationed across the street with bayonets on their rifles. I'm in my trench coat, and I'm looking over at my buddies and waving to them, and I won't tell you which finger was being extended to me but you can imagine I was getting the middle finger salute from my buddies. And it was more good natured, but it was also saying, "Gilbert, why aren't you over here?" But I had gotten excused to do my job as a reporter.

DePue: Tell me your impression of the kids that were coming to town and in the parks, the protesters.

Gilbert: This was an ongoing period of protests. This was the convention that was followed by the Days of Rage. There was the taking over of the administration buildings at University of Chicago and Northwestern. These kids were just a few years younger than I was. A lot of them were out-of-towners who had come in from the East and from other areas. Some of them had adopted the whole free love, the theme of the '60's.

DePue: The hippies.

Gilbert: The hippies. It was colorful. I wasn't against them, but at the same time I wasn't really for them. I wasn't part of their movement. But I saw what the police were doing, and how they were handling it, and I did not agree with that. There was a lot of physical force and brutality, and as the commission report later said, it was a police riot in—

DePue: The "Walker Report."[7]

Gilbert: The "Walker Report," right.

DePue: Do you remember any specific incidents of the violence you were seeing?

Gilbert: The police marched up the hill at the Sherman statue, and literally, with the shields drawn over their faces and shields in one hand and batons, moving the kids out, you did see beating with the billy clubs and the nightsticks. You did see kids with bloody faces and being carried out.

DePue: Who were your sympathies with?

Gilbert: My sympathies were actually with both sides. I certainly understood the part of the police in wanting to protect the city. I didn't side with the way that they were doing it. I did know what the hippies were saying—you know, "Give us peace now." They had had it with the war. I understood that. But I didn't like the way they were doing it, either. I didn't support that. So I guess in the legislature they would call that a mugwump: you'd be sitting with your mug on one side of the fence and your wump on the other side. But I did not participate supporting either side.

DePue: The phrase that sticks in my mind—you get this from the history books and documentaries of the time—is "the whole world's watching." Did that sound familiar? Did you see or hear that?

Gilbert: Yeah. I mean, the focus was on Chicago, and all the…

DePue: Does that mean that some of the protestors were playing to the media?

Gilbert: Oh, absolutely. Abbie Hoffman and the other leaders, if they could get the TV cameras there—and the reporters, the press, the photographers—that was the main part of their strategy.

DePue: This might sound like a peculiar question, but I wonder how long your hair was at the time.

Gilbert: Ha! Gosh, I've got some pictures downstairs. It was shoulder length.

DePue: So you would've looked like you fit right into this—

[7] *Rights in Conflict: Convention Week in Chicago, August 25-29*, is better known as the "Walker Report" after Daniel Walker, the director of the Chicago Study Team for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. Walker would ultimately serve as Illinois governor from 1973 to 1977. For the report's development, see Dan Walker, interview by Marilyn Huff Immel, May 12, 1981, Illinois Statecraft Oral History Program, Norris L. Brookens Library, University of Illinois Springfield, Springfield, IL, http://www.idaillinois.org/utils/getfile/collection/uis/id/4479/filename/4480.pdf. Also see Dan Walker, interview by Mark DePue, August 21, 2007. Unless otherwise indicated, all interviews cited in the notes were conducted as part of the Illinois Statecraft Oral History Project, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, IL.

Gilbert: And I had a moustache, but I also had a trench coat, and most days wore coat and tie.

DePue: So you looked like a reporter.

Gilbert: I was a reporter. I looked like a reporter, and I made sure people knew I was a reporter.

DePue: It sounds like you didn't really know or weren't reporting on anything that was happening within the convention center.

Gilbert: Not in the convention center, no.

DePue: Lots of things spun off from that. One of the things that spun off a few months afterwards was the trial for the Chicago Seven. I'll just list the names that I have. You've mentioned Abbie Hoffman a couple times. A lot of these names are familiar in American history. Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, Rennie Davis, Jerry Rubin—Hoffman and Rubin seem to be the ones who are most flamboyant—Bobby Seale, though I don't know that he was officially part of the Chicago Seven.

Gilbert: No, he was more connected with the Black Panthers.

DePue: Did you follow that trial? Were you reporting on that trial?

Gilbert: I did not report on that trial, but a good friend of mine—I had an apartment above his—Bob Davis, was covering the Federal Building at the time. He covered part of that trial. Bob Enstad, who was a criminal courts reporter, covered part of the trial, and there were some others. But I did not cover the Chicago Seven trial. Judge Julius Hoffman, who was the infamous judge, to use that word again, was well-known in Chicago, and there are many stories about Judge Julius Hoffman and Abbie Hoffman.

DePue: Obviously no relation between the two. Obviously no love lost between the two.

Gilbert: No. They were on opposite sides of a great chasm.

DePue: What was your general impressions of the trial, just as an observer?

Gilbert: Fascinating. Fascinating. I couldn't wait to hear the stories at O'Rourke's about what was going on, as well as reading the stories that were filed in the first edition of the *Tribune*. We had, like, five editions of the *Tribune*. You had the street edition—first deadline was three o'clock for the first edition that would come out about five o'clock. That was for the commuters going home, and they would pick up that copy of the *Tribune*. There was another interim edition in there, and then, at ten o'clock, what was called the home edition, the three-star. You had the one-star, the two-star, and the three-star edition was

the home edition. So that was the one that was delivered to the suburbs and on the trucks, and that was the one that had the largest circulation. Then there were two other editions. There was one probably about two o'clock in the morning, or maybe around midnight. And then there was the five-star, which was the late morning edition, which got all the commuters coming into the city. So when you've got fast breaking stories with so many elements to them—you have the courtroom, you have outside of the courtroom, you have late at night demonstrations—and the front page was probably turning over with each edition, it was really an exciting time.

DePue: Do you remember the specific charges that were being levied against the group?

Gilbert: No, I don't remember.

DePue: Who were your sympathies with, as far as the trial was concerned?

Gilbert: I don't know that my… Again, I found it all fascinating, just part of our history. Some of the tactics of Abbie Hoffman, I would say—

DePue: You mean like running a pig for president?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah. I mean, you say, "This is ridiculous." But the courtroom drama of it all was historic. It was interesting. It was fascinating. Judge Julius Hoffman, I didn't agree with all of his tactics, but it was the same. I wasn't there to [say], Judge Hoffman's right, Abbie Hoffman's wrong. I didn't look at it like that at all.

DePue: You mentioned Julius Hoffman a couple times. What in particular do you remember about his deportment?

Gilbert: Old, conservative, strict, scholarly, lawyerly, trying to rely on the old tradition of the courtroom and handle this wild scene in front of him, who are mocking justice and mocking him.

DePue: So he embodied everything they were mocking?

Gilbert: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Fascinating.

DePue: It sounds by this time you're a full-fledged political junkie.

Gilbert: Yeah. As my wife will tell you, I still get the *Sun-Times* and the *Tribune* every morning on my drive. I watch the news all day long, and at night. I still love the news, and love the political intrigue. I'm reading right now *The Bully*

*Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism*.[8]

DePue: You mentioned that, in the 1964 election your father would've voted for Barry Goldwater. Do you remember who you voted for in '64?

Gilbert: You know, I think I voted for Goldwater too.

DePue: Who did you vote for in '68? Hubert Humphrey would've been the Democrat.

Gilbert: I covered Humphrey, and I also covered George Wallace.

DePue: Did Nixon come to Chicago that year?

Gilbert: Yeah, Nixon was in Chicago, but I don't recall ever covering Nixon. I covered Teddy Kennedy, but I don't recall ever covering Nixon. I would've remembered it. I covered Everett Dirksen, the great senator from Illinois. He was the first politician that I covered for the *Tribune*. Great man.

DePue: But the question is, who would you have voted for president in '68?

Gilbert: I voted for Nixon.

DePue: And for governor?

Gilbert: In '68?

DePue: I think it would've been Shapiro versus Richard Ogilvie.

Gilbert: Ogilvie, I voted for Ogilvie. Then I was the State of Illinois Building reporter in Chicago for the *Tribune*, and I covered Governor Ogilvie. The press room was on the nineteenth floor, and at the other end of the hallway was the lieutenant governor's office, which was Paul Simon.

DePue: Paul Simon, yes. The anomaly.

Gilbert: And Rick Jasculca was—

DePue: What was the name again?

Gilbert: Rick Jasculca. Rick has a prominent public relations firm in Chicago, government relations, public relations. But he and I became friends during that time, and Paul Simon and I became friends. I think somewhere in the stack of stuff, I have a letter from Paul Simon when he went on to become senator, but he and I always were friends. I had good relationships with Governor Ogilvie, who was on the twentieth floor of the building, and his

[8] Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

staff during that time. It turned out they did an audit of what beats published the most stories, and the State of Illinois beat during that time had the most byline stories come out of it, of any other beat in the *Tribune*.

DePue: This might be a good place for us to take a break. I think we're probably in the neighborhood of lunch, so let's go ahead and pick this up this afternoon, if you don't mind.

Gilbert: Okay.

(End of interview #1. #2 continues)

# Interview with David Gilbert

# IST-A-L-2014-011

Interview # 2: March 14, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue



DePue: Today is Friday, March 14, 2014. This is my second session with David Gilbert. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History, and we're in David's home in Deerfield. And I guess soon you're going to be heading downtown to Chicago, moving down there. We finished off the last session talking about 1968 and all of the historic events in that timeframe; you were there in Chicago with a lot of this stuff occurring.

Just a very quick one here: Kent State in 1970. By that time, had you pretty much solidified your views about what was going on in the country and especially in the Vietnam War?

Gilbert: Well, it worked both ways, as we've talked about other things that have happened. The murder of Dr. King: as a journalist, I understood both sides of that issue. I was a fan of Dr. King from the point of being a minister. He was taking his message of civil rights, of equality for all people, and being a modern-day leader of taking black people out of a situation where they weren't respected, where they were discriminated against, and so forth. So from that regard, I understood that situation.

DePue: What I'd like to do now is turn the focus back to Illinois politics, and we'll pretty much stay there for the rest of the day. This is stepping back a little bit from the 1968 timeframe, but did you have a chance to cover the Otto Kerner administration and some of his people?

Gilbert: No, I did not cover Governor Kerner. I was certainly familiar with it. I think the first governor that I covered as a reporter was Governor Shapiro, who came into office after Governor Kerner, then Governor Ogilvie, Governor Walker, and of course, Governor Thompson.

DePue: Was it something of a surprise among your journalist friends that Kerner would step down as governor—this was early in the 1968 timeframe—that he'd take that U.S. district judge position in Chicago?

Gilbert: No, I don't recall it being a surprise. I think people looked at it as a promotion, as the place where Governor Kerner was going to serve out his legacy.

DePue: What was your impression of Sam Shapiro, then?

Gilbert: Sam Shapiro was a very nice man. He was not very accessible to the media. Ogilvie was not all that accessible to the media, but more accessible than Sam Shapiro. But I always had the impression that Shapiro was thrown in there to carry on the Kerner administration after Governor Kerner left.

DePue: You did mention in the last session that you voted for Richard Ogilvie. He won that election, so now you've got a Republican, a changing of the party, so to speak. Just a couple questions about his administration and a couple of the significant things that happened in those four years. The first one was the tax hike that he was able to push through in 1969.

Gilbert: I was a reporter for the *Tribune*, covering the State of Illinois Building, when Governor Ogilvie's office was on the twentieth floor of the State of Illinois Building in Chicago, and our press room was on the nineteenth floor. I got to know him and his staff very well. The tax hike that he pushed through and signed into law was probably one of the most needed pieces of legislation for Illinois at the time. It also was his political demise. It was the one act that took him down. When Dan Walker came in, Walking Dan Walker with his very populist ideas and messages and themes, it was the Ogilvie tax hike that probably lost him the election more than anything else.

Now, there was a difference between what Ogilvie did and what Thompson did later on with certain tax hikes that were implemented during his administration—the increase in the motor fuel tax, and a couple of other taxes that he caught some heat on—but Ogilvie worked the tax hike out with the agreement of Democrats, with Republicans and Democrats. He had them all in his office, all in the same room. Mayor Daley was represented; his voice of approval was given for this tax hike. But then the big mistake happened, and that's when Ogilvie walked out of that office by himself and made the announcement that they had agreement on the tax hike. If he had walked out with the mayor of Chicago at his side, with Democratic leaders in the legislature by his side, they all had their arms around each other, and he announced, "*We* have reached agreement that this is needed for the State of Illinois," he may have survived, in my opinion.

DePue: You mentioned Richard Daley. You can't have a conversation about Chicago and Illinois politics in the '60's without talking about Daley, but we haven't discussed him much. What was your view of Richard J. Daley, the legendary mayor of Chicago at that time, and of the Democratic machine that he ran?

Gilbert: I had several encounters with Mayor Daley, Richard J. Daley. And I always admired the man, just because he was a powerful Democratic boss in one of

the largest cities in the United States. He ran his Democratic organization very effectively. I admired him for that. On the other hand, he drove me nuts as a reporter. I was assigned to cover one of his campaigns for reelection, and I would call up his press secretary and say, "What's the schedule for today?" "Well, I don't know. We really haven't agreed on what…" I said, "Come on, what's he going to do?" "He's going to be at this ward organization at six o'clock." I said, "Where is he going after that?" "He's going to a couple of other ward organizations, but if you get to the first one we'll let you know."

So I would show up at the 43rd Ward Democratic headquarters, and I'd wait with everybody else. All of a sudden the black limousine would roll up, the Chicago policemen would kind of cordon off the area, Daley would walk in, and he'd make this rousing speech, "We gotta get out the vote! We gotta get every precinct covered! We gotta knock on every door! We gotta do this!" I'd ask his staff people, "Where's he going next?" "Oh, he's going down to the 22nd Ward." And boom, off he would go, and I'm sitting there; I've got to get down to the 22nd Ward. Of course, by the time I got down there he had made his speech and was long gone, so you kind of lost him for the night. But that's the way he did it.

DePue: By design, it sounds like.

Gilbert: Oh, absolutely by design. And you never quite caught up with him. Even the reporters who covered City Hall on a daily basis would tell you the same thing. Other than press conferences or speeches that he was making, you'd hardly get a shot at the mayor to talk to him or ask him questions. Not like it is today. On the eve of the Democratic National Convention in 1968 in Chicago, the electrical workers union had gone on strike.[9] Of course, they were responsible for installing all the telephones into the International Amphitheater, where the convention was going to be held. We're one or two days before the convention is supposed to open, and the electrical workers are still on strike, and not a phone, not any electrical wires had been put into the Amphitheater. Well, this is a crisis situation. Daley holds a news conference to announce some type of federal grant for the Cabrini-Green area, or something like that.

DePue: One of the housing areas.

Gilbert: Yeah. So that's the purpose of the press conference. I'm assigned to cover City Hall this day, and I'm sitting in the front row with the other Chicago media. The press room is packed. There are reporters from Washington, reporters from New York, and international press is there. There must've been fifty TV cameras, which were film cameras at the time, and the place is packed. And Daley walks in. Before he says anything, one of the Washington reporters says, "Mr. Mayor, we understand that just minutes ago you have

[9] System Council T-4 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Robert Nickey headed the local. James Strong, "Negotiations Resumed in Bell Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, July 27, 1968.

come to an agreement with the electrical workers union, and the strike is settled, and the convention's going to go on as scheduled. Is that true?" And Daley said, "Well, I am here to announce something even more important than that, and let me take care of the reporters who come in here on a daily basis before we get to your questions." (laughter) Here the whole world is waiting to hear that the electrical workers have reached agreement, and there's no strike, and the convention's going… And just with one brush of his hand like that, he kind of brushed everybody off, announced his federal agreement for Cabrini-Green or whatever the project was. He says, "Now we'll take your questions." And he says, "Yes, now I am pleased to announce that we have reached agreement." So everybody was happy about that.

There was a reporter for CBS News, Ike Pappas, who got to the press conference late. He walked in after Daley had made this announcement. So after Daley made the announcement and the press conference was just about to conclude, Pappas said, "Mr. Mayor, we understand that the strike with the electrical workers has been settled. Can you please give us a statement on that?" He said, "I've already covered that topic." Pappas said, "Well, this is CBS News. We want to hear it from the horse's mouth." And Daley said, "Don't give me that bullshit." (laughter) And the whole place just cracks up. Everybody left, and Pappas did not get his sound bite.

We went back to the press room, and there's a big argument in the City Hall press room: Did Mayor Daley say "bullshit" in a press conference or not? Some said, "Yes, that's what he said." "No," others said, "he didn't say that." Bill Cameron, who was a radio reporter for WMAQ Radio—and still is a radio reporter today for WLS Radio in Chicago, good guy—said, "Well, I've got the tape right here." So he pulls up the tape and replays it for everybody. And then after all the stories had been written and all the feeds had been made, he cut that segment of the tape out, framed it, and it hung in the City Hall press room for a number of years. It said, "Mayor Richard J. Daley saying 'bullshit' in a press conference," and he put the date on it, and that piece of tape is right there. (laughter)

DePue: Why was that so significant? Because he was always so careful? Or because it was so typical of who he was?

Gilbert: Oh, no, it wasn't typical of who he was. You never heard him swear or use an off-color comment at all. Many stories have been told about how he murdered the English language, and had his own Daley—

DePue: And his son carried on the tradition.

Gilbert: And Richard M. carried on that tradition. But there's a famous one where he went to Wendell Phillips High School for a Christmas concert. He was to make a little speech and welcome everybody for coming, then introduce the Wendell Phillips High School a capella choir. So after his speech he said, "And now, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to present to you the Wendell

Phillips High School Acapulco choir." (laughter) Everybody laughed, and I'm not sure he knew what they were laughing about.

DePue: I thought you were going to tell me that quote he has that's from the Democratic convention era. I'm trying to remember exactly how it went.

Gilbert: Shoot to maim looters, and shoot to…

DePue: No…

Gilbert: The shoot to kill?

DePue: Something about the disorder.

Gilbert: Oh, "We are here to create disorder, not to preserve order." I think it is something like that.[10]

DePue: That would be another Daley classic, I guess.

Gilbert: Really.

DePue: Going back to Ogilvie and some of the significant things that were going on in Illinois politics at the time, the state hadn't had a new constitution since 1870, and then in 1969, the Illinois Constitutional Convention convened in Springfield. Did you cover that at all?

Gilbert: No, I did not. The *Tribune* correspondent for Springfield at the time was a man named John Elmer, and John Elmer was the *Tribune* reporter in charge of covering the constitutional convention. They had other reporters at different times who covered aspects of it, but John was the main reporter. He's deceased now.

DePue: What did you think about the job that the constitutional convention did?

Gilbert: Not being that close to it at the time, it was much needed. There was a lot of antiquated legislation on the books at the time. It did some good things. And one of the major things it did was change Illinois's state elections to stagger them from national elections. Illinois elections for governor, statewide offices, used to be held in conjunction with national elections. And you had coattail effects from whoever was running for president. So I think that was good.

[10] Gilbert is referencing one of Daley's most famous statements, which came a week after the West Side riot. Outlining his expectations for the city's policemen, Daley said, "I assumed any superintendent would issue instructions to shoot arsonists on sight and to maim looters, but I found out this morning this wasn't so and therefore gave him specific instructions." In popular memory, this has been condensed to "Shoot to kill…shoot to maim." DePue is thinking of Daley's defense of the police response to the 1968 DNC protestors, "The police are not here to create disorder, they are here to preserve disorder." Christopher Chandler, "Shoot to Kill…Shoot to Maim," *Chicago Reader*, April 4, 2002; "Daley: City's Boss for 21 Years," *Chicago Tribune*, December 21, 1976.

DePue: That would change your life.

Gilbert: Yeah, it certainly did. And as Governor Thompson has referred to that, during his first election in 1976 and his second campaign in 1978, he really didn't stop campaigning during that first term in office. But it was the Con-Con that had changed Illinois elections away from national elections.

DePue: Let's move on, then, to the 1972 gubernatorial election. Let's talk about the Democratic primary first, because I don't know that Ogilvie had any opposition in the Republican side, but certainly there was an interesting race between Paul Simon, who was the party's selectee, and Dan Walker.

Gilbert: Paul Simon was lieutenant governor of Illinois, and that's another thing that the new Illinois constitution changed: the governor and lieutenant governor were elected from the same party. He had served as Ogilvie's lieutenant governor, and Ogilvie was Republican and Simon was Democrat. Despite that, I think the two gentlemen did get along fairly well. There was communication. I think there was respect for each other under the circumstances. Simon may not have been included in very much when it came to the administration of the state, but he did have his own programs and Ogilvie allowed him to manage those programs without a lot of interference. So when Simon became the candidate that the Democratic Party in Illinois had selected, I don't think it was any surprise to Ogilvie that that's probably who he would be facing in the general election.

DePue: What were his credentials at that time?

Gilbert: What were Simon's credentials?

DePue: Yeah.

Gilbert: Gosh, I'd have to go back and look at my Illinois Blue Book to figure that out. I know he was well respected. He was a down-stater.

DePue: He was from Troy, where he'd started his career as a journalist as well.

Gilbert: That's right. He was a newspaper man, and he would occasionally drop into the press room on the nineteenth floor at the State of Illinois Building, sit down, prop his feet up, and tell stories. He always had his signature bowtie on. You never saw Paul Simon, hardly, without that bowtie. But that was Paul Simon. He was a wonderful man, very bright man, saw the bigger scope. He was certainly left-of-center oriented, and out of nowhere came Walkin' Dan Walker, who was a populist, who was trying to ring the bell against the established party. Not unheard of. We can go back in history and see time after time after time when that happened. Theodore Roosevelt probably is the most significant person who did that, ran against all the conglomerates, all the big businesses. He even ran against the established Republican bosses in his

own party, and yet he became one of the most popular politicians in our country's history.

DePue: Just going back to something you had talked about a little bit earlier, the commission that was established to study what had happened in the '68 convention—especially the role of the city police—was headed by Dan Walker. And I think you said it yourself, he was the one who called it a police riot.

Gilbert: A police riot, right.

DePue: So that wasn't going to ingratiate him to the Daley people, but then I know he went after the Daleys with a vengeance.

Gilbert: Oh, the Daleys hated him and he hated the Daleys. When he was governor the big fight that he and Richard J. Daley had was over trying to establish the Crosstown Expressway, and that was *the* single one issue in Governor Walker's campaign. He wanted to build the Crosstown Expressway, which basically would've run along Cicero Avenue, and would even have created more of a dividing line between Chicago and Cicero, Berwyn, and the Cook County suburbs. Would've dislocated thousands of people, thousands of homes, hundreds of businesses. Walker wanted to do it, and Richard J. Daley fought it tooth and nail.

And that carried over into the Thompson administration. During Thompson's first term in office, which was '77-79, one of his big issues was to settle that Crosstown Expressway controversy. Mayor Daley had passed away in the meantime; he died in December of 1976, after Thompson was elected and before he was sworn in as governor. But that was one of the first summits that Thompson called—bringing together legislative leaders and Mayor Bilandic in Chicago, who had replaced Mayor Daley as mayor—and they reached agreement not to build the Crosstown Expressway, which would have captured millions of federal dollars that were just sitting there going unused. It captured all that federal money, and that was used for improvements to the Edens Expressway, to the Eisenhower Expressway, to mass transit, to downstate transit systems, downstate roads and bridges, and that was probably Thompson's first big summit success that he had as governor.[11]

DePue: Were there other problems with the Crosstown, as far as the city was concerned? Was that seen as an escape route, getting people out of the city quicker?

Gilbert: There was that angle, but I think it was just part of the ultimate plan to move people faster. If you look at transportation in the city of Chicago, even today you've got the expressways to the south, to the southwest, to the west, to the

[11] Kirk Brown, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 22, 2009, 27 and 58. [Placeholder for Fletcher and Thompson(??)]

northwest, and to the north. They're like spokes on a wheel going out, so you can go any of those directions very easily. In connection with that, you've got the commuter rail system, which is designed as spokes too, coming from Indiana, from the south suburbs, southwest to Joliet, the western suburbs, the northwest suburbs, and all the way up to Milwaukee. So that worked well. But if you wanted to go from north to south, I mean, it was almost impossible. What route would you take? You'd take Cicero, or you'd come into the Loop and take one of the expressways out. There was no real good way to get from O'Hare down to Joliet. So that was the missing link. Dan Walker and John Kramer, who was his secretary of transportation, had the idea that, Well, if we just build this expressway then we've got everything covered. You can get any direction you want to go on a nice interstate highway.

DePue: So was that before [Interstate] 294?

Gilbert: That was before 294, yeah.

DePue: When was 294 built?

Gilbert: Well, 294 was built right around then, but that's further out. That's further west. So at that time there had been a lot of truck traffic, in particular to the stockyards of Chicago, which is just southwest of Midway Airport. That was a lot of truck traffic coming into Chicago, or going from the rails to the stockyards, and there was no way to get there except on Cicero Avenue or Western Avenue or one of those four-lane city streets.

DePue: Let's go back to the primary election in 1972. Walker beat Simon, and I think probably quite a few of the Democratic politicians were quite surprised and maybe shocked, even, when that occurred. Then you've got the election between Ogilvie and Walker, and of course, Walker carries the day. Did you cover much of the Walker administration?

Gilbert: I did cover Dan Walker, after he was governor. I didn't cover his campaign for governor, but I followed it, of course, as did everybody. He had some key people who were really good. He had Vince DeGrazia, who was his alter ego. A lot of people thought Vince was really the populist brains of the operation. He had Norton Kay, Norty Kay, who was his press secretary, and like myself, had come out of the media. He was a reporter for *Chicago's American*. His ex-wife was a very prominent columnist in Chicago. So Norty Kay had a good relationship with the working press, and they got people to follow Walker on his walk from one end of the state to the other, where he got the nickname Walkin' Dan Walker.

DePue: One of the things early in the Walker administration that I'm curious about doesn't have much at all to do with Dan Walker: Thompson's prosecution of former governor and sitting federal judge Otto Kerner. Were you covering that story at all?

Gilbert: No, I did not. I did not cover Jim Thompson as a reporter, and that was one of the interesting gaps or non-links. I did not know Jim Thompson personally when the opportunity came to meet him.

DePue: Certainly the Kerner case is the ultimate, but he was earning quite a reputation as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois going after a lot of politicians, a lot of the power base in the city of Chicago. Did you think his prosecution of Kerner was fair?

Gilbert: At the time, from what I saw and what the verdict was, I had no other information than to think that it was fair. After I got to know Thompson and went to work for him, and especially through the first campaign in '75 and '76, he would go into certain communities, mostly in Democratic counties in Illinois, and people would call him names and swear at him about Otto Kerner and about the verdict. I began to wonder, but as I looked at the facts and talked to Thompson about it, there was no question in my mind that it was a fair decision by the jury.

DePue: We'll come back to this later when we get to the campaign itself. I think you had mentioned when we first met, ask about Sam Skinner and Joel Flaum. Did you have any dealings with either of them, who were both in the U.S. attorney's office at the time?

Gilbert: They were assistant U.S. attorneys. I knew Sam Skinner from my boyhood days in Wheaton, Illinois. His younger brother and I were classmates at Wheaton Community High School, and Sam used to drive me to school because he was a couple years older and had a driver's license when I was a freshman and sophomore. So I knew Sam, but I had kind of lost track of him. And then I had heard that he was an Assistant United States Attorney, and we had connected, but I did not talk to him about Thompson.

After I went to work for Thompson I found out what the structure was. He had an inner circle of assistants. Thompson had a circle of assistants that included Joel Flaum and Sam Skinner, Dan Webb, and some others. And before any major decision was made, whether to seek an indictment in any case, that group would meet and they would more or less vote on whether or not to seek an indictment. As Thompson later told the story, just about every time, they agreed on whether to seek indictments. And during his years as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, there were about as many Democrats that were indicted and prosecuted in the northern district of Illinois as there were Republicans. He had an incredible record of indicting local officials in municipalities and throughout the suburbs of Chicago during that time. So he wasn't going after just Democrats; it was Republicans and Democrats.[12]

The only one that he told me about where there was any disagreement in the group over whether or not to seek indictment was Richard J. Daley. There

[12] [Placeholder for Thompson's discussion of the "Kiddie Corps" and the USA office(??)]

had been a considerable effort into certain activities by the mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley. I am not aware of what the evidence was or lack of evidence was, but he definitely was teed up as a person who they were seeking an indictment for. When it came time to decide whether they were going to seek an indictment, there was disagreement among the group, and Thompson said no, they weren't going to seek an indictment on Mayor Daley. As he has told me in the past—and he should probably speak to this more than I should, for sure—but it was a matter of not being sure about the evidence, and that it would be so disruptive to the city and to the state. If you would say, "Well, why not Kerner in that same regard?" I think Kerner's time of service had passed, and he was no longer an elected public official in the state of Illinois, whereas Daley was another matter.

There are all kinds of arguments that can be levied on either side of that decision, and I still meet people… Just last week I was talking to a Chicagoan, and he said, "Oh, you were Thompson's press secretary." I said yes. And he said, "Yeah, he was probably the last real governor that we've had in this state." It was kind of a joke, but we laughed. And then he said, "You know, the only problem I have with Thompson is that he didn't run as a Democrat." And I've heard that before from other Democrats. But if you look at Thompson's history from law school to the Illinois attorney general's office to the U.S. attorney's office, and what was happening on the Democratic side of the ledger, there probably wasn't an opportunity for him to run as a Democrat.

DePue: Take us back to the national level again, because this is the timeframe when Richard Nixon is president of the United States, and of course, in 1972 he runs for reelection against George McGovern and swamps McGovern in the general election. But a few months prior to the election, there's these reports coming out of the *Washington Post* and elsewhere about this peculiar break-in at the Watergate. As a reporter, as somebody who's something of a political junkie by that time, who's fascinated by the whole thing, what was your reaction as the story about Watergate starts to unfold?

Gilbert: I'll precede answering Watergate with a story about Thompson, who, as United States Attorney, was appointed by the Justice Department to be the special prosecutor to investigate Spiro Agnew. Spiro Agnew was Nixon's vice president, and there were certain allegations about things that Agnew had done. Thompson went to Washington, did his investigation, submitted his report to the Justice Department, and then returned to Chicago. When he got off the plane at O'Hare, there was a sizable number of reporters meeting him there, television and newspaper reporters and radio, and they said, "Tell us, Mr. Thompson, what was your impression of Spiro Agnew and what you found?" And Thompson bluntly said, "He's a crook." That was the result of his investigation. Nixon had appointed Thompson as U.S. attorney. And he came back, I would say, with a finding that was not received enthusiastically

by President Nixon and his administration.[13] So Thompson kind of cut the cord with the Nixon administration at that point, as far as I'm concerned.

DePue: That was '73, perhaps?

Gilbert: Yeah, around there. So when that happened, I think there was suspicion that was cast. The press, in general, didn't like Nixon to begin with, but despite that he ran and won.

I had a personal connection to Watergate. When President Nixon was called for impeachment in the House of Representatives, the Republicans were in the minority and the Democrats were in the majority, as you might figure. That's how that all came about. Albert Jenner was a prominent Chicago attorney and one of the founders of Jenner & Block, one of the two or three largest law firms in the city. Bert Jenner was summoned to Washington to be lead counsel for the minority, so he was the lead counsel for the Republicans on the judiciary committee that was investigating Watergate. I had a very good friend at the time whose name was Ted Tetzlaff; Ted was a very bright young lawyer out of Princeton undergrad and Yale Law School, and he went to school near the time that both Clintons were at Yale. He was at Jenner's firm at Jenner & Block, and Bert Jenner called Ted Tetzlaff to be his assistant on the minority counsel on the judiciary committee investigating Watergate.

Ted, being an assistant, would call me now and then after the day's proceedings. I was a reporter at the *Tribune*, and he would say, "Look for this tomorrow," or whatever. I would pass this on, either to our Washington desk who was covering the hearings on the scene, or to our staff in the city room who were connected to it, and they would use that information. So that was kind of a link that was… I never wrote a Watergate story, but I was giving input to *Tribune* articles that were being written about Watergate.

Eventually Ted's credentials were challenged by some Republican members [who argued] that he really wasn't a Republican and shouldn't be serving as assistant minority counsel because he wasn't a Republican. Ted, at one time, had worked on the staff of Congressman Brademis in Indiana, who was a Democrat, and so therefore he was booted off the minority counsel team. The next day, Jenner hired Ted back on as a special assistant outside counsel to work with him, so it was an interesting time. But Watergate was something that needed to happen in the Nixon administration. They were

[13] While U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, Thompson was appointed by the Department of Justice to defend it against a lawsuit filed by former Vice President Agnew. Agnew claimed he could not receive a fair trial because of the department's leaks of information during its investigation of his alleged corruption while governor of Maryland. On October 10, 1973, Agnew pleaded no contest to income tax evasion and resigned the vice presidency. When Thompson returned to Chicago, he told the press that the investigation "found Agnew a simple crook. The country is well rid of him." His statement received nationwide press coverage and angered many Republicans who were still loyal to Agnew. Tom Jones, "Back from D.C., Thompson Calls Agnew a Crook," *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 11, 1973; Jack Mabley, "Are fine, disgrace enough for Agnew?," *Chicago Tribune*, October 14, 1973; Betty Washington, "Thompson's Mail Heats Up," *Chicago Daily News*, October 18, 1973. [placeholder for Thompson's discussion(??)]

playing fast and loose with administrative power. There are a lot of similarities, I think, to the Nixon administration and the Obama administration in that regard. I know people would pin me up against a wall if I said that publicly. The Obama administration, they are taking a lot of leeway in the power of the executive branch to do things not authorized by Congress or not authorized by the Constitution. The Nixon thing was a criminal act, and one step more than that, so it shouldn't become confused with Obama in that regard.

DePue: One of the reasons I'm asking, though, is you're a career journalist. You grew up in this very religious family. You've got this moral foundation going in. And yet now you've gotten into reporting on Illinois politics, Richard J. Daley, with the reputation he had in terms of the iron fist of running Chicago, with Jim Thompson going after lots of politicians of both stripes in Chicago and Illinois in general. Now you've got this going on at the federal level. Were you becoming increasingly jaded and cynical about the political process?

Gilbert: There's not much hope there, is there? (laughs)

DePue: I mean, this was the reaction of many American citizens, that they became more cynical about politics at the time.

Gilbert: That kind of leads to: I was transportation editor at the *Tribune*. My good friend Bob Davis covered the Federal Building in Chicago and covered Jim Thompson as U.S. attorney, and he was my neighbor; he and I lived next to each other in Chicago. One day he said, "By the way, Big Jim is going to run for governor, and he's looking for a press secretary. Are you interested?" I said, "Are you kidding?" And he said, "Well, do you mind if I give him your name?" I said, "No, you can give him my name, but I'm not interested." Thompson called me a couple of weeks later and said, "Gilbert, this is Thompson. I'm going to be running for governor and I'm looking for a press secretary. Are you interested?" I said, "You know, Jim, in my years of covering politics for the *Chicago Tribune* there's one thing that I've learned, and that is never to get involved in politics." He laughed, and he said, "I kind of feel the same way, but I'd like to talk anyway. Can we talk?" And I said, "Sure."

So a week or so later—I think it was early July of 1975—I went and met with him. He was meeting in an office at Winston & Strawn, which he was not officially working for at the time, but they were kind enough to give him office space after he had left the U.S. Attorney's office and announced earlier in July, around July fourth, that he was going to run for governor. I met with him for about two hours, and we talked about these issues. We talked about Watergate. We talked about the cynicism of politicians in general. We talked about Kerner. We talked about all of this. And I said, "I've covered Mayor Daley. I've covered these politicians. I don't really want to be involved in politics." He said, "Well, you're exactly the kind of guy that I'm looking for.

You've worked in Springfield. You've covered the legislature. You've covered political campaigns in the state. You know what the press wants in a campaign. You know what they don't always get. You seem like a nice enough person who gets along with people, and that's what I'm looking for." We talked for two hours. He told me about his ambitions, what he wanted to do, and that was bring good government to Illinois. That was basically it. He wanted to get Illinois's economy working again, and to do that he had to produce jobs for the people in Illinois. Simple as that.

After we talked he said, "Are you interested now?" I said, "I might be, but I don't know. I still don't know about this political thing." And he said, "Well, let's do this: let's take two weeks. I'll check you out and you check me out. What do you say?" I said, "Fine." I thought maybe that might be the last time I heard from Thompson, actually, but I did think about it. I talked to my friends at the *Tribune* about it, guys like Jim Strong, who was labor editor at the *Tribune* and my desk partner; Stormy was his nickname. And Strong would say, "You know, guy, you're crazy. You'll probably be running against Dan Walker. How are you going to beat a guy like that? And you're crazy to get into politics." Other reporters and friends of mine said, "You know what? Thompson's a good guy. He probably would do it different. Maybe you might be onto something here." After two weeks, in the morning I'd wake up and say, "What are you thinking? That's crazy. No way. You've got a good job at the *Tribune*. You're on a good track at the *Tribune*. Why don't you stay here?" By the end of the evening, when I had been talking with friends and so forth, I was thinking, "Well, maybe this is not a bad idea."

After two weeks, Thompson called me up and he said, "Gilbert, Thompson. I've taken two weeks and checked you out. Despite what I've heard, I still want you to be my press secretary." I laughed and I said, "Well, Jim, I've taken two weeks and checked you out, and despite what I've heard, I'll take the job." He said, "No kidding?" I said, "No kidding." And that was it.

DePue: Did you know before that moment, that you were going to say yes when he called?

Gilbert: I was probably 80 percent sure, but I wasn't 100 percent sure. But when he called, I just had a feeling this was the thing to do.

DePue: Going back to what was the plan, huh? What was the plan for you?

Gilbert: There's a plan in there someplace.

DePue: Were you married at the time?

Gilbert: I was not married at the time. I had been divorced, and that was a good thing too. It was a job for a single guy.

DePue: That's why I was asking the question, because it's already a pretty demanding job time-wise to be a reporter. You had to know that you'd be stepping into a completely different world to be a press secretary for a guy with that kind of ambition. Or did you?

Gilbert: I did, twenty-four/seven. I knew it was going to be anytime, anyplace.

DePue: Did he know your politics?

Gilbert: Yeah, I think he asked me about it in our conversation. I told him that at the time I considered myself an independent. I had voted for Alan Dixon. I remember that.

DePue: For his Senate run.

Gilbert: It would've been Secretary of State, right?

DePue: Yeah, let me check on that. Treasurer.

Gilbert: For treasurer. Okay, that's right, because I know I had voted for Dixon. I used him as an example, so that would've been for Treasurer, and then he became Secretary of State. So I considered myself an independent. I vote for the right person, for the best person in my opinion.

DePue: Had you voted for Walker—

Gilbert: No.

DePue: —or for Ogilvie?

Gilbert: Ogilvie.

DePue: (pause in recording) We took a very quick break, and now, David, it's time to talk about the actual election itself, because as soon as you're on board it's full campaign mode, I would think.

Gilbert: It's August 1975, and it's actually eighteen months before the election. I was the first full-time staff person Thompson hired, as press secretary, and I joined his campaign on August 2, 1975. There were a few volunteers who had been helping out: Dan Weil, who was also an Assistant U.S. Attorney on his staff; Dan Kennelly, who was a former Chicago policeman, who kind of served as a volunteer assistant before he came on board full-time. I wouldn't call him a bodyguard but he did carry a concealed weapon. A few other people. But in August of 1975, we had nothing. We had no office. We didn't have a pencil. We didn't have paper. We didn't have a desk, a waste basket, anything.

DePue: What was your pay scale like, compared to working on the *Tribune*?

Gilbert: It was about the same. I think my pay scale was $35,000 a year.[14] That's what we agreed to, whatever that boiled down to per month. And Thompson met his payroll; I must give him credit for that. There were some times during the first campaign—and I'll come to that in a minute—that we were about out of money, but he did pay his staff people.

DePue: You're the press secretary, the guy that has to help him develop his image and make himself known. He's very well-known in Chicago. How about the rest of the state at that time?

Gilbert: In the six-county Chicagoland area, he was fairly well known. His name recognition was about 36 percent. And for a non-elected public official, that wasn't bad for the whole six-county area. So if he had a pocket of people who knew him, it was certainly here. Downstate, when you got south of Interstate 80, it was almost zero. And when you got really south, you know, into southern Illinois—south of Carbondale and Mount Vernon and down in that area—people didn't know him. So we started off with nothing. Thompson had never run for elective office before. And he wasn't very good at it.

But prior to announcing he was running for governor, he used to meet for breakfast every Wednesday morning at the Union League Club of Chicago with two gentlemen: one was Marshall Korshak, who had been the Democratic city treasurer, I believe, for the city of Chicago. At this time I don't know if he held elected office; he may have been a Democratic committeeman for some ward. The other person was Michael J. Howlett. And Mike Howlett and Thompson were good friends. At the time, Howlett was Secretary of State, and very popular, probably the most popular Democrat in the state. For the Jefferson Day dinners throughout the state, he was always the speaker that was most sought after.

DePue: You're saying this while Dan Walker's the sitting governor and also a Democrat.

Gilbert: Oh, exactly. Exactly. But Mike Howlett, a wonderful storyteller, had a patronage army of thousands as Secretary of State, probably the largest employee base in state government, and he was a nice guy. I knew Mike Howlett, and I still know his sons. I ran into Eddie Howlett just last week, and wonderful, wonderful guy. The point of the story here is that Howlett and Korshak, two Democrats, meeting with Jim Thompson, who was a United States Attorney, ready to resign to run for governor. And Howlett tells Thompson, "Jim, if you're going to run for governor, you've got to be one of the people. You've got to slap them on the back. You gotta kiss their babies. You have to drink beer with them. You have to laugh with them. You have to cry with them. And you have to go to their parades." He's telling Thompson, who's a rookie, all the stuff he had to do to be a popular campaigner,

[14] This would amount to a $154,000 salary in 2014. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Inflation Calculator, http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

basically.

When I came onboard I had covered enough politicians that I knew the good ones from the bad ones. The good ones did what Mike Howlett said you should do: you're one of the people, you kiss their babies, you have your picture taken with them, and you shake their hands. Thompson was invited to go to a certain event and he went, and there were fifty people there in a big room. Because he's six-foot-six, he's kind of unknowingly self-conscious about his height, so he would go stand in a corner. At the time I was six-two, and I kind of understood that because I had a tendency to do the same thing. So after that first event I said, "Jim, if you're going to do this now, you have to do a couple of things: one, when you walk into a room like this, you have to stand in the middle of the room so you can be with all the people; two, you have to shake as many hands as you can; and three, you have to tell them your name and what you're running for. "Hi, my name's Jim Thompson. I'm running for governor of Illinois." If it's a Republican gathering you say, "Hi, I'm Jim Thompson. I'm running. I want to be the Republican candidate for the governor of Illinois." That's all you've got to say, but you've got to repeat that over and over and over.

So he started doing it and he got really good at it, and he found out he really liked it. He found out that because he was big, because he spoke well, because he had this incredible law enforcement record that people who knew him did know about, they wanted to meet him. They wanted to meet this guy. You know, this guy who stood up to the machine and Chicago and threw the crooks in jail, the guy who went after a former governor. Some people didn't like him, but a lot of people did, or a lot of people were just fascinated to meet the guy who had the balls to do something like that.

DePue: Yeah, the former governor.

Gilbert: Yeah. So he had that going for him.

DePue: How long did it take him to get comfortable in doing that?

Gilbert: A couple of months.

DePue: That's all?

Gilbert: That's all. One of the first people I hired then was Jim Skilbeck, whose nickname was Skilby. I hired Skilby primarily because he came out of radio, and he had some radio broadcasting background. He had a radio voice. He had done country and western programs and he had done talk shows, mostly in secondary markets, so not a well-known guy; nobody knew who Skilby was. But he had also been involved in several Republican congressional races, so he knew what worked in politics and what didn't.[15] We started booking

[15] On Skilbeck, see Kim Fox.

Thompson into parades, and the first holiday coming up was Labor Day, so we booked him into the Labor Day parades.

DePue: Did he make the state fair that year?

Gilbert: Yeah, he did. He did make the state fair the first year. That was in August of 1975. I don't remember if he had much of an impact. The second year, 1976, he was all over the state fair, and I think he had a much bigger presence.

DePue: Let me read you a couple lines from the *Chicago Daily News*, August 16-17, 1975, during the state fair. This is an article about the state fair, and Dan Walker's there and Jim Thompson's there. Here's Dan Walker: "Step right up, ladies and gentlemen. Get the best food at the state fair." That's the pitch that he's making. And here's Jim Thompson: "Hi, I'm Jim Thompson, and I'm running for governor." (laughter)

Gilbert: Well, he had memorized his lines by then.

DePue: "Where are you from?" And a little bit farther into the article it says, "Walker seldom walks from one point to another at the fair without shaking most of the hands in between. With 98 percent name recognition he can simply say, 'Hi, I'm Dan.'" Now here's the part that's going to trouble you, a paragraph later: "But Thompson was seen committing a political boo-boo: walking from the fair's coliseum to the Republican tent without glad-handing anyone, and with 55 percent name recognition, most of it in Chicago area, he cannot expect downstate fairgoers to stop and stare the way they do when Walker goes by."

Gilbert: I would agree with that 100 percent. And it probably was not until '76 that he began to hone what became known as Thompson's campaign style. We had t-shirts, 'Thompson For Governor,' orange t-shirts with blue lettering. Jim Skilbeck then even took it a step further: he got a bullhorn. And Thompson would walk in the parade. Sometimes he'd walk with Jayne Thompson, (Jayne Carr before they were married). He'd go side to side and shake hands with people, and Skilby would be out front with his bullhorn saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, here comes Jim Thompson, the next governor of Illinois!" Some people would cheer. Other people would boo, but usually the cheers were more predominant. He'd stop, chug a beer if somebody handed him a beer, hand it back. He would sign autographs. He just worked it. I don't recall him riding in a car. There may have been a few times when he rode in a car into a stadium or something, but rarely. He was always walking.

DePue: Was Jayne with him for some of these parades?

Gilbert: Yeah, Jayne was with him, and—

DePue: Walking with him?

Gilbert: Yeah, walking with him, and when Samantha got older she was walking with him. They grew up as a campaigning family, and they accepted it.

DePue: Did Jayne seem to like it? Especially in the first couple campaigns.

Gilbert: Yeah, she did. She did. She was surprising, how much fun it was, as you've seen in the picture of her going down the giant slide at the state fair with him. It was fun. But there was a problem on the campaign trail for not only Jayne Carr Thompson but for any spouse of a person who's campaigning for a big office, and that is that the public, the electorate, nine times out of ten will go right by the spouse to get to the candidate.[16] So here she is with her husband, "Hey, Jim, over here; hey, Jim, over here," and there's Jayne, and nobody's saying, "Hey, Jayne, over here." Nobody's saying that. It takes a special kind of a person to be able to stand in the shadow of the candidate and say, "This is what he's got to do. This is what he's supposed to do. I understand this. I support it. I'm happy that it's going so well for him."

DePue: It's interesting, because that's the person you described as your mother

Gilbert: Basically, yeah. Yeah, that's an interesting observation. And it was difficult for Jayne at some times. When Thompson met Jayne Carr, she was an Assistant Illinois Attorney General under Bill Scott, and she was good. She did a lot of trial work. She wrote some amazing briefs. She was considered a star in his office. Very good, and that's one reason I think Thompson was attracted to her. Legally, they were on the same page. Whether they're on the same platform, I'm not sure, but the same page, anyway. They loved the law. They understood it. They talked about it. They had a lot of comfort with each other in that regard. When Thompson started running for governor and then was elected governor, her legal career all of a sudden was compromised because she is dating or is married to a candidate who's running for governor, or she's the first lady of Illinois, and what kind of a legal practice can you have in that regard? She handled that as well as anybody could. She tried joining a private firm. She tried doing legal work. She tried to be Of Counsel. And these conflicts of interest kept popping up, or they were afraid they would pop up in a lot of cases, so that didn't work.

DePue: Let's go back to the very beginning days of the campaign. What was the strategy? I assume you and Thompson sat down and brainstormed about that.

[16] And occasionally, they experienced worrisome interactions. Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014, [currently 25; finalize page number(??)] [Placeholder for Jayne's talk with Mark(??)]


Gilbert: We did brainstorm about it. The first part we'd been talking about, and that's just campaigning and meeting people, "this man Thompson."[17] The second part was meeting Republicans who were going to vote for him in a primary. We didn't know who was going to pop up against him as an opponent in the primary.

Before Thompson announced that he was going to run for governor, he went and met with his old boss, Bill Scott, who was the Attorney General for Illinois. Scott was the fair-haired Republican. After Dick Ogilvie, it was supposed to be Bill Scott who was going to run for governor and be the next Republican governor of Illinois. I don't know how much Howlett and Korshak played into this strategy, but Thompson went into Bill Scott's office. I don't know if it was unannounced, but I understand that he just one day walked into his office, said, "Hi, Bill." Scott said, "Well, hi, Jim. What are you doing here?" And Thompson said, "I just came to tell you that I'm going to run for Governor of Illinois." Boom, like that. As I understand it, it was a shock to Bill Scott, and he didn't know what to say. And Thompson didn't give him much of an opportunity to respond. He said, "Of all people, I wanted you to be one of the first to know that that's my intention."

DePue: So that was Thompson's way of eliminating Bill Scott as an opponent?

Gilbert: I don't think it was his way of eliminating him. Hopefully he was going to eliminate him, but I don't think that's what he was going to do to eliminate him. But it was part of the strategy to corner him, to let him know, "This is going to happen, and I'm going to be out there first, so good luck."

DePue: As far as getting into the Republican base, especially downstate areas, how big a role do the Lincoln Day dinners play?

Gilbert: Huge role. The Lincoln Day dinners, and meeting and getting to know and having that beer or that cocktail with the Republican County Chairman, was just key. Not that Thompson had an opponent in the first primary, but he wanted to gin up the Republican vote in the primary, because he knew he was going to need 100 percent Republican vote in the general election, no matter if it was Dan Walker or someone else, plus a large number of independents, plus

[17] Slogan on a 1976 campaign pamphlet.

a number of Democrats. Those were the numbers he had to achieve to win. So as you saw in those commercials that we watched, the more name recognition he had—This Man Thompson, This Man Thompson; "Hi, I'm Jim Thompson," "Oh, I heard you were out here"— it was so important to that first campaign strategy.

DePue: From what you said, then, going into the campaign he recognized he needed to pull enough Democrat votes to be able to win?

Gilbert: Yes.

DePue: He wouldn't be able to do it just with the pure Republican and independents.

Gilbert: Unh-uh. So we soon opened campaign offices at 110 South Dearborn Street, right across from First National Bank Plaza. Great campaign offices. We began to get volunteers. Jim Fletcher came on as our first campaign manager.

DePue: Another U.S. attorney guy?

Gilbert: No. Fletcher, I believe, was associated with Bernie Epton; Bernie Epton had been a Republican state legislator, a representative, and had run for mayor against Harold Washington. And we'll have to check this, but I believe Fletcher came out of Epton's law firm.[18]

DePue: But the race against Harold Washington would've happened a few years later.

Gilbert: That happened later, right. That was Bernie Epton. But Fletcher, I believe, came in. Fletcher is a very smart man. He's a strategist. He's a political animal. He knows the ins and outs of especially Republican politics at this time.

DePue: Is that to say that Jim Fletcher is that guy that every good campaign needs to have? He's the number cruncher who you tell him the county in Illinois, he can tell you how it's going to go?

Gilbert: Pretty much so. He is one of the guys that you've got to have. But he, along with a few other people, were key in that first campaign. He worked the Republican strategy. I don't know if Kjellander joined us in that campaign; I think he may have. Bill Cellini was a big supporter early on, and those men had the downstate network more in hand than anyone else. So they would put together Republican chairmen receptions. At first I don't know how convinced Thompson was of the importance of county chairmen, but it didn't take him long to figure out that these guys were key, and he had to have their undivided loyalty.

We took off from there. We had a campaign office. We began to open

[18] Fletcher managed Epton's 1983 campaign against Washington. For his background and decision to manage Thompson's 1976 campaign, see [Placeholder for Fletch's interview with me on this topic(??)]

offices downstate. We put together our own network of advance people; Bob Athey, who had worked a lot on Nixon's campaigns, doing advance work for him, came in and helped set up our advance team. We had county coordinators in just about every county. It began to build from there. And all of a sudden, Thompson, who's a great speaker, began to develop a great political speech. You saw his commercials, and we wanted the impression, when people heard Thompson speaking about how he tackled the corrupt machine politicians in Chicago, that they would hear a cell door slamming in the background. That's the image we wanted to portray. "Oh, yeah, this guy's tough. He's big. Nobody's going to touch Jim Thompson." And that worked for us.

DePue: Did that play equally as well in the city and the suburbs and downstate?

Gilbert: Some parts of the city, and in the African American communities of Chicago and certain African American churches it played very well. In certain Cook County suburbs it played very well. In DuPage County it was a home run. (DePue laughs) They'd been waiting for this day for a long time. We got one of our own!

DePue: DuPage County had the reputation at that time of being the second most Republican dominated county in the country.

Gilbert: Yeah, I think so.

DePue: Go ahead.

Gilbert: I mean, it just began to build. But with all of these people coming on, every county chairman, when they joined, had their hand out. "Well, Jim, how many jobs are we going to get here in Ogle County?" Or, "What's this going to mean to Woodford County?" And Woodford County is the county where Eureka is home. It's probably one of the most Republican counties in the state, and that will come into play in Thompson's third election.

DePue: Well, because who went to school at Eureka College?

Gilbert: As a Democrat, though.

DePue: Ronald Reagan.

Gilbert: Yeah, he was a Democrat when he went to Eureka. But Eureka is his home, as far as going to college, along with Dixon. Another key part of the strategy—along with Fletcher coming in as campaign manager, Bob Athey coming in to kind of head up the advance team and work on that part—was Bailey Deardorff, which was Doug Bailey and John Deardorff. They had a primarily liberal Republican consulting firm based out of Washington, but they came in and wanted to do the political commercials and strategies and so forth. They had a pollster tied with them named Bob Teeter. Teeter, of course, is a big

name in political polling throughout the years, both Republican and Democrat, [though he] was primarily considered a Republican pollster. So Bailey Deardorff and Teeter joined our campaign. They came in for strategy sessions, and based on their polling said, "Your name recognition in the metropolitan Chicago area is good, [around] 50-60 percent. Downstate you're not known at all, so you should really build that base in the Chicago area. That's what you'll need."

But we talked about that and said, "If we can make news every day in the Chicago metropolitan area but build it from downstate, spend a lot of time downstate—in the county fairs, in the state fairs, at the Lincoln Day dinners, the Memorial Day parades, the Fourth of July parades, and so forth—and get that name recognition built up downstate, we've got something. Every day [we can] send news to Chicago that plays in the *Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, the *Daily News*, the *American*, and then on WMAQ radio, which was the talk radio of the time, and WBBM." That's where Skilbeck came in, who I'd hired as the radio man. We tried to get a segment out of a speech every day and send it up to Chicago, and he'd get on the phone, "Hey, I've got Jim Thompson who was in Olney today, speaking to the Kiwanis. And here I've got a thirty-second sound bite where he said…" whatever the news of the day was. And that stuff began to play. So we were keeping his identity stirred up in the Chicago area through the Chicago news media, while meeting and building a base in downstate Illinois.

Now comes Mike Howlett, and I've heard this story directly from Danny Rostenkowski, who was chairman of the ways and means committee—longtime Democrat committeeman from the Northwest Side, wonderful guy.

DePue: Considered the most powerful guy in the House of Representatives for a while.

Gilbert: Absolutely, and they said at that time, second or third most powerful man in Washington. But Rosty told me this story, actually, a couple of times. He was out playing golf one day, and the pro comes up and says, "You've got a call from Mayor Daley. He needs to talk to you right away." And as Rosty told the story, you know, "What in the hell does he want?" But he went into the pro shop, picked up the phone, called the mayor back, and Daley allegedly told him, "Where is Mike Howlett? I want him to run for governor. Find Howlett and tell him he's running for governor." So that ended Rostenkowski's golf match for the day. But he went and found Howlett, and said, "Mike, I just talked to the mayor. He wants you to run for governor, and that would be in the primary against Dan Walker." We soon, through one source or another, heard the story that Howlett was going to be running in the primary against Dan Walker and could be Thompson's opponent in the general election. And we thought, Oh man, what's this going to look like? The same two guys that had sat in the Union League Club for several years every Wednesday morning over breakfast?

DePue: Was that well known?

Gilbert: No, no, not at all.

DePue: Now, this speaks volumes about Walker's relationship with Mayor Daley, but Walker had made his entire career reputation on tearing down Daley, so it's not a surprise, certainly.

Gilbert: Right, and they were bitter enemies over the Crosstown Expressway. People forget how big that Crosstown Expressway issue was. I mean, it was huge. And so with all the flair of Chicago Democratic politics, Mike Howlett announced that he was the Democratic candidate, endorsed by the machine in Chicago, and—

DePue: When would that have occurred?

Gilbert: The primary was March 17, 1976, so it had to be in the fall.

DePue: So enough time to give Howlett a chance to put together a credible campaign?

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And I would think he's not going to have a serious problem with raising the money he needs to do that.

Gilbert: No, you wouldn't think so, and the most popular Jackson-Jefferson Day speaker.

DePue: (laughs) I know when the Lincoln Day dinners are. Those are mostly in February.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: When's Jackson-Jefferson?

Gilbert: About the same time.

DePue: Are they? So another purely political kind of an event.

Gilbert: Rubber chicken.[19] Greg Baise and I would go with Thompson to some of these Lincoln Day dinners, and we'd have an entourage of about five or six people. I would be there, or Skilbeck; one of the press people would be there. We'd probably have the county coordinator from whoever's county we were in. We'd have one or two state police, state troopers who were then assigned to our campaign, or before that, Dan Kennelly, who was our own heat-bearing (laughs) aide. Thompson would get up, and he'd get on a roll, and he'd keep rolling and rolling, and we'd be in the back going, "We gotta get out of here. We gotta be here. The weather's closing in. We've got to get out of here."

[19] Reference to the frequency and quality of chicken the dinners offered.

During that first campaign, we put together a volunteer air force, and we didn't have state aircraft. Illinois's a big state—420 miles long and 300 miles wide. People in southern Illinois are closer to Mississippi than they are Chicago, in more ways than one, as Thompson used to say. So we started putting together people who had airplanes, who would volunteer to fly Thompson and a couple of aides around. One of our good pilots was Bob Donahue, and a good friend of mine, who went on to work for the FAA in Washington, in charge of airports. But Bob and his partner—"Bad Weather" Blough (pronounced blow) was his nickname—flew a twin-engine plane, and those guys would take off in bad weather, and we'd say, "Oh, man, we shouldn't be flying through this stuff."

DePue: Were you spending most of your time on the campaign trail, or back in the home office?

Gilbert: In '75 and '76 I was almost totally on the campaign trail. I did some speechwriting at first, but after he got the hang of it Thompson was his own speechwriter. Most of it came off the cuff. I mean, he was just a natural speaker. He just had a mind that would not forget a statistic, so if you told him something, if you gave him some information, you darn well better be sure it was good information, because he'd be spewing it out.

DePue: That's the reporting side of you: make sure you got it right to begin with.

Gilbert: Darn right. In our press staff, we just had a couple of rules. One was just what you said: always be sure you have your facts straight. Secondly, always return every phone call that you get the same day. I don't care if it's midnight and you haven't gone home yet and you've got a phone call, but return your phone calls. And never lie. Never give a reporter bad information that's not true.

DePue: What were the main issues of the campaign?

Gilbert: In which campaign, the primary or the general?

DePue: Let's start with the primary.

Gilbert: The main issue in the primary election was, Who is Jim Thompson? It was merely, Who is this man, what's he done, and why is he running for governor? And that morphed into jobs, jobs, jobs. We've got to create jobs in Illinois to get the economy of Illinois back on its feet. Honesty, integrity in government. And, of course, there was always the shadow of Otto Kerner behind those statements, whether you believed Thompson did the right thing or not. And his reputation. The economy definitely became the issue.

In the general election, running against Mike Howlett, it was, Who's going to be running this state if Mike Howlett's elected? Is it going to be Mike Howlett or is it going to be Mayor Daley? We had a door hanger put together, we actually had it drawn up and ready to go, which was a picture taken of

Mayor Richard J. Daley and Mike Howlett at the St. Patrick's Day parade in Chicago. And it was a side profile shot. Howlett was here with his jowls hanging down, with his felt hat on, with his dark coat with the Sons of Ireland banner across, and standing just in front of him was the same profile of Mayor Daley. So you had Howlett here, Daley here, they're both looking out this way, and the only thing it said on the door hanger was, "Who do you want running Illinois?"

DePue: Now, you talked yourself about Thompson having all these meals with Howlett every week over the years. Did Thompson really believe that Howlett wouldn't be his own guy once he became governor?

Gilbert: Who knew? Howlett didn't want to run for governor. We knew that. Rostenkowksi confirmed that. He was happy as could be being Secretary of State: didn't have the pressure; had this vast army of political workers who'd reelect him, who'd do the work; he was popular; he didn't have to work hard; secretary of state's office takes care of itself.

DePue: And yet, when he announces in the fall, you've got a sitting governor who has his own power base, who's very well-known across the state. Did Thompson's campaign think that it was going to be Walker or Howlett that they would face?

Gilbert: When Howlett announced, we thought it would be Howlett. The Chicago machine was going to be too much in Chicago for Walker to overcome, and Howlett's popularity downstate. Walker wasn't getting a whole lot of invites, the same invites that Howlett was getting for the Jackson-Jefferson Day dinners.

DePue: But you mentioned yourself that the secretary state position is a great one if it's all about patronage, and there's lots of patronage jobs that are going down south. Wouldn't the Democrats down south be beholden to… Well, I might be answering my own question. They'd be beholden to Howlett.

Gilbert: Exactly. Who's the secretary of state? Not Dan Walker. You did answer your own question. The other thing was, we had a tested group of coordinators throughout the state, young kids, who believed in Thompson, who had hit the ground, and we had refined our campaign act by the time that general election came around. So when Thompson rolled into town, there were banners at the airport, the press was there, there was a caravan, the county chairman was in the RV with Thompson riding to the event, and it was a well-oiled machine. Howlett didn't have that kind of a campaign strategy structure put together. There were stories that he was supposed to go to Decatur and the plane landed at Bloomington or something like that, and he was just having all kinds of problems.

DePue: This was in the general campaign or the primary?

Gilbert: No, the general.

DePue: Who would you have preferred to run against, Walker or Howlett?

Gilbert: Either one. Either one, but we thought Howlett would be the more difficult candidate to run against, just because of the Daley machine. And it started out that way. When we were approaching Labor Day in 1976—I had referred to this a little bit earlier—we were about out of money. Those commercials that you saw down there had been produced for the primary.

DePue: Yeah, we were watching these commercials during lunch today.

Gilbert: Yeah, and those cost money. There's a lot of production involved, and you have to buy media time. You have to put them on TV, and we had radio spots, and so forth. We had a paid staff now that was pretty large. And it was tough. So we're running out of money, we come up to Labor Day, and Thompson says, "We're going to have to lay some people off or make some decisions, because we're just about at the end of our financial rope." But the *Tribune* poll came out on Labor Day weekend that showed Thompson had a substantial lead over Howlett, and the floodgates opened. The money started pouring in. People who had been holding back said, "Hmm, this guy's going to win, and I'm going to get on board." From then on, from Labor Day up until the election, we were almost exclusively in downstate Illinois. We had Chicago media traveling with us much of the time on a daily basis, so we were making Chicago news on every newscast. Meanwhile, in Mount Vernon, Illinois, (imitates newscast) "Jim Thompson bought a dog today. He's an Irish setter, and he named him Guv." All of a sudden the stories are about Guv. So it worked.

DePue: I'm going to reveal a little bit of my own cynicism about politics. You said that when it was clear Thompson had a sizable lead over Howlett, the floodgates opened and he got a lot more money. I'm thinking the average voter who wants to contribute to a campaign might be more compelled to contribute to a close campaign so he thinks he can push his guy over the finish line. But if you're opening up the floodgates and you're getting a lot more money, you're getting money from deep pockets who might have something that they want to get out of the government once that person becomes governor.

Gilbert: Welcome to politics.

DePue: (laughs) So that is the case? The second scenario is the case?

Gilbert: Both are the case, but since the beginning, since the first election, that has always been an incentive for someone to get behind an elected official who's going to be in a position of power to help somebody out. Now, what you do to help those people out is another story, and once we get past the election we

can talk about some safeguards that Thompson put into place to make sure we weren't going to have problems along that line.

DePue: I got a little bit ahead of myself. I did want to mention here the results of the primary. Thompson did have an opponent, but let's go with Howlett-Walker: Howlett 48.1 percent, Walker 41.7 percent. Pretty significant defeat for Dan Walker, the sitting governor. Anything of interest in terms of Thompson's primary opponent, Richard Cooper?

Gilbert: Dick Cooper was a Weight Watchers guru, I think out of Oak Brook. Nice guy. Probably running for governor because he had so much money he didn't know what else to do. Never had much of a platform. Always nattily attired; he dressed really well. Didn't have the same shtick that Thompson had in parades or meeting with people or so forth. A little stiffer candidate, and he certainly didn't have the organization that we had, or the ability to put an organization together like that.

DePue: Does that mean that you could save your resources for the general election? You didn't have to devote too much to the primary?

Gilbert: No, no, not at all. It was just the other way around. Thompson's name ID had to be raised for the general, and one way to do that is in the primary. We were spending a considerable amount of money on name ID, the "This Man Thompson" commercials that ran, especially downstate, in the primary, that then gave him an edge in the general. I had talked earlier about election night on March seventeenth, when Thompson won the primary. He beat Dick Cooper, which, big deal, but it was a big deal. It was the first election that Thompson had won.

DePue: And the vote was 77.1 percent for Thompson; 9 percent is what Cooper polled.

Gilbert: Yeah, not bad. But we took five or six commercials out of that victory speech on election night, so that's where the money was going. We were not coasting at all during the primary.

DePue: We've been talking about that quite a bit already, but fairly early in the general election, May eighth, Thompson announces that he and Jayne are engaged. Or they probably jointly announced. I want you to talk about how much that was part of the political discussion (Gilbert laughs) versus just a spur of the moment thing.

Gilbert: It was neither. It was *never* part of the political discussion. It was never a spur-of-the-moment deal. These two had known each other for quite some time, and I think probably had quite an admiration for each other for quite some time. But you know what? They never invited me on any of their dates, so I'd really be out in left field if I was commenting on that, because I wouldn't know what I was talking about.

DePue: But come on, Mr. Reporter, every journalist in Chicago had to be speculating it was *all* about the campaign.

Gilbert: Well, I will tell you some facts and things that I do know that may solve your cynical mind. (laughter) You're a cynic! One, May eighth is Governor Thompson's birthday, and there are some significant things that happen down the road on May eighth, which may or may not come out in our discussions. They did have a wonderful courtship, and Jayne was a wonderful person and fit into the campaign extremely well. She kept working through all of this. She was still working as an assistant attorney general.

DePue: You mean U.S. Attorney, or was she in the attorney general's office?

Gilbert: No, she was in Bill Scott's office. The engagement happened, and we moved along. It was primarily Thompson on the campaign trail before they were married. She did join him on certain occasions, but it was primarily Thompson. When they did get married, they got married in St. James Cathedral.

DePue: That's June nineteenth.

Gilbert: June 19, 1976. The wedding was beautiful. As you walked in, it wasn't strictly by invitation. There were invitations that were sent out, and I'm sure that some people who weren't invited got in and [were seated]. But there were certain areas that were reserved for invited guests. Have you ever been in to St. James Cathedral?

DePue: No.

Gilbert: Beautiful, beautiful church. Big cathedral, high ceilings, choir lofts along the side, and the altar and everything. The choir loft, over on this side, it just so happened that was reserved for Republican county chairmen. (laughter) Does that help? Because they wanted to attend. I mean, it wasn't a political wedding, but, you know, you're spending so much time… They were now Jim Thompson's good friends: "Of course he's going to invite me to his wedding." So we had a special section set off for them.

DePue: As the press secretary for a guy who's running for governor, this isn't exactly bad press either, is it?

Gilbert: Oh no, it was wonderful. Every woman in the state couldn't get enough pictures of the wedding, or what kind of a dress did she have on, where are they going on their honeymoon—all the things that surround that wedding. That's a wonderful event.

DePue: So where did they go on their honeymoon?

Gilbert: For Thompson, who had been single for thirty-nine years—he was thirty-nine years old at the time—this was "Big Jim finally got a little woman." (laughter)

DePue: How many years had they been dating? Do you have a sense of that?

Gilbert: I really don't know. I don't know how long they had been dating. I know they had known each other for quite some time.

DePue: We talked a little bit about Jim Thompson as the campaigner in those very early days, and you certainly addressed that he got much better. Describe Jim Thompson by the time you get to, let's say, the state fair in August of 1976.

Gilbert: He was owning the state fair in terms of Republicans. This was the first time since Dick Ogilvie, who probably wasn't much of a state fair goer, except on Republican day, that Republican downstaters really felt they had someone they could have fun with. Like at the state fair, going down the giant slide with his bride and their dog. Guv even went down the big, giant slide at one time.

DePue: With cameramen at the bottom.

Gilbert: With cameramen who just happened to be right there, getting the whole shot, which played really well in Chicago. So he loved the state fair. During his administrations he put more money into the state fair. He did things like bringing Willie Nelson in. He brought the Chicago Symphony to the state fair for the first time, which was a great, great tradition for many years. He was a big supporter of the state fair. He also revived the Du Quoin state fair, which was on its last legs. Even during '76, downstate chairman said, "You've got to come to Du Quoin," and Thompson's first question was, "What's Du Quoin?" But he went to the Du Quoin State Fair, and went to the harness races there, and later, as governor, put more money into the Du Quoin State Fair and got it back on its feet. For southern Illinois, this was it.

DePue: Harness racing brings out an interesting point for Illinois politics because Kerner's demise had a lot to do with horse racing; horse racing, gambling, and organized crime had always been connected in a lot of people's minds. But going to the state fair and going to the harness races and things like that, was that seen as a plus?

Gilbert: Yeah. This was part of the state fair that had always been there. They had harness racing. They had motorcycle racing. They had stock cars. They had the sale of the Grand Champion, which Thompson was there getting his buddies who owned large restaurants in Chicago to pony up big bucks to buy the championship steer. He went whole hog, (laughter) you might say.

DePue: What are some of the other classic Jim Thompson on the campaign trail stories you've got?

Gilbert: One of my favorites was C.L. McCormick, who, as a legislator from downstate, kept bugging Thompson to come down to his region for a gospel sing. Every Wednesday night or Saturday night they would get together and have a gospel sing, and it was exactly that; they'd get together and sing gospel songs. Sometimes there would be a featured singer who would lead the congregation. It was not only just a congregation; people from the whole town loved these gospel sings, so it was the thing to do. C.L. said, "Governor, you come to my gospel sing and you'll have all the votes in my area."

In the last two weeks of the campaign we put together an RV trip down the east side of the state. I think we started in Charleston and went all the way down the east side, and the Chicago press was traveling with us. We've got Larry Green, who we saw in the video that we watched at noontime, from the *Daily News*; we had Dick Kay, who was a Chicago television reporter; we had Mike Flannery. We probably had about six or seven Chicago media types traveling with us, along with local media that would ride with us from stop to stop. They'd all get in the RV, and Thompson would just talk. They'd tell stories. So we're going to the gospel sing in C.L. McCormick's town, and Thompson said, "What can I talk about here?" And the media started chipping in ideas: "Why don't you take something out of the Bible? Why don't you talk about something like Moses? You know, my opponent's like Moses; he's been to the top of the mountain, he's seen the promised land, but he'll never enter the promised land." That's what he did at the gospel sing, and it was a huge hit.

DePue: Is that where this came from: "Illinois has a modern Moses in the gubernatorial candidacy of James Thompson," written by George Kelly?

Gilbert: (laughter) Could be. From there, we went on down to Elizabethtown. And we were going to go from Elizabethtown on to Metropolis and then back up through Carbondale. It's a week before the election in 1976. We get to Elizabethtown about 4:00 in the afternoon. It's autumn. The leaves have fallen. It's one of those cool but really beautiful autumn late afternoons, and we pull up in front of the little county courthouse, the Hardin County courthouse. And the little high school band is playing on the side. There are maybe three hundred people, which I don't think there are more than that that live in Elizabethtown. It's on the banks of the Ohio River, and as you look out over the Ohio River you're looking over to Kentucky on the other side of the Ohio. Then as you look east on the Ohio River, there's this big island in the middle of the Ohio River.

Thompson is introduced by the Republican County Chairman of Hardin County. He stands up, and he says, "Ladies and gentlemen, by this time next week, when the sun comes up over Hurricane Island, we're gonna have a new governor and his name is Jim Thompson! Big Jim Thompson!" The place went nuts. Everybody's clapping. I'm sitting there—after eighteen months of campaigning; after forty-some county fairs and after the state fair; after innumerable Lincoln Day dinners; after meetings with county chairmen; after editorial board meetings all over the state, from Rockford to Decatur to the

*Southern Illinoisan* to the *State Journal-Register*; and Thompson talking and talking and talking, speaking and speaking—here the Hardin County Republican chairman is giving this speech, and I'm thinking, You know what? I think we got a chance. (laughter) It was a moment that will live in infamy, as President Roosevelt said. But it was a wonderful… I knew we had it at that point.

DePue: Weren't the polls telling you that you had it already?

Gilbert: The polls were looking good, but you never know. Then the election is held, the results are coming in, and when the final results come in, we're finding that Thompson carried 100 out of 102 counties. The only two counties he didn't carry—I'm sure you know what those are.

DePue: They might be on the map here of the general election. One would be Cook County.

Gilbert: No, he carried Cook.

DePue: Okay, you didn't carry Alexander and one is so…

Gilbert: Union County.

DePue: Union County. Is that what this one right here is?

Gilbert: Actually, I thought it was Christian County and Union County, but that could be it. This is Union.[20] This was Clyde Choate's home county, and we expected Clyde to do very well in his home county. He was the Democrat leader in the House, and he was Mr. Southern Illinois for years.

DePue: I'd forgotten he was still a feature of the Illinois legislature at that time.

Gilbert: Oh, he was a powerful feature.

DePue: Must've been an amazing guy. Medal of Honor winner, and a—

Gilbert: Oh, and he was a terrific guy. Thompson and Choate got along great, just like the Howlett-Thompson relationship; just like so many others that we could talk about.

DePue: A couple other things. Let's talk about the percentages that Thompson won by, and then we'll go back to some of the other features in the election itself. Do you have some figures there, it looks like?

Gilbert: I do. The key theme during the '76 campaign was jobs, and it was jobs, jobs, jobs. In '76, he won 65 percent of the vote over Mike Howlett. He was the

[20] Thompson narrowly lost Alexander County by 323 votes and Gallatin County by 31 votes. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the General Election*, November 2, 1976. [Placeholder for election map in *Handbook*(??)]

first candidate to receive over 3 million votes for governor in the history of the state, which is still the largest vote total, I think, in the history of the state. We started Democrats for Thompson, which was part of the strategy in the beginning. We could get the independents, and we have to have a number of Democrats. But those were my keys. Hundred out of 102 counties, 65 percent victory, and just an overwhelming landslide over Mayor Daley's chosen candidate.

DePue: How proud were you of your candidate?

Gilbert: Extremely. Extremely proud. He carried himself very well, didn't get carried away. There were opportunities during the campaign where people would—like you say, they're interested in getting a job, or getting something from their elected official. I had people coming up to me and shaking my hands, "My name's so-and-so. Tell the governor that I'd really like to meet with him." And I'd look and there'd be a hundred dollar bill that he'd just palmed. I'd say, "Excuse me, if you want to make a contribution to Citizens for Thompson, just see that person right over there who's taking campaign contributions, and we'll give you a receipt."

DePue: Well, that was the tried and true tradition down in southern Illinois, especially—that sounds like the Paul Powell story.

Gilbert: Palming was not something unheard of in this state, that's for sure, but we had a leader. It starts at the top. And if you worked on his campaign, you followed the rules.

DePue: You think a couple of those times, some of those times, somebody was trying to set Thompson up?

Gilbert: Possibly, but I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised.

DePue: And to give you an opportunity to put your modesty aside, how big a role did you play in his victory?

Gilbert: I was happy I made the decision I made, to leave the *Tribune* and to join a rookie politician running for governor of Illinois, who not only conducted the campaign that he conducted in the highest level, but set a standard for campaigning in Illinois. And very similar campaign style to Bill Clinton. That comparison's been made a number of times. And he did it honestly. I don't know of anything with any staff people or with the candidate himself that I wouldn't be proud of.

As far as my role, what I think I brought to the campaign was an understanding of the media. I'd looked at working with the media as, What would I want out of a political campaign? And then find ways to answer that question and give reporters what they wanted. Getting a return phone call every day—I mean, I've called campaign offices and never heard back, and that's something that would really, really make me angry. So that never

happened that I know of. And the people who came to work in our press office abided by the same rules. We had a great relationship with the media. He was fun, and it was fun to be on his campaign, because it wasn't all strict position papers, although we had all of that stuff. He was a likable guy. He was an approachable candidate. He was believable. He told the truth. So I contributed what I could contribute.

DePue: The campaign wasn't totally devoid of controversy, and one of them certainly—you've suggested this before—was the Otto Kerner trial. That would work great in some circles, and it worked to disadvantage in others. And I happened to know that Otto Kerner's step-grandson was very vocal in his opposition to Thompson, because he felt Jim Thompson, as U.S. Attorney, had unfairly tarnished his dad's reputation, destroyed a man, purely for political ambition. A lot of what he was suggesting were things like Nixon and John Mitchell, the attorney general at the U.S. level, wanted to get his dad because of things that were going on in Chicago with the Kerner Commission, those kinds of things. So there were some nasty allegations, and also some suggestions on Tony Kerner's part, that Thompson had lied to a racing board out in California about the trial and about the evidence that Marge Everett had offered, and made some contradictory statements. You and I have both seen the interview that Bill Curtis had with candidate Thompson about that very issue. How did you deal with that issue?[21]

Gilbert: We acknowledged it, didn't dodge it. If I were Otto Kerner's son, if it were my dad, I would probably feel the same way. That's very understandable. Now, do the facts hold up as to what he's saying? I don't think so. History has proven that. During the early days of the campaign in downstate communities, when Thompson would be in a parade and go by the local Democratic headquarters, it was not unusual for people to hurl some type of epithet at him derogatorily about the Kerner conviction. However, the Kerner conviction was upheld. The justice system proved that it was an honest verdict, so history will take a stand on that. In the long run, in the campaign, there were Democrats for Thompson in large numbers who stood up to that, and obviously didn't believe it, or they wouldn't have been a Democrat for Thompson or voted for him. So history will be the judge of that.

DePue: Do you recall any incidents where Tony directly confronted Thompson when he was on the campaign trail?

Gilbert: Yeah, there was one I think that I heard about. I don't believe I was there at the time but I recall something about him. You know, I totally understand Tony Kerner's position. Just this past week a man named [Allan] Kustok was convicted of murdering his wife in Chicago. His son was a former quarterback for Northwestern's football team. Another daughter testified on behalf of her father and said, "My father didn't do it." And the jury, over an hour and a

[21] [Placeholder for Governor's Conference on Otto Kerner(??)]

half's deliberation, found him guilty. It's not unusual for a child of a parent who's been convicted of a crime, a felony, to take that position, so I certainly understand his feelings.

DePue: Here's a completely different kind of challenge for a press secretary to deal with: all the buzz about Jim Thompson's aspirations to possibly run for president.

Gilbert: He was asked about that in television interviews. He was asked about that by Al Hunt from the *Wall Street Journal* and David Broder from the *Washington Post*. And I think Thompson's position was that's an issue that was created by the media. Anybody who wins in the fifth most populous state in the nation by a huge landslide, 70 percent of the vote, 100 out of 102 counties, is definitely going to be on a shortlist of people who would be considered contenders to run for president. But along came Ronald Reagan at the same time, so it was a compliment for a lot of people to think that. Thompson, did he ever want to be president? He admitted that, ever since he was eleven years old. Who wouldn't want to be president of the United States?

DePue: But he was getting those questions a lot during the '76 campaign, right?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, he was getting it during the '76 campaign, during the '78 campaign, and then Reagan began to catch hold, and it kind of died down. But Thompson never once—and I was probably as close to him as any staff person in his administration—never once said, "Here's our strategy for getting to be known nationally so we can have a shot at running for president." Never one discussion about that.

DePue: You mentioned a couple main issues of the campaign. I assume Crosstown did not go away; it was still an issue. Certainly you mentioned the importance of the economy. We haven't addressed the nature of the economy at the time. But we're looking at relatively high unemployment and relatively high inflation rates, over 6 percent in both categories. The American economy was not doing that well at the time. I think at the national level the unemployment rate was about a percentage point higher than Illinois. But what was the candidate saying about what he was going to do to address the unemployment?

Gilbert: Create jobs.

DePue: How?

Gilbert: Create jobs. Go to other states, not only convince—using corporations outside of Illinois to locate into Illinois, but for companies based in Illinois to expand in Illinois. And he worked hard at achieving that. Illinois is the second largest agricultural state in the union, next to California. And we export more agriculture—we did export more agricultural products in 1976—than any

other state in the union except California. So he worked hard to create jobs in that regard.

DePue: Was he talking about establishing overseas trade missions?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, any way we could create more jobs in Illinois.

DePue: The Reagan theme—and jumping ahead to the 1980 election—one of his big issues was deregulation. Was that a factor that Thompson was talking about?

Gilbert: Not in 1976, that I recall.

DePue: ERA had become an issue in 1972 when it passed at the U.S. Congress and went on to the states. And every single year in Illinois from ’72 to ’82, the Illinois legislature in both the House and Senate voted on the issue and devoted an awful lot of time and a lot of energy to it. A lot of press ink was spilled over that issue, as well. Had to be an issue in ’76. What was his position?

Gilbert: He was definitely pro ERA.

DePue: Did the pro ERA forces believe him at the time?

Gilbert: You’ll have to ask them. (laughs) I believe they did, yes.

DePue: I know that once he became governor they became less enamored with him in that respect.

Gilbert: Well, that’s politics, but…

DePue: I know that Michael Howlett was running on a pledge of not raising taxes. Like the economy, that’s always an issue of every single campaign. What was candidate Thompson saying about the issue?

Gilbert: He did not see the need to raise taxes. There needed to be some adjustment in the tax structure of Illinois, but that was an issue that he would work out with the legislators in the legislative branch of government.

DePue: Wasn’t there an awful lot of pressure on the budget? If you got high inflation rates, you basically have to be able to match the income that the state’s getting from revenue to be able to keep up with those inflation rates. You also had a lot of programs that were being initiated in the 1960s—the Great Society, the War on Poverty programs—that were getting to be more and more expensive.

Gilbert: Right. There are also a lot of these programs that are federally driven, and a lot of these issues that are federally driven, that one governor, one legislature can’t say, “Oh, we’re going to take care of this.” His philosophy was, if we get the economy of Illinois on track, these other issues basically will take care

of themselves because there will be money to pay the taxes. You know, as long as a person has money in their pocket to pay the rent, that's not an issue. And in Illinois, wouldn't you love to have 6 percent unemployment now? Not that that was acceptable. In the 1984 presidential election, 6 percent unemployment was huge; it was the big issue. If you can get below 6 percent, you're golden, but when you're going through the '80's, and the high interest rates that were being charged, that's something that no one person controls. States have certain rights within their own domain, but you have to operate within what the federal laws say. If we compare what happened with these national issues in Illinois at that time to what's happening today with federally imposed issues like ACA and—

DePue: Affordable Care Act.

Gilbert: Yeah, the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, as it's better known. And if we look at the debt that the state is suffering from, from pensions and so forth, and I look at what the status of the state was during the fourteen years that Thompson was governor, I'd say he was a darn good governor.

DePue: Nineteen seventy-six is the only time Jim Thompson is going to run on a ballot where there's also a presidential race going on. How much did the race between Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter factor into the election?

Gilbert: President Ford was in Illinois on several occasions, and he was typical Jerry Ford. We were on a train ride through the state, starting in Chicago and ending up in Springfield. And of course, President Ford got the typical questions from the Illinois press: "Oh, by the way, Mr. President, are you going to Lincoln County while you're here in Illinois?" And there is no Lincoln County. He was on the train platform in Pontiac, and he said, "It's so great to be with you folks here today in Bloomington," and things like that. But I don't think it really impacted us. The results speak for themselves. If there were coattails in that election, it probably was a reverse coattail.

DePue: I would think that Carter won the state that year. I don't know for sure.

Gilbert: I don't recall, but may have.

DePue: You got a chance to compare the campaigning style of Jerry Ford versus Jim Thompson?

Gilbert: Yeah, it was different. (laughter)

DePue: Your guy was a better candidate, I would assume you would say.

Gilbert: I wouldn't say better or worse. They were certainly different, and I think Jim Thompson really had his finger on the pulse of Illinois. One of his favorite lines, which he took from Teddy Roosevelt, was "Illinois, unlike any other

state in the union, mirrors the nation," and at that time I think it did. I don't know if that's still true today or not, but it did.

DePue: In terms of the demographics? In terms of big cities, rural areas?

Gilbert: Right—manufacturing, transportation, centrally located, makeup of its residents and citizens. It's a heck of a state. Wonderful state, and a lot of interesting things in this state. Franklin Roosevelt, when he was president, was in Peoria and took a drive up on the big bluff overlooking the Illinois River in Peoria, and he said, "This is the world's most beautiful drive." And it became known as the World's Most Beautiful Drive, which brought the name for the radio and TV station, WMBD; it stands for World's Most Beautiful Drive. We're a great state.

DePue: And after all, how does it play in Peoria, huh? (Gilbert laughs) I wonder when that started.

Gilbert: Yeah. I think that was more of a theater slogan that started because a lot of theatrical plays were previewed in Peoria. If it plays in Peoria, it'll be good on Broadway.

DePue: Since we're close to artistic issues, let's talk a little bit about Thompson and antiquing on the campaign trail. Was he doing it back in '76?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm. I have heard him say that he once worked with a fellow worker—I don't know who this person was—that was an antique buff and kind of got him into antiquing. I assume it was back when he was in the attorney general's office, or sometime along then. He realized that there was a lot to antiques, not only their value and uniqueness and so forth, but just the history that an art piece brings with it, and he became very interested in it as a hobby. There is a woman in Chicago who has had an antique store, a very profitable antique store, for years, who knows Thompson. She says that for a layperson who's not an antique collector, per se, a professional antique collector, Jim Thompson has an eye for antiques and an appreciation that she rarely sees in a public person who walks into her store. So it's his hobby, and he loved it; he loved getting people involved in it. He used it as a way to get some fantastic pieces of art for the state. You look around at the Frank Lloyd Wright house in Springfield, and not only did he get the state to acquire that and to keep it as a national treasure, but he found pieces of art and Frank Lloyd Wright materials, furniture that he had designed, that were acquired to go into the house.[22]

[22] Kim Blackwell Fox, interview by Mike Czaplicki, July 14, 2014, [update final page numbers; currently 86-87(??)]. On Thompson's love for antiques, see Mike Lawrence, interview by Mark DePue, March 4, 2009, 48; Sam Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014, 39-40 and 47-49; Greg Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013; Jim Reilly, interview by Mark DePue, August 11, 2009, 51; Jim Edgar, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2009, Volume II: 276, 284, and 301. [Placeholder for cite to Thompson's discussion of antiquing.]

DePue: Any stories that you recall about him antiquing, especially in that first campaign?

Gilbert: No, not in particular, other than if we'd be campaigning in a town and went past a campaign store, he might make a note of it, "When we're done with the parade I want to head back and just check it out, see what's in there." But he loved to go through and browse. Drove some of his staff people crazy who didn't like antiques, but I developed a fondness for antiques, and I've collected a few things along the way.

DePue: One other story, and that's just to get your memories about election. Where was the campaign on election night?

Gilbert: Gosh, there were so many. (laughs) I remember in '82 we were at the Hyatt.

DePue: Yeah, but we'll get that in another session.

Gilbert: I think in '76 we were in the Conrad Hilton. Does that sound about right?

DePue: I don't know. I should know, but all downtown Chicago locations?

Gilbert: Yeah. I believe it was in the Conrad Hilton, in one of the large ballrooms.

DePue: My guess is you got to go to bed early.

Gilbert: Oh, no.

DePue: (laughs) Little bit of partying, then?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, there was… And it was a lot of fun. It was great celebration. It was fun for me to look at my friend, Jim Strong, at the *Tribune*, who said "You're crazy doing this," to say, "Now what do you think, pally?" And he would say, "Nice going. That was pretty cool." Dick Ciccone was managing editor for the *Chicago Tribune* for a number of years and is a good friend. He and I get together for lunch about every three or four months with a group of reporters from our era, from the *Tribune* days, and at our last one a couple of months ago Ciccone said, "You know, you did the right thing. If you had that choice to make today, would you do it?" And I said, "No way. No way at all." He said, "I agree with you. But back then at that time, and with Jim Thompson, you made the right choice." I don't think there's any other political candidate that I would've made that decision.

DePue: So your comment wasn't a reflection on Thompson, it was just if you had a similar situation but somebody other than Thompson you wouldn't do it again?

Gilbert: Not anyone that I know of. Since I left the Thompson administration in 1985, there's only been one time that I've seriously considered getting involved in a

campaign, and that was with Jack Ryan, who ran for the U.S. Senate. He got tied up in stories about his divorce, and his divorce documents being secret and not available to the press, and he wouldn't release them. Then finally, the *Tribune*, through a Freedom of Information request, got access to them, and it sunk his campaign. He would've run against Barack Obama. Ryan had some good political skills. On a debate on Channel 7 for WLS, I went, and that's when I was considering joining his campaign. This issue came up, and afterwards I met with him and said, "Jack, we've got to talk about how you handle this issue, because you're not handling it right." He said, "I will call you tomorrow and let you know," and I never heard back from him.

It went on, and after the election, after it was all over, we had lunch, and he brought it up; he said, "I remember we had this opportunity to talk about it, and I'm sorry I didn't, because I didn't handle it the right way." And that's part of why I wouldn't get involved in politics again. When I left Springfield, Thompson said, "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I've got some offers that I'm considering. I'm looking at McDonald's, Edelman Public Relations wants to talk with me, and Continental Bank wants to talk to me about heading up their advertising and public relations." He said, "You're not going to work in politics?" I said, "I don't plan to." He said, "Good for you. Don't do it." And I haven't. I've gone the corporate, private route instead.

DePue: It occurred to me there's one subject I did want to ask you about, and that's the debates. Do you have any memories about the number of debates and any particular stories about that?

Gilbert: There were a couple with Mike Howlett that I remember. There may have been one or two during the primary, but I don't think they amounted to much. Dick Cooper, as we've mentioned before—really nice man, but I don't think he had a real grasp on the issues. (pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, back to the debates.

Gilbert: In the primary, no memorable issues developed. With Howlett, there were a couple of debates that I know. One was a League of Women Voters debate in Oak Brook. We wanted debates with Mike Howlett. Mike Howlett did not want a debate with Thompson. Thompson had great speaking skills. His reputation in the courtroom was well known. He was an excellent closer in the courtroom. He thought legally, from a legal framework and approaching a subject, so he knew how to debate, and he was smart; anyone who would debate him probably didn't have a chance.

DePue: Did he have a theatrical flair to him, as well?

Gilbert: A little bit, but his size and demeanor was really all the flair he needed. He had a good voice, and he spoke well. He spoke with conviction. He knew what he was talking about. He was smart. And that would end up carrying the

day. So if you put a 39-year-old lawyer, successful U.S. Attorney, side by side with Mike Howlett, who was heavy, who was balding, who was jowly—and I don't mean that derogatorily, but that's who he was, and a wonderful, wonderful man—when you're talking politics and putting the young up against the old, what's your takeaway? What's your natural impression? A question came up for Mike Howlett in the Oak Brook debate, "Mr. Howlett, what's your opinion of coastal zone management?" And Howlett said, "How in the hell do I know? Ask this guy." (laughter) Everybody laughed, and Thompson looked at Howlett and said, "Oh, thank you. You think I know what it is?" Well, coastal zone management—for all the swells who live along Lake Michigan from Evanston, Kenilworth, Waukegan, Wilmette, on north—was a big issue, because they were talking about preserving and managing the coastline along Lake Michigan. Paying for it was going to mean taxes and so forth. That's what that issue was all about. So it became kind of a joke on the campaign trail, you know, "Oh, by the way, Mr. Thompson, what are your views on coastal zone management?" And he would look for Larry Green, the reporter from the *Daily News*, who would bring that subject up, or have somebody ask the question, because he got such a kick out of it.

But the debates between Thompson and Howlett basically were pretty one-sided, and definitely with Thompson's advantage. The Howlett team kind of dropped out of that whole discussion after a while. I was the person in charge of setting up the discussions between the two camps for if we have four debates or eight debates or whatever. And Newt Minow was the chief negotiator on the other side. We went back and forth, and he was playing all these games. I said, "Look, we don't have to debate, but Jim Thompson's happy to debate any place, any time." I think we ended up with four debates initially, and ended up having two, but I would have to go back and check that.

DePue: So after Howlett saw how poorly he was doing against Thompson in the debates, they backed out?

Gilbert: I don't know if he backed out or we just didn't agree to any more debates.

DePue: Any final words, then, about that '76 campaign? And next time we'll get into his administration.

Gilbert: Yeah, it was probably the best political campaign ever run in the state of Illinois, and at the time it set all kinds of records. I think Jim Edgar probably came close to establishing some new records during his first campaign, but I'm not sure about that.[23]

[23] As the last race held in a presidential year, Thompson's 1976 campaign still holds the record for highest vote total in an election for state office in Illinois. His record for margin of victory (1,390,137) was surpassed by Edgar's 1986 campaign for secretary of state (1,574,079). At the time of this interview, Lisa Madigan has the highest victory margin, with 1,677,210 votes in her 2006 campaign for attorney general.

DePue: And to put this into a national perspective, Jimmy Carter becomes the president after Gerald Ford loses. Ford had the significant coattails of Watergate behind him, and that certainly helped lead to his defeat. I've got to believe that the day after the election there's all this speculation about who are the rising stars in the Republican Party, and Jim Thompson had to be right near the top of the list.

Gilbert: He was on the media's list, but Thompson never formed any committees. We really didn't have any discussions about seeking out national platforms to speak. And during Reagan's reelection to his second term, the Reagan campaign used Thompson speaking on Reagan's behalf. He spoke before the Maryland legislature in Annapolis. He spoke at a fundraiser in Newport, Rhode Island, on behalf of President Reagan.

DePue: This was '84 you're talking about?

Gilbert: Yeah. Then he met the *New York Times* editorial board, speaking on behalf of President Reagan, because Reagan wouldn't go. And Arthur Sulzberger, who was the publisher of the *New York Times,* opened up the editorial meeting by saying, "Well, Governor Thompson, we already know what we think about President Reagan, so let's talk about you." (laughter)

DePue: There's a lot more of Jim Thompson, and now we get to talk about him as Governor Thompson from this point forward. That'll be different. But I want to thank you for a fascinating discussion today about your early years, and especially about this election in 1976. We'll have more fun and more interesting stories next time.

Gilbert: Wonderful.

DePue: Thank you, David.

Gilbert: You're welcome. Thank you.

(End of interview #2. #3 continues.)

# Interview with David Gilbert

# IST-A-L-2014-011

Interview # 3: March 26, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue



DePue: Today is Wednesday, March 26, 2014. This is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in Deerfield, Illinois, and we're starting our third session with David Gilbert. Good afternoon, David.

Gilbert: Afternoon, Mark. Good to have you back.

DePue: As oftentimes happens, you and I were chatting before we began today and said, "You know, there's a couple more things about '76 that I was thinking about after you left." So let's start with a couple more things about the 1976 campaign between Thompson and Michael Howlett.

Gilbert: As I do a little more research and my memory kicks in a little bit more, I just remember some amazing things about the '76 election in Illinois. Here you've got a candidate like Jim Thompson, never ran for public office before, and he conducts this eighteen-month campaign for governor. H e wins by the largest plurality in the history of the state up until that time, over Michael Howlett, who was the number one Democrat, a sought-after speaker in the state, Mayor Richard J. Daley's handpicked candidate to run for governor. Then I look at other things that took place. Alan Dixon was the Democratic candidate for Secretary of State; he was running against Bill Harris, who had been President Pro Tem of the Illinois State Senate, and he won by just about as large a margin as Thompson won. So you've got a Republican governor beating a Democrat; you've got a Democratic secretary of state beating a very popular Republican. So which way is this thing going to go?

DePue: And we should mention here that Michael Howlett was not an unknown name; he was very popular in his own right, as I understand.

Gilbert: He was very popular in his own right. The story goes that Alan Dixon had wanted to run for governor in 1976, and he would have challenged Dan Walker in the primary, then ended up running against Thompson. However, Richard J. Daley said that he wanted Michael Howlett to be the Democratic candidate, and he urged Dixon to step down. Dixon did step down in favor of Howlett. Howlett loses. Dixon wins as Secretary of State and sets himself up to be the gubernatorial candidate in the Democratic Party two years later to run against Thompson. Thompson, a rookie governor, was coming in facing really tough issues in that short two-year term, so the Democrats were pretty happy about the situation; they thought, "Hmm, this is going to be a shoo-in". At the same time, you've got Michael Bakalis coming on to the scene, running for comptroller as a Democrat. He is woefully the underdog in the election against George Lindberg, who was the incumbent Illinois Comptroller. Lindberg was a very popular guy, and went on to be a judge, and everybody thought he was a shoo-in. But here he was upset by Michael Bakalis, who was somewhat of an unknown.

DePue: He was superintendent of schools, though, I thought.

Gilbert: Right, he was, but what political base is that, running as superintendent of schools? That doesn't give you much visibility. Then, running for attorney general you've got Bill Scott—who it was no secret—had -anted to run as the Republican candidate for governor, until Thompson kind of boxed him out, elbowed him out under the boards, as they would say in basketball. Scott won handily against Cecil Partee, who was the first African American candidate to run for statewide office in Illinois. Cecil Partee was a wonderful, wonderful guy, great storyteller, a great legislator in Illinois.

But I look back at the '76 election in that scope, and here you've got Thompson leading the statewide ticket as an unknown, a never-tested-before Republican, winning by the largest margin ever. Then you've got two Democrats coming in there winning rather handily. Then you've got Bill Scott, a Republican, winning handily. You've got Jerry Ford winning the state of Illinois as a Republican, but losing the presidential election to Jimmy Carter. So, I mean, fascinating year. This is the stuff historians could slice and dice and really make some money on.

DePue: So for a political junkie like myself? Or maybe you would classify yourself in the same category?

Gilbert: Yeah, once it gets in your blood you can't get it out. It's like a bad disease.

DePue: Whether your guy wins or loses, it's fascinating to watch, huh?

Gilbert: It sure is.

DePue: Then you mentioned the story about right after the election, the people come a-courting.

Gilbert: Yeah. Well, it was an exciting election night, big win. Everybody's happy. So the next day I get a call from the executive producer of *Meet the Press*. She had been doing this for a number of years, and I think she had the nickname of the Iron Lady of Producing. Real character. Wanted to get Thompson on *Meet the Press* on Sunday. So that would've been around November twenty-sixth, twenty-fifth, something around there. I said sure, but she wanted him to come to New York. Couldn't do that, but said we would do it from WMAQ headquarters, NBC headquarters in Chicago, in the Merchandise Mart. So we booked that. Shortly afterwards I got a call from *Face the Nation*, CBS's Sunday morning program. They asked the same request, and I thought, Oh man, this is great. We'll get NBC, we'll get CBS, great national exposure. So we booked them. They were on at different timeslots.

But a day or so later I get another call back from NBC, and she says, "What in the heck have you done? I thought we had an exclusive here. How can you double book your candidate? This is supposed to be just on *Meet the Press*." And she's all over me. I said, "Sorry, I don't recall you saying that this was an exclusive." As it turned out, Thompson was on both *Meet the Press* and *Face the Nation* that day, and it served him well. It not only reinforced his terrific win, but all off a sudden he got national exposure as a young, dynamic Republican governor in the fifth most populous state in the nation, with a strong Democratic history, in a year when Republican governors were taking a pounding nationwide. So that was pretty cool.

DePue: How long did it take before, at the national level, people started throwing Jim Thompson's name in as a presidential candidate for 1980?

Gilbert: It did not take long at all. Even during the '76 campaign, there were some of the national press corps that came out to take a look at how the race was going, and they would ride with Thompson in his RV as we were going from stop to stop, or interviewing him along the way, spending a day with him. Even *People* magazine, I remember, spent a day with us during that campaign. So the seeds had been planted; after this big win, his name was in the hopper. Alan Hunt showed up, David Broder, a lot of the important reporters from out east. Broder was with the *Washington Post* for a long time, a great columnist, and Al Hunt still contributes to the *Wall Street Journal*.

DePue: Must've been young guys at the time.

Gilbert: They were young guys. We were all young guys. (laughter) Thompson was a young guy, thirty-nine years old. I think he was the youngest governor ever to be elected Governor of the State of Illinois.

DePue: You also mentioned, before we got started here, a story about Ronald Reagan coming to the state. Was that 1976?

Gilbert: Yeah, I believe that was 1976. He was campaigning, and there was an outdoor barbecue in Oak Brook, in somebody's backyard. Dave O'Neal was running

for lieutenant governor, and Thompson, of course, was running for governor. Reagan, in his own inimitable way, said, "We've got to support this fine, young candidate for governor in Illinois, Dave Thompson." (laughter) I looked at Thompson, and Thompson looked at me, kind of rolled his eyes, but everybody laughed, so the audience at least knew who he was talking about.

DePue: And I suspect that Reagan wasn't too concerned about it after he probably found out what he'd done.

Gilbert: I don't know if he ever found out what he'd done.

DePue: Let's get on to 1977, but one other piece of housecleaning. At the very end of 1976—I believe this happens right after the election, in December—Richard J. Daley dies.

Gilbert: I was sitting in our campaign office on the corner of Monroe and Dearborn, overlooking the First National Bank Plaza, and my office looked out. I don't recall how I heard the news. It was either on the radio or a small, little TV I had in the office, or somebody called me. But they said, "Mayor Daley's dead." And I thought, "Oh, you've got to be kidding." It was late in the afternoon. Thompson, I believe, was at the Union League Club. He was someplace at a meeting, and I called him immediately and said, "Jim, Mayor Daley just died." He said, "No kidding?" I said, "I want to put out a statement." He said, "Yeah, please do. Say something nice." So I wrote a statement and we released it. You know, great man, great mayor, sad; thoughts, prayers, and concerns for his family. I remember that so vividly in my mind from the news clips on TV later that day; I think the number on the ambulance, the Chicago PD that picked him up, was number thirty-four. Why that number sticks in my mind, I have no idea. But that was a sad, sad day for Chicago. And it was a game-changer for politics in Illinois.

DePue: Your story about Michael Howlett and Alan Dixon in the '76 race would help illustrate the role that Daley would play, wouldn't it? I mean, that Daley wanted Howlett. I believe that Howlett had to kind of be convinced to run that year.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: But if that's what Daley wanted, that's what the state got.

Gilbert: Right. The word was, Danny Rostenkowski got the call from Mayor Daley in '76 that "I want Howlett to run for governor. Go find him and tell him." Rostenkowski was out playing golf someplace, so he had to track Michael Howlett down and give him the word that he was running for governor.

DePue: How was it that Richard J. Daley had acquired that much power?

Gilbert: Through a number of ways, I believe. One, longevity; he was a longtime serving mayor, and he was at the end of his career at that time, twenty-four, twenty-five years. And he had a Democratic organization, always referred to as the machine, which comprised aldermen, committeemen, ward committeemen, and then you had your lieutenants from then on. When you broke it down, just about every square block in the city of Chicago was covered by a precinct captain, by a ward worker, by someone who would walk and knock on doors and get the vote out. Now, to put a machine like that together he had to put jobs out, and jobs are the most important thing in an administration. If a man's going to be powerful, he has to be in control of the jobs. Michael Howlett probably had the largest patronage army in the state, in the Secretary of State's office. That's why the Secretary of State is considered to be the second most powerful job in the state, next to the Governor. So that's how Daley did it. That, and then loyalty. These people were just really loyal to him.

DePue: An amazing personality, and even Republicans look back at that event with sadness and with fondness towards his career. Would that be fair to say?

Gilbert: Most Republicans, I would say. Most people. Most people who certainly lived in Chicago. And as history is revealing now, what he did for JFK to get Kennedy elected, he did probably illegally. I don't think there's any doubt about that now. Votes were actually stolen in that election. But he elected the President of the United States. That's power. That is raw power.

DePue: Yet Dan Walker ran his entire campaign against Richard J. Daley and won the election that way.

Gilbert: He did, and again, kings are set up to be toppled. There's no doubt about that. We see it all of the time, and I think that's what happened. Walker just tapped this populist theme. People had had enough of it, and there was a big division of Chicago versus the rest of the state, probably more so than it is even today. And Walker tapped into that theme very successfully. But it only served him for one term.

DePue: And Daley beat him.

Gilbert: Daley got revenge.

DePue: Perhaps his last act on Earth?

Gilbert: Daley got revenge, but he won the battle and lost the war.

DePue: Let's move back to Jim Thompson. In 1977 he's the brand new governor. How long before he started to think, Gosh, I've got to run for reelection in two years?

Gilbert: He never stopped thinking that. On election night in Chicago in 1976, we had our campaign consultants and videographers there filming Thompson's victory speech. It was well crafted to emphasize the themes that we wanted to stress in the '78 campaign. So the campaign really never stopped. We looked at several pieces of legislation that were going to be key during that rare two-year term, and we didn't get spread out too thin. There were a lot of things we could've tried to do, but just focused on emphasizing Thompson's law and order background, his image of fighting crime, fighting corrupt politicians in Chicago. And that carried us through to the campaign against Bakalis.[24]

DePue: Do you recall at what point in time he would've mentioned to you, "Dave, I want you to stick around for the administration, as well?"

Gilbert: (laughs) I don't remember. I don't even know if we had the conversation.

DePue: You just assumed?

Gilbert: I just assumed, and we worked really well together. The one conversation I do recall is what my salary was going to be. (laughter) I found out, and despite that I stayed around.

DePue: Was it less than when you were working on the campaign?

Gilbert: No, no. It was about the same, but it was, I think, $36,000 a year, something like that.

DePue: And his salary, I've been reading, was $50,000 at that time.

Gilbert: Right, right. Those were the days. (laughter)

DePue: I'm sure back then $50,000 sounded like a lot of money to some folks.

Gilbert: That's true, and actually, I could live nicely on $36,000 a year, although there weren't many perks with a job below the governor. You know, the governor came pretty well taken care of with transportation, housing, and so forth.

DePue: Any challenges during the transition, putting together a transition team and making that transition?

Gilbert: No, the transition period went really, really well for a number of reasons. One, Thompson had become the golden boy of the upper echelon of company CEOs and the movers and shakers, both Republican and Democrat, in Chicago and in the state of Illinois. So they came forth offering services. We had a suite in a large apartment in the John Hancock building that had been donated as kind of our transition headquarters, so that's where people came to

[24] Placeholder for Fletcher's discussion of this strategy.

be interviewed and so forth. Names were coming in of really blue ribbon people, good, good people who wanted to be part of this administration. So the transition period was fun.

Certain fundamentals were set up in the transition period that Thompson used throughout his fourteen years as governor of Illinois. That served him very, very well and allowed him to become one of the only governors who did not have major scandals in his administration. To do it for fourteen years and not have a major scandal is saying a lot, especially in Illinois. One of those fundamentals was the woodshedding process, which involved our chief counsel, Gary Starkman, who had been an Assistant U.S. attorney under Thompson, and several other people—Jim Fletcher and so forth. Once a major nominee was agreed on for a certain position, they would meet with this person in private, and they would go over their background: "Is there anything in your background that, if it became known, if it became public, would either embarrass you or embarrass governor-elect Thompson?" They went over financial holdings, they went over financial interests, and really backgrounded these people extremely well. That process went on for fourteen years. There were a few people who were knocked off the team as a result of the woodshedding. The name comes from, "We'll take them out to the woodshed and find if they've got anything to say." And it worked really well.[25]

An openness with the press was another fundamental that he established, and that carried over from the campaign. He had a very good relationship personally with the press. I did, for my part, but the key was that **he** did. And he was an easy guy to work with, as far as the press secretary, because he loved to do interviews. He loved the give and take, the sparring with journalists, and so forth.

DePue: Especially in that era, young journalists are trained that there's supposed to be something of an adversarial relationship between politicians and the press, and yet Thompson seemed to like that part. Was that mainly a fact of his personality involved in that?

Gilbert: It was his personality, and it was a fact that he just loved the give and take. If the adversary is coming at him with a tough question, I mean, he—

DePue: It helps to be a prosecutor?

Gilbert: Yeah, exactly right. He made his bread and butter in the courtroom, handling tough conversations, you might say, and giving impressions to juries and to judges. That's how his mind worked. He worked sorting it out, "Well, I can see this guy's coming in here loaded for bear on this particular issue. We'll just see how we handle that." And he was just extremely good with that, not only with the media, but with opposition groups. We were in southern Illinois one time and happened to go past a coal mine where the miners were on

[25] Placeholder for Fletcher]

strike. There was a group of miners out picketing. The county chairman said, "You don't want to talk to those people. They're really upset about this." Thompson said, "Stop the car." He hops out, and he talks with them. And pretty soon, they're all best friends. You know, "Okay, guys, I'll see you next time," back in the car, and off he goes.

But that's the way Thompson worked, and that was part of the key to not only his success but his popularity. So when he won the election by the largest plurality in the history of the state over the Democrats' probably most popular person to run against, he really had to do some work. And if you remember, earlier we had talked before he ran for governor he used to meet every Wednesday at the Union League Club with Michael J. Howlett and Marshall Korshak. And Howlett was the guy that said, "Jim, if you're going to be in this business, you've got to slap people on the back. You've got to drink a beer with them."

DePue: I remember you telling me that story, yeah.

Gilbert: So it's really interesting how the circle comes around.

DePue: Other principles that you want to mention now?

Gilbert: Hire good people. I don't say that for myself, but he surrounded himself with bright, young people, not necessarily out of the political arena; some came from government circles. Art Quern had been a White House fellow; he originally came out of one of the Nelson Rockefeller campaigns. Quern was bright, one of those bright guys quietly spoken. He brought Quern in to head up the Department of Public Aid. Holy cow, here's a guy coming from the East to head up Public Aid. But yeah, did a masterful job. Paula Wolff, who still is on the scene in Chicago as one of the most recognized city planners, infrastructure planners—she heads up the Illinois State Tollway now, under a Democratic governor—but she was one of the keys to bringing thoughtful people in, people who were smart and knew their field, knew their business. They weren't political hacks coming out of the system, "Oh, you did a good job for me, so you're going to head up this department."

DePue: Was she on the transition team?

Gilbert: I believe she was. I'm trying to think of everybody who was in the room or on the transition team. But I believe it was Gary Starkman, Jim Fletcher, Paula Wolff, I think Zale Glauberman joined us around that time. He was more on the legislative side. Zale was a smart guy. I think he still has a consulting firm in Springfield. And then there were a number of smart people who were helping us, and helping us find people. Bob Malott, who was chairman and CEO of FMC Corporation, was a big help. There were just probably a dozen, maybe even thirty people like that who pitched in, "Here's a person that you ought to take a look at." So the transition period, especially for that first

campaign, setting up that first administration, was a lot of fun. At the same time, you had to keep in mind the politics of the situation.

DePue: Did they have to be Republicans?

Gilbert: No, they did not have to be Republicans, but that was part of the woodshedding process: Who have you worked for? What have you done? I think having Republican credentials certainly helped, but I don't recall that coming into the conversation very many times. It did later on in the game, but not in the transition period.

DePue: Since we're there, I wanted to ask about some of the other key people in the administration going forward. You haven't mentioned one of the most important in any administration, and that would be the budget director.

Gilbert: Well, I was just about to mention Dr. Bob, Bob Mandeville, who was well liked, was known as a straight shooter, and was known as a man who really understood budgeting in a large state like Illinois. Governor Ogilvie, who had been defeated by Dan Walker four years earlier, sat down with Thompson. Ogilvie was supporting Thompson, but it was kind of at an arm's length. He wasn't a full-blown Thompson backer, for whatever reason. I don't know if he still had some sour grapes about not being re-slated, or party turned its back on him, or what. Dick Ogilvie was a wonderful, wonderful man, and Thompson admired Ogilvie very much, but they eventually got together for a luncheon or a meeting one day. Thompson said later that Ogilvie told him, "Jim, if you're going to be an effective governor in Illinois, you have to know the budget, and you have to know *every* line in that budget. You have to go through it, you have to read it, and you have to know what's in it. If you do that you'll be a good governor."[26] And Thompson took that to heart. When he hired Bob Mandeville, Mandeville was the professor with his cigar, and he took his time to explain to this rookie how state budgeting worked, and went through it just like a schoolteacher, just like a professor. I think that's one reason that Thompson was the effective governor that he was. He not only understood budgeting, but he had the intelligence to understand it and make it work.

DePue: I understand that Mandeville was one of those few people who was there for practically the entire administration.

Gilbert: He was. He was still there when I left in 1985. A good man, honest man, funny. He had a dry wit, sense of humor. But again, it was that caliber of

[26] Mandeville had a somewhat different take, arguing that a governor did not need to know every line of a budget, but matured by focusing on roughly ten agencies that used the majority of the general funds. For this and other issues in fiscal policy during the Thompson administration, see Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki.

person that Thompson attracted. The other thing that was key—and I found this in the first campaign, but it carried over into setting up the first administration—Thompson would hire people that he trusted and allow them to do their job. He would not micromanage. If you screwed up, you screwed up. If you screwed up really bad, you would hear from him, or you'd have a talk about what happened. But I *never* heard him once berate an employee. There were some things that went on; you'd say, "Ooh, gosh, I wish I could have that one back," and he understood. So there was a good working relationship between the boss and the employees.

DePue: Did you go in and challenge the boss when you thought he was on the wrong track?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, any number of times, and not only myself but other people did. But Thompson, he'd read the room, and he would not always take the consensus. Sometimes he would say, "Yeah, I hear what you're saying, but I think we're going to do this," for whatever reasons he may have had. And that was fine with everybody, because we knew how he operated. We knew he didn't have any hidden deals or secrets going on. He trusted his staff, and his staff not only trusted him but really liked him. They were very loyal to him.

DePue: We haven't mentioned the chief of staff. I know we've heard the name a couple times, but who did he select—I don't know if the term was deputy governor at that time or chief of staff?

Gilbert: Vic DeGrazia became the Deputy Governor for Dan Walker; I think he was the first person that I know of to carry that title in Illinois government. It was one that Walker made up, and probably Victor's ego wanted that, so that's why they did it. I don't know.

DePue: Well, Walker was a navy guy, so chief of staff would've been a familiar military term.

Gilbert: And have a little different meaning, I think, than it did in the military or in the navy. Jim Fletcher stayed on. He came as campaign manager, and then transitioned in as chief of staff. Ilana Rovner later became the deputy governor, and she basically was housed in Chicago. But wonderful, wonderful person. She had been an attorney, then later went on to become a very distinguished federal judge, and now, I think, is even on the U.S. Court of Appeals in the Chicago area. Ilana Rovner: one of the funniest people you've ever met, great sense of humor, smart as a whip, and she was, in a lot of ways, Thompson's alter ego. She would challenge him in ways that most of us couldn't do. But they were the naysayers who would step up and say, "Oh, but wait a minute, you can't go down this road," and he would always listen. He might not always take the advice, but he would always listen.

DePue: How would you describe Thompson's leadership style? We've been hinting around at that anyway, but if you could put a short phrase to it.

Gilbert: I would best describe it as lead by example, and hire good people and trust them to lead. And that's what he did. In the state house, once we actually went in after the first inauguration, his office was this big office that was covered in gray—and that's a whole other story about how he redid the office. But there was a little back hall coming out of his office that came down into my office. Most people, when they would go to meet with the governor, would go in through the front. There were a few of us that had access in through that back door. Several times I used that back door, which was never locked, to my knowledge, just to walk in if something had happened that he had to know about, a prison riot going on or whatever. I'd walk in, in the middle of a meeting; I would give him a note or give him the word. And that was fine. I don't know that many governors before or who followed operated that way, but that's the trust level that he had with his staff. You didn't abuse that privilege or that ability, but that was fine with him.

DePue: Who was the gatekeeper? Who controlled who got to the governor?

Gilbert: There were several gatekeepers at several levels. And this is where I'm probably going to get a little confused, but his personal secretary was probably going to be the final gatekeeper. If someone showed up and wanted to see the governor unannounced, with Thompson they would have a chance, because if you recall, the governor's office is long. There's this little back door I was talking about on the rear, left-hand side. The main entrance to it is straight ahead. His desk was down here. But over here were two big doors that opened up into the hallway, into the rotunda of the Capitol. Those had been sealed off by previous governors. So Thompson had his whole office stripped down—all the gray paint taken off, going back to the original colors—those doors unsealed and opened up, and he would conduct his business with those doors open on a lot of days. There'd be a little velvet rope across it. But visitors to the Capitol could come in, "Oh my, there's the governor! He's working!" Or, "It looks like he's working!" (laughter) And Thompson would be on the phone or meeting with people. He'd wave to them. They'd wave back. They'd take pictures, flashbulbs going off.

DePue: There's these famous shots of him with his feet up on the desk. Would he be doing that sometimes?

Gilbert: Oh yeah, yeah. He was very informal, as far as that went. And it was not unusual, if there were going to be late meetings going on in the office, for somebody to bring a six-pack in. We'd have a beer or whatever after the public was no longer coming into the Capitol. Very informal, likeable, fun, great sense of humor, loved to laugh, and loved to shop. He actually loved campaigning, being governor. That's why he stuck around so long, I think.

DePue: Your description of the early years sounds like he was spending most of his time, when he's not on the campaign trail or traveling, in Springfield and not Chicago. Is that right?

Gilbert: Yeah, more in Springfield than Chicago. There was a reasoning for that. Probably most importantly, he liked it. He liked Springfield. He liked the executive mansion. He had a love for it. He redid it. He fixed it up. Same with the Capitol Building. Although the secretary of state is in charge of the Capitol, he wanted his office to look like the original office. They had, like, battleship grey paint the office was painted in, and underneath were great murals and things.

DePue: I'm just thinking, Dan Walker, navy guy, and you mentioned battleship grey. (laughter) I don't know if there's any connection there.

Gilbert: There may have been a connection. I don't know.

DePue: Obviously, that's going back to the governor's love for antiques, and architecture as well.

Gilbert: Right. His first personal secretary actually was a holdover from Dan Walker; I can't remember her name right now. But the one who became his personal secretary and the ultimate gatekeeper was Gloria Evans. And Gloria was everybody's mom. She was great. Along the way, I said, "Jim, you're getting stuff at every place we stop. People are giving you stuff. I think we ought to keep a log of all the stuff that you're taking with you"—t-shirts, strawberry preserves, paintings, jackets, hats, it never stopped—"just keep a log. Your traveling aide, whoever the bagboy is, takes the stuff and puts it in the bag, and when you get back to Springfield he'll sit down and categorize all this stuff: who gave it, where, and what time, and what were the conditions. Give that to Gloria Evans, and she'll put it in the gift book." That's when we started the gift book.

And every now and then—usually Bob Hillman from the *Chicago Sun-Times*, who was one of those—he was not one to sit down and have a beer all that often. I think he liked Thompson, but he also loved to stick it to him. He'd come down, "Where's that gift book? I want to look at that gift book." And he'd go through and try to find something in there. A couple times he found some very interesting things that turned into major stories.

DePue: I'm sure that a lot of the things you mention here are rather inconsequential as far as the public was concerned, but then you get people who are giving gifts to major sporting events or airplane rides. I know that there was a little bit of a dust-up, perhaps, when he got an opportunity to go down to see the Kentucky Derby?

Gilbert: I think that was one. Another one was when Illinois was in the Rose Bowl; he flew out on Xerox's private jet, and nothing wrong with it. There weren't any

state laws against it. It was more of an image thing. But something hit the windshield of the jet, and it had to make an emergency landing in Denver. When that happened, then it became public news. "Oh, the plane that Governor Thompson… Oh, how'd he get on that plane?"

DePue: I know the ethics rules have changed a lot since his administration. A lot of the things we're talking about would be illegal now, correct?

Gilbert: Would be illegal according to present day laws and practices, probably, yeah.

DePue: Were some of those changes in Illinois law because of what was going on during his administration, you think?

Gilbert: I don't think so. The difference being, I don't think Thompson abused those privileges. When privileges like that are given and people get something for the gift, that's where the abuse comes into play. I don't recall that ever being the case with Thompson. We can split hairs over that all day, but personally I don't recall anything.

DePue: We're kind of in the neighborhood. Let me ask you about another person that's important in any Illinois governor's staff, and that's the personnel director, typically known as the patronage chief. Who was that to start with?

Gilbert: Who was the first patronage chief?

DePue: Was it Michael Dunn?

Gilbert: No, Michael Dunn was an intern. He started out as a bagboy. Mike came out of Rockford.

DePue: Within a few months there were something like four that cycled through the job. That's what I've read, at least.[27]

Gilbert: Yeah, that could be. I'd have to do a little research on that, Mark. I know Baise went on to become the patronage chief at one time, before he became Secretary of Transportation.

DePue: What I've read is that Dunn got himself in trouble because he was using the state plane for some personal reasons, and he had to step down from the job. That was fairly early on.

Gilbert: Yeah, he did, but he was not in charge of patronage. And I'm not sure what his position was. I know he was a coordinator for us during the first election.

[27] Dunn followed Dan Kennelly as Thompson's first patronage chief.

DePue: During the times you were there working for the governor—this is through 1985, correct?

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: Was the phrase "pinstripe patronage" being kicked around?

Gilbert: Yeah, that came into play. Mostly during the campaign against Adlai Stevenson, I believe, is when "pinstripe patronage" came in. Thompson started out—and I want to be careful how I say this so you don't get the wrong impression—he started out as an open door governor, and I think he maintained that open door policy throughout. He started out as a governor who was going to hire good people, and party politics didn't play that much of an issue. That's in putting the administration together. Then, during that first campaign he began to find out how important the county chairmen were. Carrying 100 out of 102 counties, the Republican county chairmen were doing a heck of a job, let me tell you, for some reason, and that was because they thought, "Here's our guy; we've got a chance. We're going to have a good, strong Republican governor". Thompson then quickly found out that when the county chairmen would meet at the state fair, or he would have them in for a barbecue at the executive mansion, there was always, "Hi, Gov, how you doin'? And here's what I want." And they would have people that they wanted hired in the local Department of Transportation facility in their county, the local mental health facility, the prison—whatever state jobs were available in their local counties or in state government in general. "I'd like to send somebody in to work here or there." So that's where this whole issue of pinstripe patronage comes into play, that if you're a good, loyal soldier of mine, there'll be some jobs for you.[28]

DePue: One of the critiques I have heard from a couple people is that the nature of his appointments changed over time, and you're kind of suggesting that after the first couple years they became more politically oriented.

Gilbert: I think that's fair to say, but at the same time they became politically oriented in a very upright and legal way. People still went through the woodshed, and I don't think it's ever been considered a crime for a Democratic governor to hire Democrats in his administration, or a Republican to hire Republicans. That's the way our elective structure is set up, even back in Lincoln's day, and before that. But Thompson did listen more to the county chairmen, and to his legislators in particular, Republican and Democrat.

DePue: Since we're on the subject—this is way ahead of the timeline—but in 1990 the Supreme Court ruled on a case called the *Rutan* decision that was based on hiring practices within the Thompson administration. So 1990 is five years

[28] Placeholder for *Handbook* entry on patronage.

after you're out of the picture, but I've got to believe that that case was filed while you were still there. Was that correct?

Gilbert: It could've been. It's my recollection that was filed in 1986, but I do remember *Rutan*. It was filed, and I think Thompson acknowledged it and moved on.

DePue: So you're not the guy I need to be talking to about that.

Gilbert: Good. (laughter)

DePue: Relieved, huh? A couple other names I wanted to ask you about: Zale Glauberman; was he one of the legislative liaisons to begin with?

Gilbert: Yes, and I think he had been active originally in the Ogilvie administration, and may have been representing the Republicans in the House during Walker's administration, but I'm not sure about that.[29]

DePue: How about Dan Webb and Ty Fahner?

Gilbert: Dan Webb and Ty Fahner were former assistant U.S. attorneys, bright guys, good guys, and Thompson brought them in to head up the Illinois Department of Law Enforcement. And again, people that came out of the same legal foundation that he did. They weren't going to put up with any corruption, any BS, and that's why he brought them in.

DePue: And the positions they held? Do you recall that?

Gilbert: Fahner went on to be Attorney General. He was appointed. And that was during the Tylenol issue.[30] Webb was Director of Law Enforcement. Danny Webb and I used to play tennis together in Washington Park, and a good guy.

DePue: Who was winning the tennis matches?

Gilbert: (laughs) I always won.

DePue: One of the reasons he was a good guy, huh?

Gilbert: Yeah.

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[29] Glauberman had served on Speaker W. Robert Blair's staff before joining Thompson's campaign as research director. *Illinois Issues*, March 1986, 37.

[30] Reference to the unsolved murders of several people in 1982 after someone laced Tylenol capsules with cyanide prior to their distribution to Chicago-area stores. Bernard Turnock, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 16, 2014, [update final page numbers, currently 16-24]; [Placeholder for Thompson and Fahner's recollection(??)]

DePue: John Kramer at Illinois Department of Transportation.

Gilbert: John Kramer was a holdover from the Walker administration.

DePue: So a Democrat?

Gilbert: Yeah, he was a Democrat. Knew a lot about transportation. Smart as a whip. Interesting, interesting guy. He was Deputy Secretary of Transportation under Langhorne Bond, who was Secretary of Transportation under Dan Walker.

DePue: Can't get a better, more colorful name than Langhorne Bond.

Gilbert: Oh, Langhorne Bond. There was a legislator who used to come into the State Capitol and stand in the middle of the rotunda and say, "**Lang-horne Bond**!" Have you heard that story?[31]

DePue: No.

Gilbert: Say, "**Lang-horne Bond**!" And it would echo through the rotunda, as you can imagine. But Kramer was smart; he had, along with Langhorne Bond, been the chief architect of the Crosstown Expressway. So Thompson comes into office. The Crosstown Expressway was the main reason Richard J. Daley wanted Dan Walker out of there, because Walker did not want to build the Crosstown Expressway and Daley did. So you might say that Kramer held the keys to the Crosstown Expressway, in that he understood it, he knew what the objections were. I believe it was the first summit. Thompson was a good "summitry" guy; he loved to call summits on different issues. But the first summit that he held was on the Crosstown Expressway. Richard J. Daley had passed on and was not there. I think the new mayor was Michael Bilandic.

DePue: Bilandic, right.

Gilbert: Great guy. I liked Mayor Bilandic personally. We were pretty good friends. But we had the Crosstown summit; the legislators were involved, and whoever from Chicago, and Thompson broke that logjam, which killed the Crosstown Expressway but freed up all this federal money that was being held hostage. It was about a three-to-one, four-to-one federal-local match, so there was a ton, millions of dollars in federal money being held up. Thompson broke that logjam. That was one of the key issues in his first two-year term; that, Class X, and maybe a couple of others.

DePue: Was there any grumbling because he allowed a Democrat to hang around in a key position like IDOT? Because there's patronage involved there too.

[31] John Knueppel. Greg Baise, interview by Mark DePue, August 7, 2013

Gilbert: Are you kidding me? In Illinois? Would there be grumbling about something like that? (DePue laughs) Of course there was grumbling. People hated Kramer. But he was a smart guy. John Kramer had the ability to take more crap from more people and still smile about it than anybody I know. And that was part of the secret to his success. He could go up to an antagonistic legislator, put his arm around him. He'd say, "You know, Senator so-and-so, Representative so-and-so," and they'd scream and yell and swear at him, and he'd say, "No, no, no, not so quick." And there may have been a little patronage flowing in the background and all of that too, but he was smart. He was very successful.

DePue: Just one more name, and this is one that normally doesn't get mentioned much but I want to mention it because I think he goes on to the national level, and that's John Block.

Gilbert: John Block. Oh, he was a character. One of my favorite early press conferences that we put together was Thompson's naming of John Block as Director of Agriculture for the State of Illinois, because he was a farmer, and because he was a graduate of West Point. He talked like a farmer. And he had also married a judge's daughter in DuPage County—Rathje, I think, was her last name. So there was a background of very important political influence in that arrangement, just from Judge Rathje. Her father, was *the* judge; he ran DuPage County for a number of years. So John R. Block was a good appointment. And the farmers loved it. They loved the fact they had a farmer heading up the Department of Agriculture.

DePue: Was that unusual at the time?

Gilbert: Far as I know. I don't know that many farmers. I mean, he was a real farmer. He had hundreds, maybe even thousands of acres, out in western Illinois. So that was very important. And Thompson loved it. He loved somebody who could put straw in his mouth and not look like a phony, and taking him out to meet with the farmers. The farmers loved it too, and they would discuss all their issues. He did go on to be U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

DePue: Who did Thompson turn to when he wanted political advice? Who was his political guru?

Gilbert: I don't know if he had a guru, per se. There were a number of people that he would talk to, and there were even more people who would talk to him. So he was getting political advice. It may sound a little corny, but I think to a certain extent his father played a role in being the person that he could call and say, "Hey, Dad, how are you doing?" And they would go up to their little summer vacation place together and talk. His dad was a physician, and not a politician. Went to night school to become a doctor, terrific guy. That was kind of his moral compass, I would say. Political advice he would get from his staff, of course; everybody had an opinion. Bill Cellini, I think, at the time was mister

inside/mister outside, a position he held for a long, long time, through a number of administrations.

DePue: Never had an official position, but always somebody you would turn to?

Gilbert: Yeah. Well, I don't know if he would turn to him, but he would listen to him. He represented a very important segment and a large segment, the concrete layers and asphalt layers, the highway people, construction people. But he always was kind of a manipulator, putting jobs here and there. A lot of that never got to Thompson, I don't think. But he still had good, sound political advice along the way. His former assistant U.S. attorneys played a role. Danny Weil, who was one of his assistants, Sam Skinner, Joel Flaum, Dan Webb, Ty Fahner, Ilana Rovner. That group, from time to time, would give political advice. And maybe most important, Jayne Thompson. She, probably more than anyone in the wider inner circle, was the one who would say "No" first about something, and she would let her husband know about it. She had a lot of input.

DePue: Everything you've said up to this point would suggest that Jim Thompson had very good political instincts.

Gilbert: He had very good political instincts. He had very good political luck. And I don't think that's to be overlooked. You can have the best political instincts in the world, and if you aren't catching a wave here and there it's not going to help you out. But he was a lucky guy in a lot of ways.

DePue: Just the timing of events and things?

Gilbert: Timing of events, and that worked against him, too, in certain ways, when Ronald Reagan came along.

DePue: At the presidential level.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: I'm taking so much time here because I think it's important that we establish the foundation and we can move through some of this other stuff a little bit more quickly. But let's go back to his inauguration, January 11th. Any memories that you have about that day?

Gilbert: It was pretty exciting, that's for sure. Back in 1977, the inauguration of a governor in Illinois was a big deal. It was a big deal news-wise. All the major TV stations, not only in Chicago but around the state, would send crews in for live interviews and updates, covering not only the speech but the prayer breakfast in the morning and the receptions in the afternoon, the balls at night. So that was a big deal. It was a black tie deal. I wore a black tie, interviewed by Channel 9, I remember.

DePue: Did you rent it?

Gilbert: Of course. (laughter) On my own nickel too, as a matter of fact. But it was fun. This was a fresh new start for Illinois, in a lot of ways, as far as Republicans were concerned, that's for sure. But this is where Thompson's political instincts come into play in unusual ways. Going around the state campaigning, eventually in all 102 counties—I don't know if he made all 102 in the first campaign, but pretty close to it—there would be parades. There'd be the high school band marching in the parade in a certain town, and they were really good. He would meet with the kids, and he'd say, "You know what? If I'm elected governor I would like you kids to come play at my inauguration." He must've had twenty-five or fifty bands that he had made that promise to, and different people. So they all started showing up. And we thought, Oh, we've got to have something to do here with these bands. So we ended up having a parade, and ran the bands through the Armory building in the afternoon.

DePue: But obviously part of the parade's got to be outside.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: Did the weather cooperate that day?

Gilbert: It was cold. I'm trying to remember if that was the ten-degree day. There were a couple of things that happened that day. I think it was really cold. Other thing that happened is about thirty minutes before the inaugural ceremony starts, I'm backstage talking to different people—

DePue: Was this inside or outside?

Gilbert: Inside. One of the security people came up and said, "We've got a problem." I said, "What's that?" He said, "A guard has been killed at Pontiac Prison." I said, "Oh, man…" I said, "Well, he's got to know about this, but we've got to make sure that he, personally, doesn't do anything about it. *A*, he's not governor yet; but B, there's an issue here, because this is not unusual for prisoners to send a message to the rookie governor. It's happened before in other states; it may have happened in Illinois." So we get Thompson in a room, and they brief him—who the guard was, how it happened, Pontiac's on lockdown. Thompson says, "I think I should go up and meet with everybody up there in Pontiac." We said, "No, no, no. You can't." That was probably the first time the staff just unanimously said, "No, you can't do this." And he did not. He did not go. But that was kind of in the shadows of what was going on, on this really happy day.

DePue: What a start. He figured out, "Well, I guess I'm governor now. I'm going to do it."

Gilbert: Yeah, exactly.

DePue: He takes over as governor, and he's got a Democratic legislature, is that correct?

Gilbert: Yes. Cecil Partee, I think, was President Pro Tem of the Senate.

DePue: There were 186 ballots to figure out who the next Senate president was going to be?

Gilbert: Yeah. And Thompson settled that dispute. He went in and sat in the chair. He loved it, loved every minute of it.

DePue: The theater of it?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, exactly. And the back-hall dealings, and bringing who to the table, how are we going to get this person's vote. I mean, that's politics. That's the fun part of government.

DePue: What was the agenda for that year, the legislative agenda for him?

Gilbert: The two major issues were settling the Crosstown issue problem and passing Class X. Class X was for certain heinous crimes: No pardon, no parole. And we wanted that image to be of a strong governor passing this law, and people hear the cell doors slam in the background.

DePue: As the press secretary, so much of your job is about the image. Was it easy to help craft that image and to guide him through that process?

Gilbert: If there was any crafting to be done, it was probably in the early parts of the campaign. But this is a very bright man who loved campaigning, loved the idea of being elected governor—**actually being elected** governor—and he kind of came in with his own image and own skills. There was very little of… Sometimes you said, you know, "You don't wear any goofy hats, and you always milk a cow from the left side," and stuff like that, but other than that, he was a natural. He really was. And he's a great speechmaker. If you go back and listen to Thompson's speeches—the budget message and the state of the state message, and his important speeches—the guy was good. He still is. He's a great orator, I would say. So there was very little prep work on that.

DePue: A couple phrases that I've discovered just in getting ready for this: Year of Austerity, or Year of Sacrifice. That was a message that he was putting out initially?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Would that be something that you would help develop?

Gilbert: (laughs) Yes. That was an important part of our message and image. When he became governor, he wanted the limo. He wanted the big, black Lincoln

Continental. I said, "*No way*. You cannot do it." And he said, "Why not?" I said, "How are you going to have an image of austerity and cutting back and watching your nickels and dimes in state government, watching the people's money? And oh, here comes big Jim in his big, flashy limo." I said, "We can't do it." He said, "What am I going to do?" I said, "Checker Cab makes this car, and not only is it ugly, but it portrays this image of austerity that we're trying to communicate. The other thing is it has big doors and big seats; you're a big guy, and you can get in and out of it. And when people look down the street, see this Checker Cab limo coming, they'll know Big Jim is in town." He laughed, and said, "Oh, Gilbert, Gilbert, Gilbert." So we got Checker to bring in the limo, and he tried it out. You know how the doors on a car both open like this; the Checker Cab opened like this. The front door opened like this, and the back door opened like this. So you could open it up—

DePue: Like the wings of a bird or something.

Gilbert: Yeah, right. So here comes Thompson, big old blue thing, and didn't take long for him to get the black limo down the road, but the way it started out was very, very important.

DePue: I also know that he was taking some heat early on about functions in the mansion, and lobster, (Gilbert laughs) and champagne, and liquor in general, and the scale of it was maybe beyond what Dan Walker was doing.

Gilbert: Yeah, he loved to entertain, loved to have a party. He would do it for reasons; if he's having dignitaries in, he was going to serve dinner in a very fashionable style. And he would have lobster flown in.

DePue: But this is on the public's dime, though.

Gilbert: Well, some of it was, some of it wasn't. When some questions were being raised, I think some of that was paid for out of the campaign expenses.

DePue: But the questions came up, I would assume, because, as you mentioned, the message was Year of Austerity.

Gilbert: Yeah, well… But he is the governor. If you're going to attract business, and you've got business leaders coming in, you should treat them accordingly.

DePue: I probably should set this up, this particular year, 1977, with a couple other statistics. You're looking at about a 6 percent inflation rate, and I think that's on the increase. There's about a 6.2 percent unemployment rate; maybe it's a little bit lower for Illinois than other states. This is at the beginning of the Carter administration, as well. But there's energy concerns. All of that's in the mix. And that's, I'm sure, part of why the emphasis in Illinois was a Year of Austerity.

Gilbert: It was a Year of Austerity, but the theme that the governor also kept pounding away on was jobs, jobs, jobs. Everything had a jobs component to it. He'd make an appointment, and we would brainstorm in the press office, "How do we tie jobs in? How many jobs is this going to bring?" So we were constantly bringing that in. At the same time, with the Year of Austerity, we were dimming the lights in the Capitol along with Jimmy Carter and the rest of America. We were cutting back on this and that.

DePue: That was even more of a factor in the '78 campaign, and we'll get to that in a little bit.

Gilbert: Yeah. That's true.

DePue: How about, though, the other part of that: if the inflation rate is high—and it's been high for a couple years, 6 percent, 7 percent, going in that range—and salaries aren't keeping pace, and he's looking at state salaries… I know that was a matter of discussion early on in the administration.

Gilbert: It was a matter, but to attract good people you've got to pay them at least a living wage, and if you're taking qualified people out of the private sector and wanting them to basically live in Springfield, their salary has to be commensurate. I'm not talking outrageous; we're not talking $100,000 salaries. We're in the ballpark. But it did call for some salary increases, and any time you increase salaries in state government you're going to catch heat. And that was the case with Thompson.

Now, Thompson, I might say, is kind of a flamboyant guy. He likes antiques. He likes fine art. He likes to travel first class. He loves to have a martini on the state plane on the way home from a speech. He likes a good glass of fine bourbon. So he's not going to all of a sudden conduct himself like an Amish person just because he's been elected governor. He's not going to give up a lifestyle that he's comfortable with. And he doesn't think he needs to. So there is going to be some grumbling about that.

DePue: His previous job was as U.S. Attorney for the northern district. We mentioned that he was going to make $50,000; that was his salary as Governor of the State of Illinois, and that was pretty much on par with a lot of other states at the time. Was he making more money as the U.S. Attorney?

Gilbert: I don't know. I doubt it. It was probably in the range. May have been making a little bit more.

DePue: But it seems obvious that he thought he needed to be paid more than $50,000.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: And he thought the legislators needed to be making more, as well.

Gilbert: Mm-hmm. Part of that was keeping up with the times, but the other part was he's thrown the legislature a bone here. You know, "You play ball with me, I'll play ball with you."

DePue: Getting back to the overall budget, was this at a time period when welfare expenses and Medicaid expenses were growing?

Gilbert: They've always been growing, yeah.

DePue: So there's added pressure because of that?

Gilbert: And don't forget, there's this sense of Chicago versus the rest of the state. So when it came to funding for schools, or funding for welfare, funding for single moms, all this stuff, downstate legislators said, "That's a Chicago issue." Mass transit? "That's a Chicago issue." Money for CTA? Of course that's a Chicago issue, and that was their bargaining chip. So there was a great Chicago/downstate—still is, to a certain extent—when it came to funding for schools and welfare and transit.[32] As a result, you'll see some pretty sophisticated mass transit systems in downstate communities. You'll see a nice, nice looking, non-polluting bus going down the street with two people on it. But that's not only state; federal mandates have created that dilemma as well.

DePue: I wanted to ask about some of the other issues in 1977. You've already mentioned a couple of these, but I'll just go through a quick list here. The death penalty.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: A Supreme Court decision a few years before authorized or allowed states to decide whether or not they're going to have a death penalty.

Gilbert: Mm-hmm.

DePue: What was the governor's position on that?

Gilbert: I believe he allowed the death penalty to stay. Yeah, he did.

DePue: There was a vote to approve the death penalty for the state of Illinois?

Gilbert: I don't know if there was a vote or not.

DePue: I think that was the case.

Gilbert: Is that the case?

[32] Placeholder for D'Esposito's discussion.

DePue: I might have to do some research. So you don't recall that as being a major issue?

Gilbert: No, not a major issue. This is part of his law enforcement background. I think people would expect him to take that position.

DePue: Which means somewhere down the road he's going to have to be making some very hard decisions.

Gilbert: Such as?

DePue: He's going to have to be the one who ultimately decides whether or not a death sentence will be carried out.[33]

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: You don't recall any of those during the timeframe you were with him?

Gilbert: I do, but I don't recall the specifics. And this whole issue of death penalty, Department of Corrections, law and order, is one that Thompson changed in Illinois. Prisons used to be looked at as unsightly institutions. NIMBY—Not In My Back Yard. Thompson said, "We've got a problem here with crime." "Governor, isn't Class X going to mean there are going to be more people in prisons throughout the state?" Yes it is, but we're going to have to build more prisons, and that's going to mean jobs. All of a sudden, people were putting billboards up around Springfield, "Bring the new correctional center to Centralia. We want it here." They started to realize the value of these institutions. I don't think it had been like that prior to Thompson's administration. So from that standpoint, you've got people looking at law and order, Class X, prisons, jobs, in a new light. So death penalty was in the hands of somebody who had a plan for law and order in the state, and I don't recall it being a big issue. As a personal decision on whether to flip the switch or flip the injection, that may have been. I think for anybody that would be a tough decision to make.

DePue: Was law and order an issue that was playing out at the national level, as well? I remember that was certainly a factor in Richard Nixon's elections.

Gilbert: Yeah, it was, but I'm trying to remember Carter.

DePue: Yeah, he certainly wouldn't identify with that.

Gilbert: I wouldn't pick him as a law and order guy.

[33] On Thompson's power to pardon or reduce sentences, see [Placeholder for D'Esposito's discussion(??)]

DePue: Since we're talking about Class X, I know that one took a little longer to play out than Governor Thompson wanted to. You got to the end of the legislative year and nothing had been done out of it, though I'm sure it was one of his major initiatives.

Gilbert: But there had been a lot of noise made about it, and there was a lot of public sentiment building. People could understand it, and that's why we chose the name Class X as it was a longer interment for heinous crimes. Class X, no pardon, no parole. Media picked up on it. TV anchors picked up on it. "Governor, what about this Class X?"

DePue: Who came up with that term?

Gilbert: I don't know. Thompson may have. But I think Gary Starkman, who was his first legal counsel—

DePue: Was that something that would be embedded in the legislation, a specification classification of crimes?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm, yeah.

DePue: Maybe it already existed before?

Gilbert: No, it did not. That was the point of Class X. Maybe that's why it was called X.[34]

DePue: Was this at a timeframe when "three strikes and you're out" was kind of in play at the national level?

Gilbert: Either at the time or just before.

DePue: Would that phrase work in terms of how Class X was applied?

Gilbert: No. It may have, but that's not how it was used. It was used as Class X, no pardon, no parole.

DePue: I know that he had called the special session; was it July timeframe?

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And he still didn't get it pushed through at that time, did he?

Gilbert: Uh-uh.

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[34] The name built on existing classifications of felonies in the Illinois penal code by decreasing severity:

Felony 1 through Felony 4.

DePue: And it didn't happen until the veto session?

Gilbert: I think it was the veto session, yeah.

DePue: Which generally requires a higher percentage, does it not?

Gilbert: It does require a higher percentage, and I do not recall what horses were traded in that to get it passed, but that would be a great topic to ask some of the legislative people.

DePue: Yeah, December timeframe, I think it was.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: ERA was also going to be coming up, and the legislature would devote a lot of its time and attention to ERA every single year. Going into it, what was Thompson's position on ERA?

Gilbert: He was for it.

DePue: So why did he end up taking a lot of heat? Even in the early years, he was taking heat from the women's groups.[35]

Gilbert: I think it was primarily the makeup of the legislature that he had to work with, and they would not see individual legislators as easily as they would see a six-foot-six governor who they thought could twist arms and make it happen. So they went after him, and when it didn't happen, he was the problem.

DePue: So it's almost because he had this image, because he was perceived as a very powerful and influential governor, that it played against him in the ERA mission?

Gilbert: I don't know if he was perceived as a powerful and influential governor yet. Yes, he won by a big margin, and he was popular, but powerful and influential? That remains to be seen, don't you think?

DePue: Okay.

Gilbert: And the ERA may have been one of the tests. But coming out of the blocks, he felt jobs and Class X and Crosstown were probably the issues he wanted to focus on harder.

[35] See the Illinois Statecraft series, ERA Fight in Illinois, http://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/oralhistory/illinoisstatecraft/era/Pages/default.aspx.

DePue: You mentioned jobs a couple times here. What was he doing in terms of legislation or initiatives to boost employment?

Gilbert: Oh, I'd have to go back and look. You know, I've been doing a little review for our discussions, and I found that a lot of the things that were started in '77, '78, '79, '80, really started coming to fruition in '86 '87, '88, and the latter half of his third term and the fourth term. Build Illinois, which will come up down the road—I think the seeds of that were beginning to plant. The biggest phrase Thompson probably heard in his office from downstate legislators and county chairmen was, "You can't get there from here." Quincy: "You can't get to Springfield from here. There's no direct route. I mean, it was a pain. It was a four-hour drive." Up in the Quad Cities: "You can't get there from here." Rockford: "You can't get there from here." So that sunk in. And if you look at the road system today in Illinois, you've got the All-Illinois highway, Route 51, from Rockford all the way down to Paducah or something like that. What started happening in the Thompson years, all of a sudden, people can get there from there. They can get to Springfield from these downstate communities now.

DePue: Yeah, a lot of places you talked about, there's an interstate to those places now.

Gilbert: Exactly. Well, that doesn't just happen on the federal level, you know. You've got to have the state "squeaking away", "We need this. We need that."

DePue: That also would suggest that he needs to have a solid relationship with the Illinois delegation at the federal level.

Gilbert: He loved going to Washington and having breakfast with the Illinois delegation, and they loved having him in too. I don't know how he stacks up against Walker and Ogilvie and other governors, but just knowing his travel schedule, he probably met with the Illinois delegation more than any other governor that I'm aware of.

DePue: Let's talk a little bit about his travel schedule, because it seems like his first couple years he was traveling out of state a lot. Robert Hartley's biography came out in 1979, so early in the timeframe—

Gilbert: Bob Hartley!

DePue: Bob Hartley.[36] Hartley mentioned that the first time he went to Washington, DC, he didn't meet with the Illinois delegation, and he got some heat for it.

Gilbert: Yeah, that probably was a good slap on the wrist for him.

[36] Robert Hartley, *Big Jim Thompson of Illinois* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1979).

DePue: So just an oversight on his part?

Gilbert: Yeah. It was definitely an oversight by the staff for not making that happen. I don't think it was a deliberate snub by Thompson.

DePue: Would part of that be on you, that you failed to mention that?

Gilbert: That wasn't in my realm of… I mean, I may have, but that was legislative liaison duties. That was somebody else, not to pass it off on anybody else. I was more concerned about issues in media.

DePue: Traveling to Washington, DC frequently is one thing, but he was traveling all over the place in the country.

Gilbert: Like?

DePue: California, New York, other states. So it gets to the issue of his presidential aspirations. And from what I read in Hartley's book, there were a couple trips a month.

Gilbert: I'd have to go back and review Bob's book. I do know that Bob Hartley was one of the media people who thought that Thompson had presidential aspirations from the beginning. And as far as traveling to other states, I think it is imperative for the governor of the fifth largest state in the nation, the number two agricultural exporting state in the nation at the time—

DePue: Behind California.

Gilbert: —to travel to other states and regions. I don't think he was going there for fundraisers. I don't recall him making any speeches, to speak of, that would promote him as a presidential candidate. I was as close to him as any staff person, on the road and off the road, and I don't recall him setting up appearances, in-state or out of state, in pursuit of some type of presidential ambition. I mean, the discussions just never came up.

DePue: You don't recall any personal discussions—

Gilbert: No.

DePue: —you had with the governor on that?

Gilbert: Never. I talked to him about it early on, when I took the job. "Do you think you might run for president someday?" And his answer was, "You know, who knows? Who wouldn't like to be president of the United States? But that's not what I'm really interested in right now."

DePue: But the media didn't let it go, did they?

Gilbert: Oh, the media loved it, and Hartley, being the downstate newspaper guy from Decatur, would love to put this feather in his hat. Not unusual. Not unusual at all. You look at stories by William White and his connection with Theodore Roosevelt, and the small-town paper guy making a presidential candidate, or thinking he had something to do with it, is everybody's dream in the business.

DePue: So if this was all playing out today, where you had twenty-four-hour cable—

Gilbert: (laughter)—totally different ball game.

DePue: —where at the national level they're constantly speculating on the pool of presidential candidates. Would it be unlike Thompson to be thinking about it in the back of his mind, even though he's not mentioning it in conversations with his staff?

Gilbert: You have to ask him about that.[37]

DePue: I'm looking forward to doing that. (laughter) Some other issues that I wanted to ask you about are ones that may be kind of below the radar screen for you after this many years. I read that he proposed ethics legislation, but it didn't make it through.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Anything in that respect that you can remember?

Gilbert: No. What I do recall is you'd mention the word "ethics legislation," and there were some legislators that would become catatonic in the same vein they would over ERA. "What do you mean, ERA? We don't need equal rights for women. We got equal rights for women!" I think ethics fell into the same bag for a governor who wanted to do something about it, but boy, you had a tough row to hoe. So where are you going to spend your political capital with the legislature? Are you going to spend it? Political capital, you know what we're talking about: we're talking about jobs, or whatever. Are you going to do it on something like ethics legislation, which you really want? But how hard are we going to fight for this when we could get so much more out of legislation that's going to produce jobs and is really going to affect the lives of the people of Illinois? And I think that was kind of the mindset that he operated from.

DePue: So top on the list would be the Crosstown and Class X?

Gilbert: Yeah, and that—

DePue: Jobs?

[37] [Placeholder for Jim Thompson, interview by Mark DePue(??)]

Gilbert: And jobs, in the first short two-year term, two-year campaign.

DePue: But my impression is there wasn't a piece of legislation on jobs, it was more…

Gilbert: Oh.

DePue: That's where the travel came in, perhaps.

Gilbert: Yeah. And economic developments. You know, you're meeting with people. You're talking to auto makers, whoever. You look today at Rahm Emanuel, the mayor of Chicago, and anytime there's a company bringing more than twenty people into the city, he's holding a press conference. And Thompson, that was his mindset. We've got to build jobs in the state of Illinois. We've got to get people working again. That way we can keep taxes down, and we can…

DePue: This is more of a question for the budget guys and for Governor Thompson himself, but was part of the equation in terms of developing a climate for jobs that you've got to have the right fiscal climate and that you've got to have the right budget? You're balancing your budget?

Gilbert: You're bound by the state constitution to have a balanced budget, and Thompson did deliver balanced budgets, but—

DePue: Well, not all governors necessarily worry about that as much.

Gilbert: That's true, but it is what it is.

DePue: I had forgotten that. (laughter) That that's a factor of the Illinois state constitution. Anything dealing with abortion is always a hot button issue. There was a piece of legislation where there were abortion restrictions, and Thompson vetoed the legislation.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: Abortion legislation saying there would be no state funds used for abortions, and he vetoed that legislation. Do you recall that one?

Gilbert: I do, but I really don't… I'm really not sure what the reasoning was behind that.

DePue: His veto of it? It certainly positions himself as a moderate Republican of that era.

Gilbert: There is no doubt about that. He was asked, "Are you liberal? The media says you're a liberal on these issues." His position was, "I'm conservative on fiscal matters, almost right across the board." And I think he would probably move

to the center on most other issues. But when it came to what is viewed as the Illinois citizen's pocketbook, he wanted to be viewed as a conservative.

DePue: And on social issues?

Gilbert: Middle of the road. These would be good issues for you to discuss with Paula Wolff. I know you're talking about setting up interviews with her, but she did a lot of the framing of the issues that were brought to the governor, and resulted in his position, which he decided what he wanted to do with it. But I think Paula was more middle of the road/left oriented than anybody else in the administration.

DePue: She's agreed to be interviewed, but towards the end of this project with Governor Thompson, so it's going to be a while before we get to her. Did you go on a lot of the trips when he would travel?

Gilbert: Quite a few. My personal philosophy on that was, If you need me in Peoria, you need me in Paris.

DePue: How about if you need me in Peoria, you need me in DC, or in New York City, or in California? Did you make some of those trips?

Gilbert: I don't recall going to California. I went to a lot of DC trips, especially during the Reagan years. Jim Brady was a friend of mine, and was Reagan's press secretary, and we would go to the White House. At the time, Thompson was Chairman of the National Governors Association, so he would have monthly meetings in the White House and one thing or another.

DePue: So the governors association meetings were in DC?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm, the National Governors Association is in Washington.

DePue: How did he get to have such a prominent position on that organization so quickly?

Gilbert: Just look who he is. It wasn't unusual. What's the lifespan of a governor? Four years? Eight years, in most states? So it's going to happen rather quickly for whomever is chosen. He's a good speaker. He had good friends. Anyway, he was Chairman of the National Governors Association, and Chairman of the Republican Governors Association at another time during this administration.

DePue: Did he politic for those things?

Gilbert: I don't know that he did. His staff did. We had a Washington office, a very good Washington office, and we would—"we" meaning the staff—would make sure that at a Governors Association he would have some kind of a speaking role.

DePue: Isn't that the kind of thing that you'd want to pursue if you had presidential aspirations?

Gilbert: No. Oh, it's the kind of thing you want to pursue as a governor. I mean, if you can put your arms around a half dozen governors, that's your power base. But I don't know that it's necessarily a stepping stone to seeking the presidency. (laughs)

DePue: Well, maybe I'm going to be just as obstinate and focused on this issue as the journalists of the day were, but did you guys in the staff ever talk about—

Gilbert: Nah.

DePue: —the possibility of being presidential timbre?

Gilbert: I mean, it was fun. For example, when he would go into the White House for meetings, I would go to the West Wing and see if Brady was in. Brady would say, "Hey, Gilbert, what's going on? Come on in here." And I'd walk into his office. We'd talk, and about the first thing he would ask me, "How are the Cubbies doing?" Great Cubs fan. But he said, "Look, if you come in here anytime, and I'm out of town, I'm not here, I want you to use my office." He told his staff and everything. I would go in, and nine times out of ten, Brady wasn't there. And I'd say, "Hi, how you doing?" "Oh, Mr. Gilbert, come on in!" So I'd go in and I'd sit down at Brady's office, a really cool office. Fireplace over here, model ships over—you know, famous paintings on the wall. My blood pressure would go up a little bit. I'd sit down at his desk and I'd call my parents, (laughter) "Hey, Mom and Dad, guess where I am?" And I'd say, "I'm sitting in the press secretary's office in the White House." They'd say, "Oh, wouldn't you love to be there someday?" I said, "Yeah, that'd be fun."

That's about as far as it went. I mean, really. I didn't walk out of there thinking, Boy, I'd love this job someday. I said, "Yeah, this is fun." I got to know the Washington press—Sam Donaldson and all these characters—and it was fun. It was a trip. There is no doubt about that. And I'm sure when he [Thompson] would go into the East Room or whatever room he's meeting in, in the White House, he would say, "This would be nice someday." But really, that's as far as it went. We didn't have discussions about it.

DePue: You had given me a couple videotapes of campaign ads and a couple interviews. Towards the end of that first year there was an interview that he had with Bill Curtis, Channel 2. And there was another gentleman with this incredibly deep, resonant voice. I don't remember who that was.

Gilbert: I forget his name.

DePue: But they were asking about his first year, and to reflect back on it. Of course the question about presidential aspirations came up.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: But I think it was Bill Kurtis who was also asking him about programs, and apparently there had been some criticism that there weren't programs that he was advancing, that it was the Year of Austerity, so obviously you aren't going to have programs.

Gilbert: Well, what's a program? And I think that was his answer. If you look at what we've accomplished, if you look at all the laws that had been passed, and the bipartisan cooperation to get some of these laws passed, and so forth, aren't those programs? Aren't those things that are accomplishments?

DePue: To paraphrase what I remember, he would say things like, "A balanced budget – isn't that a program?"

Gilbert: (laughs) Darn good one these days.

DePue: Is that just a desire from the public and the media especially, that you've got to be doing something specific, having something to look at?

Gilbert: That's the media. I don't think the public looks at it that way. "So what's your program? What's your program?" Maybe what's your position on this particular issue that relates to them, yes, they care about.

DePue: But later on in his administration—and this is after you had left the scene—he did develop the reputation for being a builder.

Gilbert: Oh, yeah. But you don't do that in the first two years of your administration. Like I said before, during that first two-year term and during the second term, which was four years, that's when the groundwork was laid for things that played out. There are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of things you can point to in this state that happened during the Thompson years, everything from convention centers to highways to airports to river projects, Kaskaskia, that work on the Mississippi—I mean, it goes on and on and on and on.

DePue: We're at about an hour and fifty minutes here, and I did want to get next into 1978. There are some issues in 1978, and it's also going to obviously be a campaign year. I would like to start on that, and then we can continue with that discussion tomorrow, if that's okay with you.

Gilbert: That's fine.

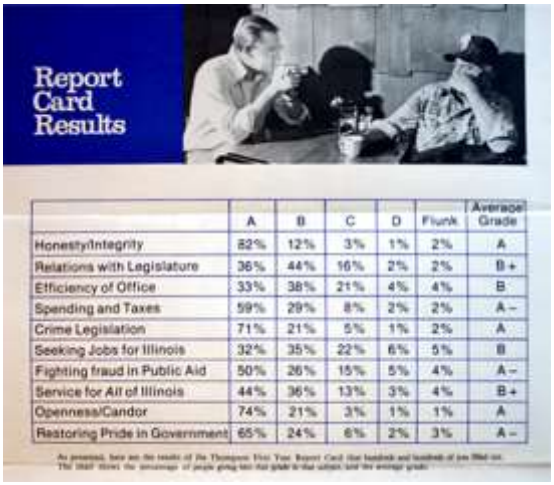
DePue: Let's start with this. The governor's aunt kept scrapbooks of press clippings from his administration—hundreds and hundreds of press clippings that we

are going through—and this is one of them. I think this is roughly the beginning of '78. It's the report card.[38]

Gilbert: Mm-hmm!

DePue: And it would just be the kind of thing that you, as the Press Secretary, would especially focus in on at the time.

Gilbert: Yeah.




| | A | B | C | D | Flunk | Average Grade |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Honesty/Integrity | 82% | 12% | 3% | 1% | 2% | A |
| Relations with Legislature | 36% | 44% | 16% | 2% | 2% | B+ |
| Efficiency of Office | 33% | 38% | 21% | 4% | 4% | B |
| Spending and Taxes | 59% | 29% | 8% | 2% | 2% | A- |
| Crime Legislation | 71% | 21% | 5% | 1% | 2% | A |
| Seeking Jobs for Illinois | 32% | 35% | 22% | 6% | 5% | B |
| Fighting fraud in Public Aid | 50% | 26% | 15% | 5% | 4% | A- |
| Service for All of Illinois | 44% | 36% | 13% | 3% | 4% | B+ |
| Openness/Candor | 74% | 21% | 3% | 1% | 1% | A |
| Restoring Pride in Government | 65% | 24% | 6% | 2% | 3% | A- |

DePue: It graded the governor A through F on a variety of issues: honesty and integrity—this had to make you very happy—came out the highest; 82 percent of the Illinois public graded him an A in honesty and integrity. Now, going into this thing, what would you want to have the governor scoring highest on?

Gilbert: Oh, honesty and integrity. Wouldn't you? I think you recall going through the campaign commercials, that first campaign, and then the ones that rolled over into the '78 campaign, Thompson standing on the corner, and the little old lady saying, "I heard Jim Thompson was out here. I wanted to come out here and see you." "Oh, is that right?" "Yes, and I think I'm going to vote for you for governor." "Oh, is that right? That's nice. And why is that?" "Because I think you're honest." That was money in the bank. And it was the truth, you know? Honesty and integrity. Here's an honest guy. He has prosecuted over three hundred crooked politicians, and you can expect that same type of government when he comes to Springfield. So I'm pleased to see it was that high. I don't recall seeing this before.

DePue: Oh, really? I want you to respond to the ones I've got highlighted. I've got three highlighted at the top end of the scale, and a couple where he scored lower, if you will. So what were the other ones that I've got highlighted here on the top?

Gilbert: Crime legislation—that would be Class X. Openness, candor. Yep. Probably all the media reports, especially on TV, of his open door policy in his office, and people looking in, and just his ability to get around the State. So those all make sense. I look at some of these others and I say, he probably did not have

[38] Report card from the April 1978 *Thompson Insider*, a newsletter published by Citizens for Thompson.

time to really establish any kind of a record that people could look at when this report—

DePue: One of the lowest in terms of A ratings was seeking jobs for Illinois; 32 percent gave him an A in that.

Gilbert: Right, right.

DePue: And 22 percent gave him a C, and that was the highest rating he got in the C range.

Gilbert: That was one of our themes, but how much had he really accomplished in that regard by that time? I think down the road, when some of these programs begin to come to fruition, that's when that grade would've gone up significantly.

DePue: So you can't make a big impact in just one year in jobs?

Gilbert: No.

DePue: The other one that's on the low end of the scale: efficiency of office.

Gilbert: Yeah, and I think that's just an overall criticism of government in general, not just Illinois. People look at government… Is government efficient? Are you kidding me? All the waste connected with government.

DePue: This is coming from my reading of Hartley's book, but he was getting some heat his first year that he had a lazy side. Part of it was because he was traveling out of state so much, as well as some of the comments that he made, and the frequent parties in the mansion and that kind of a thing.

Gilbert: That could be.

DePue: And maybe even, you've got your feet up on the desk, this casual approach would play into that image, as well.

Gilbert: Yeah, I don't know that that image plays into it as much as maybe some of the other images that came out. He liked to play racquetball early on before his back started giving him issues, and he was on the cover of *U.S. Racquetball Today* or whatever. I think when there were TV reports of him doing that, maybe that's where that came from. He was a hard working governor, but he did like his leisure time too. And can't fault him for that.

DePue: You'd mentioned that from January 1977, from before he actually got inaugurated, he's thinking he's got to run for reelection. How did you and the rest of the Thompson team feel at the end of that first year in terms of being positioned for a successful run again?

Gilbert: We had no idea. (laughs)

DePue: Really?

Gilbert: Yeah. Well, not back in January of ’77.

DePue: Excuse me, ’78 now, after that first year.

Gilbert: Oh, *after* the first year. I think we were very well positioned. At the beginning of his first two-year term, no way, because we were really focused on we’d won the election and transition team and finding a place to live and all that stuff. But by the end of that first year in office, yeah, we were rolling. We knew where we were going on Class X. We wanted to promote jobs and the economy, being frugal, riding around in his Checker taxi, and so I don’t think that was a problem. As we mentioned a number of times, he won election in the first campaign by the largest plurality of any governor, got the largest vote that had ever turned out for a gubernatorial election. He was reelected in 1978 by the largest plurality any governor had ever been reelected by in the history of the state, so the campaign was working.

DePue: That’s kind of jumping a little bit ahead of where I wanted to go. It’s no surprise that he was reelected, obviously. January eleventh he gives his second state of the state. He gave a state of the state that first year?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm. Required to by the constitution.

DePue: By the Illinois State Constitution.

Gilbert: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Even though he’d been in office maybe a week or something.

Gilbert: You have to give a state of the state and a budget message.

DePue: March first is the budget address, and he’s talking about an $11.2 billion budget, which is still kind of an austerity budget at that time. Mandeville had been working hard in that respect. And again, the American economy—and quite naturally the Illinois economy—was beginning to suffer even worse than the previous year. So you’ve got 7.6 percent inflation—in other words, everybody’s salary is being degraded pretty darn quickly at that pace, especially year after year—and 6 percent unemployment for the state. The thirty-year loan rate at that time would astound people from where we’re at today: 9.6 percent. That’s got to have a hit on the housing market, I would think.

Gilbert: And it still hadn’t topped out.

DePue: Yeah, it was going to get much worse. Rising gas prices. I'm sure you remember this: one of the pictures in the scrapbook that surprised me was a photo of a thermostat turned to sixty-eight degrees, (Gilbert laughs) because that was about the timeframe that Carter came out and said, "We need to turn our thermostats down to sixty-eight in the daytime and sixty degrees at night." Doesn't go over very well for the American public at the time.

Gilbert: Yeah. Well, it does and it doesn't. Nobody likes to be uncomfortable, but everybody likes to do what they can to help their country out. Most people do. But the significant things that Thompson was doing, they turned the dome light off at the Capitol. They darkened the lights at night in the Capitol, and did their bit. What impact that has, I really don't know. It's symbolic in nature.

DePue: I'm not sure how much this would've played a factor in a reelection year, but certainly it was a tough time for farmers. A lot of that had to do with rock bottom grain prices, and that's where John Block enters the picture.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Do you remember the American Agricultural Movement and their advocating for parity and protesting and showing up in Springfield and other cities?

Gilbert: Driving their tractors in. Yeah, I do remember that, and I remember Thompson meeting with them, and getting his farmer drawl working when he would talk to them. (Gilbert laughs)

DePue: Was he already making foreign trips by that time?

Gilbert: I don't think he had made any foreign trips yet, no. I'm trying to remember the first foreign trip.

DePue: What was his response when they're pushing for parity, which is really a federal issue more than it is a state issue?

Gilbert: It is a federal issue, and so much of the agricultural issues are federal in nature. As a matter of fact, all of the economic impact that Illinois is reeling under in 1977 and '78, '79, are federal issues. It wasn't necessarily a state issue. It wasn't we are overtaxed. So what a governor has to do is try to find ways to get someone to come in to build a new factory, to create jobs in a state. We're kind of swimming against this tidal wave of federal influence that's coming at us.

DePue: Do you remember when he started to make a lot of trips overseas?

Gilbert: I don't know that there were a lot of trips. He made several. In '84 he took the European trip from Scandinavia down to Germany, down to Paris, and then to London.

DePue: You mentioned a trip to Paris. Were you with him on a trip to Paris?

Gilbert: A couple of trips to Paris. We made three trips to Tokyo during the time I was with him.

DePue: What was the purpose of the trips? What's the message that he's delivering when he makes these trips?

Gilbert: Mainly, "Invest in Illinois." In Tokyo, for example, he's meeting with a Mr. Toyoda, who is head of Toyota, and having lunches at the Mitsubishi headquarters, talking about auto-making, as well as other Mitsubishi products.

DePue: To build factories in Illinois?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm.

DePue: To have business outlets in Illinois? How about agricultural sales. At the time—I think even still to this day—Japan had very restrictive rules about beef imports, for example.

Gilbert: One of the luncheons that we had with Mitsubishi was at the top of their headquarters building, and it overlooked the Imperial Palace, one of the most beautiful sites I've ever seen. They served Kobe beef with knives and forks. We'd been getting pretty accustomed to chopsticks, and out came the fine silverware and the Kobe beef, which was excellent at the time. I know there were agricultural discussions in Japan, and there were in the West. China: His trip to China in '85, which I did not go on, I know was heavily agriculturally oriented.

DePue: So a lot of that sounds like it came after the timeframe that you were with him.

Gilbert: Could be, yeah.

DePue: I need to go back and do some homework on my own in terms of grain sales to Russia. I know those things were changing back and forth during the Carter administration as well. I think the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in '79.

Gilbert: That's right.

DePue: I think there was a grain embargo after that, and that certainly had a huge impact on Illinois farmers. Do you recall any reaction that Thompson would've had to that one?

Gilbert: No.

DePue: Yeah, I need to do some more research myself, and that's a better question to ask him. Let's go this far, then: March twenty-first is the Republican primary.

Obviously Thompson wins that handily. We talked a little bit about it, but who were the Democratic candidates going into that? Michael Bakalis is the one who won the primary, but I think there were some people who had considered throwing their hat in the ring and then bowed out early on.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: Was Dixon thinking about doing that at one time?

Gilbert: That was what the media thought he would be doing based on his results winning the secretary of state's office in '76. So I will have to go back and look that up. That might be a good place to start next time.

DePue: Yeah. I think also Paul Simon: Whether or not just the media thought that he'd be a good candidate, or if that was something he had in his own mind.

Gilbert: I think the U.S. Senate was more his goal.

DePue: So let's call it a day, and we've got the '78 election to talk about tomorrow.

Gilbert: Okay.

DePue: Thank you very much, David.

Gilbert: Thank you.

(End of interview #3. #4 continues.)

# Interview with David Gilbert

# IST-A-L-2014-011

Interview # 4: March 27, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue



DePue: Today is Thursday, March 27, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Again today I am in Deerfield, Illinois, talking to David Gilbert. Morning, David.

Gilbert: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: We had quite a conversation yesterday. Today it's going to be another political year. As the Press Secretary for somebody like Jim Thompson, I'm sure it was always a fascinating ride.

Gilbert: There was **always** something going on, whether it was with the media, with the legislature, with the campaign, or stuff that was going on behind all of that. It was a fascinating time to be involved in state government.

DePue: We talked a little bit about this interview in 1977 where Bill Kurtis was pressing him on his presidential aspirations. After they had the interview, they had this short, little exposé, about a three- or four-minute film clip, and it was all about Jim Thompson doing things on the campaign trail. Mainly still photos, but they were doing the Ken Burns zooming in on it, that kind of thing. And in the background they were playing a song from *HMS Pinafore*. I was watching it and thinking, "Gosh, I don't think any news media would be willing to do that with a politician today."

Gilbert: What was the song that they were playing?

DePue: You know, and I can't remember. (laughter) It was fitting. [The song was *"When I was a lad & Ruler of the Queen's Navee"*]

Gilbert: I would have to go back and listen to the words, but if you listen to the words of that song closely, which was Gilbert and Sullivan, you'll find out that there

were some ironic comparisons to Thompson's lifestyle—I'll put it that way. That'd be an interesting thing to go back and listen to. But to your point, he was a likable guy. Charlie Wheeler, in kind of a summation article that he wrote for *Illinois Issues* back in 1990, summed up one character. He said, "After fourteen years, the Thompson record includes a host of impressive accomplishments, tempered by some notable failures, and even a few downright embarrassments. More than anything, it's a record of sometimes surprising contrasts dominated by the personal charm of a man it's almost impossible not to like." This was written by one of Thompson's most—I wouldn't say critical—but analytical reporters who followed him through his career. For Charlie Wheeler to make an observation like that, I think it says something. But you go back to the Bill Kurtis interview, and the composite that they had composed of Thompson's campaign style, and how positive it was, and it ends up with both Kurtis and his cohost congratulating Thompson on his victory, wishing him good luck. That stuff does not go on today.

DePue: Did you have a hand in that?

Gilbert: I know Bill Kurtis. He's still a friend. We had lunch together about a year ago, and we've worked on some projects. One of the reasons I think Thompson brought me into his campaign as his press secretary was I came out of the media. I was a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* for nine years. I knew all these people before I knew Jim Thompson. So going back and making a phone call, "Hey, Bill, the governor is going to be in Chicago tonight and would be available if you'd like to have him on set live, on your evening news." "Oh, I'd love to do that, Dave." That's kind of how things like that happened.

DePue: I wouldn't imagine it was a hard sell for most anybody you talked to.

Gilbert: No, not at that time. That's for sure. As a matter of fact, I don't *ever* recall being turned down on an interview request for Jim Thompson. If we were going to Decatur and wanted to meet with the editorial board or with Bob Hartley at the *Decatur Herald*, not a problem. I mean, they would say, "Oh sure, come on in". Same with any newspaper in the state. Even the *Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, *Daily News* at the time in Chicago, it was not a problem.

DePue: Were there news outlets approaching you to do interviews that you were a little bit more leery of?

Gilbert: No, not really. I think we've touched on this a little bit before. Thompson loved the give and take with reporters, and his prosecutorial background and his prosecutorial style—he loved to appear before the bench in the federal courtroom and argue cases personally. So sitting down with a group of editors, or even an antagonistic reporter, that was more fun than something to avoid.

DePue: Interesting outlook. That's not the way most politicians would look at it, I don't think.

Gilbert: No, you look at some of the campaigns today—Bruce Rauner going through a whole primary campaign without holding a news conference; holy cow, how does a guy like that get away with it? And Michelle Obama, the first lady of Illinois, going to China on spring break with her two daughters without the press. She said, "No, the press is not going with me." Oh man, I'd be screaming bloody murder if I was editor of the *New York Times* about blocking the press on something like that. What if her plane's diverted and she ends up someplace where…

DePue: Like Malaysia, for instance.

Gilbert: Yeah, exactly. Times have changed. It's not like it used to be in 1976, '77 through '85.

DePue: You mentioned yesterday after we were done recording that his Christmas parties at the mansion were legendary. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Gilbert: In 1977, his first year in office, we talked, and I said, "Let's have a Christmas party for the media, and I'll invite all the former press secretaries." Norty Kay, who had been Dan Walker's, Smokey Downey, who was a legendary guy.[39] Oh gosh, he went back a number of years. Invited these people in. Former reporters, everybody was welcome as long as they were connected to the media some way. So we made up invitations, sent them out to everybody, and I would say everybody showed up. There was a guy who was a columnist for the paper in Richmond, Illinois—you know, one more step, you're in Wisconsin; it's way up there. But a great, great guy. He must've been maybe eighty years old, but sharp as a tack, and he would follow Thompson. He would always call me for his little weekly column. He showed up at the Christmas party. And the editor of the paper in Paris, Illinois. And from all over they came in for the Christmas party. There were no speeches. Thompson maybe said a few words about, "We really enjoy having you cover our administration, and we just wanted to get together and share a cup of cheer," and then the party went on. It was mainly just people talking, drinking, eating, having a good time. And as you know, the press corps does like to do all those things. (laughter) There are some legendary stories that happened at that press party which probably are better left unsaid.

DePue: Oh, darn!

[39] William "Smokey" Downey had a long association with William Stratton, working for his campaigns in 1946, 1950, 1952, and 1956, and serving as press secretary in Stratton's gubernatorial administration from 1952 to 1959. William Downey, interview by Marilyn Huff Immel, 1982, Illinois Statecraft Oral History Program, Norris L. Brookens Library, University of Illinois Springfield, Springfield, IL, http://www.uis.edu/archives/memoirs/DOWNEY.pdf.

Gilbert: Well, one reporter had a lot to drink that night. I will not mention his name; he was a reporter for one of the largest newspapers in Illinois, but I won't say which one that was. There was a piano player, and there was singing going on, and this young man got a little too much to drink and crawled under the piano. We didn't know if he was dead or falling asleep or what, but somebody kind of pulled on his leg, and he started calling for Jayne Thompson, "Jayne Thompson, come rescue me!" (laughter) Of course, that was the story told around the press room for many weeks thereafter. Poor guy had a hard time showing his face. But that's the mood. That's the mood of the press corps at this time.

Thompson was a good guy. Sometimes after the close of the day, I'd be in my office and wanted to ask Thompson a question, and I didn't know if he was still in his office. I'd go through—they had a little back hall—and into his office, and he wasn't there. So I'd go out and ask the state policeman who watches over the entryway to the governor's office, "Do you know where the governor went? Did he go over to the executive mansion?" He would say, "Oh, no, I think he's up in the press room." And I would say, "Uh oh! What's going on now?" I would go up to the press room and kind of look around, and there Thompson would be, either in the *Tribune* office or in the *Decatur Herald* office, or in the room where there was a pool office that a number of reporters shared. He'd be sitting there with his feet up on the desk, as he liked to do, several reporters sitting around, and he'd have a cold can of Budweiser that they pulled out of their private stock, and he'd be just talking with the guys. Sometimes stories would come out of those sessions, but a lot of times it was just, "Here's what's going on" and, "How you doing? What's happening?"

DePue: Did any of the media feel like they were being played or manipulated, to a certain extent?

Gilbert: They probably knew that this went beyond normal relationships with your average politician or government official, but they also knew Thompson did not BS them. He usually gave them the straight scoop. So they saw this as an advantage of having access to the governor, that otherwise wouldn't occur. This didn't always happen during his administration. Later on, when there were issues, he wasn't quite as free to go up and put his feet on the desk in the press room. But for the most part he was, even when issues would arise that perhaps could be negative to him. I think he kind of diffused it a little bit with this relationship.

DePue: This isn't too many years after the Watergate era, and I would assume a lot of these journalists you're talking about had been professionally trained in journalism schools. Wouldn't one of the things taught in schools of journalism around the country have been there's supposed to be something of an adversarial relationship?

Gilbert: Oh yeah, there's no doubt about that. I was a reporter for the *Tribune* during the Watergate era, and was very aware of this. When I was recruited by Thompson, the first call that he made with me he said, "Would you be interested in considering being my press secretary," and I told him, "Jim, one thing I've learned covering politics for the *Tribune* is that I never want to be involved in politics." And that was just kind of the mood of the media: Yuk, why are you going into politics? Why are you doing this? Leaving the hallowed fourth estate? Thompson kind of broke those walls down. There was a real respect that reporters had for him. As Charlie Wheeler mentioned earlier, you couldn't help but like the guy. He was a good storyteller, loved to laugh, loved a good joke, loved a prank, and so that attitude, that personality trait that he had, just worked so well for him in campaigns and in state government.

DePue: It must not have been at these Christmas parties, but I thought there were other events that he had, celebrations where there was a little bit of roasting going on, or skits that were played out.

Gilbert: There were. There were skits that were played out at different times when we would have the staff Christmas party—not the press Christmas party but the staff Christmas party. There was one time I played Santa Claus.[40] Ilana Rovner, the deputy governor, gave this incredible roast. Jim Williams, who was in my press office, a former reporter, was just a funny, funny man, a great jazzman as a matter of fact, and he would roast the governor. There were some good-hearted tales being told and things like that. But that was Thompson's sense of humor. He loved that. He loved people taking shots at him. He could handle that.

DePue: Let's get back to the 1978 campaign. I think yesterday we finished off with the primary, which was relatively uneventful for Governor Thompson. Of course, Michael Bakalis emerges—most of the legitimate Democratic candidates I think had dropped out long before the primary campaign—but he was the winner of the primary that year. But I don't think you and I have talked much about the lieutenant governor. Tell me a little bit about Dave O'Neal.

Gilbert: Dave O'Neal was a sheriff—and he kind of acted like a sheriff—down in St. ClairCounty. He was a county sheriff, and had risen up through the Republican ranks in south central Illinois politics, and came on the scene. Nice guy. Heck of a tennis player. I used to play tennis with him. (DePue laughs) He was very, very good. But he was one of their own. He represented downstate Illinois extremely well, and he ended up being a very good running mate for Thompson on that ticket.

[40] Gilbert played Santa in a skit organized around the idea of the public trial of the state for mismanagement, a trial held in the "courtroom of public opinion." [Placeholder for link to Follies page on the project website(??)]

DePue: Here's a factor that's going to play into the campaign in 1978, but I'm curious when the governor and Mrs. Thompson announced that Jayne was pregnant.

Gilbert: I'm not sure what the date was. You may know better than I what that date was.

DePue: I don't.

Gilbert: I don't, and I would have to look that up.[41] But it soon became known that she was going to have a baby, and that was big news. All the little old ladies in Illinois loved the fact that the baby was going to be born in the governor's mansion. (laughs)

DePue: Did you play that to your advantage?

Gilbert: No, we would never use anything of a personal nature like that to political advantage. (DePue laughs) It was—

DePue: I'm not sure if I want to take you seriously or if you're jesting on that.

Gilbert: I'll put it this way: when asked, we answered. And the question was asked. Sure, we talked about it, "Yes, everything's going fine. Mrs. Thompson's doing well. There was an ultrasound this week." I don't even know if they had ultrasounds back then, but it was updates like that that people were interested in. But it was a very big deal for the citizens of Illinois.

DePue: Did that mean towards the middle and the end of her pregnancy she was not stumping the campaign trail like the governor was?

Gilbert: No, she was not involved in active campaigning during the '78 campaign.

DePue: What was the view that the campaign had towards your opponent that year, Michael Bakalis?

Gilbert: Michael Bakalis was an interesting person. He was smart. He came out of the educational system in Illinois. He had been comptroller in Thompson's first term. It was kind of a switch: Walker had a Republican comptroller, George Lindberg, who was banging away on Walker with questions about state finances and the state's checkbook.[42] Bakalis upset Lindberg in 1976 and became the Democratic state comptroller with a Republican governor, so the roles were switched. Here Bakalis was, banging away on Thompson about fiscal issues and the state's checkbook and so forth, giving Bakalis probably the background impetus and belief that he could beat Thompson in a general election. Several reporters compared him to the Kennedy style—good

[41] On December 27, 1977, two days after Jayne told him the news, Governor Thompson told reporters.
[42] On this point, see Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, December 12, 2013, [update final page number; currently 75(??)]

looking, the mop of hair, good speaker, kind of a liberal Democrat—and that was the image. He was not nearly as tall as Thompson, so physically, if the two stood by each other, Thompson, being six-foot-six, was a larger man and had a more imposing personal figure than—

DePue: You could say that for just about anybody who opposed him.

Gilbert: Yeah, just about anybody he'd walk up to, but every now and then some six-eight mope from downstate would say, "Hi, Governor, how you doing?" That would be very unusual. Bakalis didn't have a lot of baggage, but he also didn't have much of a track record. As comptroller, I don't recall he had done much that really caught the public interest.

DePue: Strikes me as not the best place to have a bully pulpit to be talking about your opponent, unless it is a budgetary issue.

Gilbert: A budgetary issue, and education. He had a good education background. Thompson in that first year did have a significant win on education with the Chicago school district; he provided some state funds through summitry and brought everybody together, and that created legislation to basically save the Chicago public school district from failure, from bankruptcy.

DePue: I know that occurred in 1980, but was that an earlier—

Gilbert: No, that was 1980 when it was finalized.

DePue: Okay, so it had been in the works for a while then?[43]

Gilbert: Right, right.

DePue: How did you and the campaign attempt to portray Michael Bakalis?

Gilbert: We did not try to portray Michael Bakalis as anything other than what he was, and we did that by really focusing on Thompson and his record. Class X and the campaign from '76 never stopped; we kept moving right ahead: Jim Thompson, a man you can trust, a man that brings integrity into the governor's mansion. And he still maintained that image. At the time, Republican county chairmen and kind of the diehard Republicans throughout the state were complaining about Thompson—that he wasn't a team player, that he didn't know what patronage was, you couldn't get a job out of Thompson if you squeezed him all day long—so that reputation during that first term worked to his advantage with the large public. At the same time, the Republicans who were complaining the most knew that he was the only horse

[43] For different perspectives on the 1980 summit to address the Chicago school funding crisis, see [Placeholder for Thompson(??)], Robert Mandeville, interview by Mike Czaplicki, February 20, 2014, [update final page numbers; currently 213-223(??)], [Placeholder for D'Esposito's discussion].

to ride, and if they were going to ever have a chance they had to get behind him and vote for him.

DePue: Did any of the hesitancy on the part of a lot of the Republican leadership translate into more difficulty in fundraising for the governor?

Gilbert: Fundraising was a big issue because times were tight and the economy was not good. Interest rates were moving up, "soaring," as has been described, and a lot of employers were laying people off and trimming budgets. So fundraising was difficult, but being the incumbent, you always have a leg up in that regard.

DePue: Was it an advantage now that he had a record, or a disadvantage?

Gilbert: We didn't have much of a record, so it was an advantage that that original image was still intact. You've got to remember—and Thompson pointed this out a number of times during his administration—every time you sign a piece of legislation into law, you're pleasing some people but you're also alienating some people. Almost every law that is enacted has proponents and opponents. So the longer a governor is in power, is in office, I should say, the more legislation he is going to have signed, vetoed, pocket vetoed, or whatever, but you're creating proponents and opponents. You can't please everybody all the time, as Abraham Lincoln once said. But to that point, with a short term, only a two-year term, Thompson really didn't have much of a legislative or a gubernatorial executive record to run on, so that really didn't become an issue.

DePue: A couple dates here, and see if you recall anything; you might not. March twenty-fourth, a massive ice storm hits central Illinois and leads to Governor Thompson appealing for federal support.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: I don't think the Carter administration was very supportive.

Gilbert: Yeah, I don't know if they came through in that regard. Down the road we had much better luck with the Reagan administration than we did the Carter administration. But Thompson, being the governor of the fifth largest state in the union, did have a strong voice. Carter and Ham Jordon, his chief person in the White House, and Jody Powell, his press secretary, were very aware of Illinois and the Democratic political base that was there, even though the state had carried for Jerry Ford in that first election.

DePue: You'd mentioned yesterday that Thompson was traveling a lot out to DC, for governors' conferences and things like that. Did he have a decent rapport otherwise with Carter?

Gilbert: Yeah, he did. The National Governors Association holds two meetings every year. They hold a summer session in one of the states, and usually it's hosted

by a governor of that state. They hold their winter session in Washington, DC, and it's usually in February; all the governors come into Washington, and they have two or three days of meetings. But during that time there's a dinner hosted in the White House by the president, and most of the governors attend that. Thompson did attend that meeting. I think that was probably his first encounter with President Carter. But as it turned out, he would be critical of Carter during Carter's first term, as the Republican Party nationally was going more conservative. Thompson was kind of maintaining his stature as more middle of the road, not going as conservative or as hard to the right as the national party. And I think that was recognized in Washington, certainly by the Carter administration, that Thompson is probably, of all Republican governors, a governor we can deal with. So I think that relationship, although it was antagonistic, was there. Having said that, Thompson still had a platform to be critical of some of Jimmy Carter's moves in the White House during that four-year term.

DePue: And I've got to believe that whatever Thompson felt at the time, Carter was viewing Thompson as one of just a handful of governors who were potential opponents in 1980.

Gilbert: Yeah, he was on the shortlist at that time, no doubt about that.

DePue: Governor Thompson was generally supportive of the notion that it was time for a legislative pay raise, and he certainly felt like he needed to get paid more than $50,000 himself. But May nineteenth he promises to veto any legislative pay raise.

Gilbert: Right. (laughter)

DePue: Shall we hold that whole discussion until later, then?

Gilbert: Well, it plays out. That's when the whole pay raise issue started.

DePue: In that year, you start with a 7 percent inflation rate and finish with 9 percent, so there's definitely a lot of inflationary pressure being built on these pay scales.

Gilbert: Right, and giving rise to the question, Why in the heck should these legislators be given a pay raise when my salary's being cut?

DePue: The next date plays right into this whole issue: June fifth caught the entire country's attention because Proposition 13 passed in California. Tell me your understanding at the time of what Proposition 13 was and what it meant.

Gilbert: Oh, jeez, now you're throwing me a curveball here.

DePue: My basic understanding is it was to put a cap on the increase in property tax in California that was faced year and year out, and it was a response from the public on that issue.

Gilbert: Of all states, California was probably the leader where property taxes were taking the biggest—

DePue: The leader as in the highest.

Gilbert: Right. So that was, of course, very much on the radar in Illinois. Prop 13, are we going to see anything like that here? I don't know that it really came into play right away, but it certainly gave impetus to community organizational groups down the road that would start raising this type of an issue as an issue in Illinois.

DePue: In fact, I think in 1977 Rep. Don Totten, a Republican, came out with his own proposal. He suggested that there ought to be a cap of 7 percent on state revenue.[44]

Gilbert: Right. Totten was the oddball Republican legislator from the northern counties in Illinois, and he was the arch conservative in the General Assembly on the Republican side. He did raise this cap issue.

DePue: And the Illinois Political Action Committee: Was that a more liberal organization?

Gilbert: Absolutely. The Illinois Political Action Committee was a Democratic organization, liberal in nature. I believe one of the founders of the Illinois Political Action Committee was Pat Quinn, who was a young lawyer and had graduated from Northwestern law school. He would later come in with his own statewide constitutional amendment petition.

DePue: We'll be hearing a lot about that here later this morning.

Gilbert: Exactly.

DePue: That organization was proposing a property tax rebate, and it's something that apparently Bakalis latched onto as well.

Gilbert: He did, and anytime you talk about property tax rebates or anything reducing property taxes, it's going to be very popular with voters.

DePue: And that plays exactly into what Proposition 13 was about.

Gilbert: Right, that's true.

[44] [Placeholder for Totten interview(??)]

DePue: So what does Thompson do to counter all of this?

Gilbert: I believe that's when we came up with the Thompson Proposition.

DePue: He announced that on July eighteenth.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: What's your recollection of what the Thompson Proposition was all about?

Gilbert: The Thompson Proposition basically was going to be a statewide campaign, gathering signatures to place this proposition on the ballot.

DePue: As an amendment to the constitution?

Gilbert: No, I don't believe it was a constitutional amendment. I'm trying to remember the exact wording of the proposition. Do you have that there?

DePue: It's probably out in the car. I should've written that down. But it sounded like the proposition was more a suggestion than a mandate.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: We can get that into the transcript when we come to that point.[45] Were you involved with developing that concept?

Gilbert: I was involved in the discussions of it, but I was more involved in handling the promotion of it with the media in terms of getting the news releases out, setting up the interviews, and so forth. I think the idea came from Thompson himself, and the whole policy on the proposition was developed by our issues staff, Paula Wolff and those people. There was a lot of debate within the administration of whether to do this or not. Some people inside felt it was not a good idea because it just had too many potential liabilities opposed to it, some of which actually came to fruition down the road.

DePue: Do you remember any of the challenges that the campaign had in collecting the signatures? You needed to collect six hundred thousand of them.

Gilbert: We needed six hundred thousand, but it was a pretty popular issue, and Thompson, being a heck of a campaigner, was selling the proposition. I think I've got some campaign buttons in my desk promoting the Thompson Proposition, "Vote yes on the Thompson Proposition." So from that standpoint it was very popular. When it came time to vote, there were some challenges on signatures. Had been the case in Illinois, probably still is, that

[45] The proposition read: "Shall legislation be enacted and the Illinois Constitution be amended to impose ceilings on taxes and spending by the state of Illinois, units of local government, and school districts?" For discussion of this proposal, see [Placeholder for Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki(??); Thompson and Fletcher's discussion/ *Handbook* entry for Thompson Proposition].

anytime you're collecting signatures for a proposition or for an issue or for a candidate, some county chairmen and political operatives would roundtable. What they'd do is sit down at a table, bring the petitions in, and they'd go through voter lists and just start as best they could forging names. Then they'd send it around the table, and the next person would write a name; send it around the table, next person would write a name. That, of course, was not promoted by Thompson, and he would abhor anything going on like that, but apparently it had happened because there were some instances of forgery that were discovered later on.

DePue: Well, how about this: I read that he actually offered $100 to people who could get 750 signatures.

Gilbert: That may have come out of the campaign. I don't remember that offer directly, but I know there was a lot of competition going on to see who could raise the most signatures.

DePue: Certainly if you're offering money for signatures you're going to entice people to push the boundaries of ethical behavior, I would think.

Gilbert: Well, I don't look at people quite like you do, Mark. That's… (laughter) Do you think people do that just for money?

DePue: Certainly human nature would never kick in, in that respect, right?

Gilbert: No, right. (laughs)

DePue: But I know he got 607,000 signatures, and you mentioned that there's lots of people looking into the validity of the signatures. David Robinson, does that name ring a bell as one of the people?

Gilbert: Yeah. Jeez, I haven't heard that name for a long, long time.

DePue: Not one of the friends of the campaign, I assume?

Gilbert: No.

DePue: Was he a legislator? I know he was a Democrat.

Gilbert: Yeah, he's a Democrat. I think he came out of the Peoria area, didn't he?

DePue: That could be right. I think it was central Illinois.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: I think one of the embarrassments was that Vicky Sands, who was Dave O'Neal's executive secretary, actually pled the Fifth when questioned about the seven thousand signatures that she had gathered.[46]

Gilbert: (laughs) Yeah, she did.

DePue: And that doesn't sound good to the campaign.

Gilbert: No, not at all, and that raised some eyebrows. That's for sure.

DePue: Do you remember how Thompson dealt with that?

Gilbert: I know he didn't like it, that's for sure. Not sure what happened.

DePue: I read that he said, "Let's take those seven thousands signatures off the lot."

Gilbert: Yeah, sounds like something he would do.

DePue: And it's probably about this time that Bakalis is seeing some blood in the water, perhaps, and calls it Proposition Zero.

Gilbert: Yeah, (laughs) he did get a little mileage out of that.

DePue: But I suspect it was something of a victory September eighth, then, when the State Board of Elections approved the proposition for the November election.

Gilbert: Right, right, exactly. And that was a boost for Thompson's campaign too.

DePue: Was that something that the campaign emphasized and played on a lot for the rest of the campaign?

Gilbert: I wouldn't say we played on it a lot, because of the negativity that surrounded the Thompson Proposition. Yes, it had been legitimized by the State Board of Elections, but that had pulled us off message a little bit. Our message is, Thompson's a man you can trust, great law enforcement reputation, Class X, let's move ahead with jobs for Illinois and so forth.

DePue: Going back to June—this is 1978—ERA once again fails. That was a big year for both pro- and anti-ERA forces in Springfield. Phyllis Schlafly certainly turned out her ranks that year. I have read that Thompson actually was pressing legislators to vote for ERA, and that some of this was actually on tape. But then there's another embarrassment because Dave O'Neal, who apparently opposed ERA, was working to convince legislators against it.

Gilbert: The governor did not have very good luck with his lieutenant governors on ERA. O'Neal, being a downstater—and that's where some of the opposition to ERA was coming from—not surprised he would take that stand. What irked

[46] Reference to the Fifth Amendment, which protects individuals from self-incrimination.

the governor was that he would go around and actually lobby against ERA. Same thing happened later on in Thompson's administrations with George Ryan. Ryan was working against ERA as lieutenant governor while Thompson supposedly was for it.

DePue: The deadline for ratification was seven years, so that meant it was supposed to end in 1979. Congress extended it to 1982, so if he's reelected he gets to have this fight every single year for the rest of his administration, unless it passes. What was Thompson's view about that decision by the U.S. Congress?

Gilbert: Of course he didn't have any control over that, and he had to live with it. You have to remember that through all of this Thompson is a Republican governor, and only through one short period, I think it was a two-year period, he had a Republican House. Other than that, he's working with a Democratic-controlled legislature. He's working with Republicans in the legislature, and a lot of them go way further to the right than he's comfortable in going. So he has to compromise. He has to be a conciliator. He has to bring people together, because fighting standing up like a Dan Walker and pointing his finger in the chest of the legislature and saying, "You're going to do this," he's not going to get very far. (laughter) He's a very practical person in that regard. So when Congress extends the deadline for ERA, he probably just rolls his eyes and says, "Oh boy, here we go for a few more years."

DePue: You can't look forward to the fight that you know is going to happen here.

Gilbert: Which was a fight. At one point somebody threw blood on the door of the governor's office in the rotunda. I remember that. It was nasty. I mean, there were hard feelings. And look at the issue: Equal Rights Amendment for Women. Illinois, probably of all states, had more of an equality for women in the workplace and so forth than most other states.

DePue: It was already in the Illinois state constitution.

Gilbert: The new Illinois state constitution, the 1970 constitution, addressed equal rights for all. So what's the big deal? And I think Thompson may have felt that a little bit, You know what? We're pretty good here in Illinois, but I'll go with the flow. Some reporters described it as he only paid lip service to ERA, and that's overstating it. He made his calls. He did his work. He believed in the Equal Rights Amendment.

DePue: We mentioned David O'Neal here a couple times in the last few minutes, and both times something of an embarrassment. I know it didn't happen during this campaign, but when did O'Neal step down from being lieutenant governor, and what circumstances led to that?

Gilbert: The number one reason that Dave O'Neal stepped down was boredom. I think he just got bored being lieutenant governor. He was at odds with Thompson over ERA, and maybe a couple other issues. However, Thompson didn't

freeze him out. It wasn't an issue, like Governor Ogilvie being a Republican and Paul Simon, his lieutenant governor, being a Democrat. Thompson's a hail-fellow-well-met guy. He and O'Neal got along. His door was always open to Dave. But as any lieutenant governor will tell you, it's a tough job to be in, and I think he just got bored and wanted out.

DePue: Toug, not because it's challenging, but because… Did Thompson give him any meat in terms of what he wanted him to do?

Gilbert: Not significantly.

DePue: Let's go back on the campaign trail for the governor. What, essentially, is the message that you were trying to get out to the public?

Gilbert: As we've talked before, we were carrying, This man Thompson, an honest man you can trust, a law enforcement man, his own man, a man who's looking out for you; a man who's concerned about jobs, the economy of Illinois, the economy is going down and we're looking for ways to bring it up, to reinforce the idea with people that Thompson can bring jobs to Illinois.

DePue: Was one of the things stressed that Thompson is not Dan Walker, that he actually can work with the legislature?

Gilbert: Yeah, it wasn't so much he's not Dan Walker, but that he can work with the legislature for the good of all the people in Illinois. In that first election in 1976, when it was obvious that there was some antagonism, especially downstate, on Mike Howlett being a Chicago Democrat, and our positioning of Howlett as Mayor Daley's shadow was setting in, an organization called Democrats for Thompson was formed. This began to build a lot of steam and carry a lot of weight. So we had buttons made up, "I'm a Democrat but…" which meant, "I'm a Democrat but I'm going to vote for Jim Thompson." We even had a campaign commercial to that effect. So because our campaign never stopped, Democrats for Thompson carried on, and we found a number of Democrats who weren't fond of Bakalis for whatever reason. For a Republican governor to win office in Illinois, you have to carry a majority, almost all Republican votes. You have to carry a significant number of independents, and you must carry a number of Democrats too. Those are just the numbers.

DePue: Carry, or cause the Democrats not to turn out, cause the Democratic machine in Chicago not to turn out their votes?

Gilbert: That helps too, and with Mayor Daley gone, and the machine being weakened in Illinois and in Chicago, that would be a big help. At the same time, the seeds are being planted for the Republican machine, for the Thompson machine, which we'll see the fruits of later on; we had talked about pinstripe patronage and so forth, Thompson really embracing that concept as he goes on in his governorship.

DePue: You mean reaching out more to the Republican county chairmen, working that part?

Gilbert: Reaching out more to the Republican county chairmen and to the Democratic legislators.

DePue: I also don't want to lose sight of the fact that this is going to be the first election under the new constitution, where the governor is running in a non-presidential [election] year.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Normally that means there's a lot lower turnout, and in the last few presidential elections at the U.S. level, that generally means a lot of the Democrats are sitting at home because they tend to turn out more for presidential election years. Was that the case in '78?

Gilbert: Yes, although in '78 Thompson did win the election by the largest plurality in the history of the state for any governor's reelection. So we were able to sustain a good base for Thompson. You must remember though, Mark, back in 1976, the last time that a governor did run at the same time there's a presidential election, coattails are the big issue with the national press, and even with the local press: are Jimmy Carter's coattails going to sweep a Democratic state into the Democratic column? I think the Democrats were counting on that, but Carter didn't turn out to have coattails.

DePue: You made a great case on that very fact, that there were no coattails.

Gilbert: His coattails were cut off, and Ford actually carried Illinois. Therefore, seeing as the Democratic Party had not performed in a presidential election for their candidate in 1976, just two years later, in a non-presidential election, the turnout's going to be even lighter. So yes, that did work to our advantage.

DePue: The message of Thompson's first year was Year of Austerity. Was that something that you guys feel like you could run on? And the budget proposed in 1978 for the fiscal 1979 year was equally austere.

Gilbert: And if you look at Thompson's fourteen years in office you will see that the final budget he proposed in his fourth term of office was smaller than the budget that he inherited in 1977, when he came into office.

DePue: You mean as a percentage of the Illinois economy?

Gilbert: Taking inflation into account, $11.5 billion was the first, and I think when he went out of office his budget was $11.3 billion.[47]

DePue: That wouldn't include Build Illinois, because that's a bond issue?

Gilbert: Yeah, exactly.

DePue: You've mentioned already that Bakalis has an education background. There's a couple constituencies that Democrats normally could count on, one being education and another one being unions, and apparently Governor Thompson was calculating how he could cut the feet from under those two areas. Let's start with education. Was he working to garner the education vote?

Gilbert: He was always working to garner every vote he could get, including education. University of Illinois was very dear to his heart, being a graduate; it was very important to him. As we had mentioned before, the failure of the Chicago public schools was an issue, and he had started working on that only to culminate that in 1980 with his famous summit. So education was very important.

DePue: Let's take a look at the unions. I don't know if it's as much then as it is now, but it's traditionally Democratic turf. How did he manage to get the Teamsters union to endorse him?

Gilbert: Louis Pike was the head of the Teamsters local in Chicago, very powerful guy, and Thompson could talk their language. He could go in and sit down in a smoke-filled room, although he didn't smoke, and have a glass of bourbon with these guys and talk their talk. He was a U.S. prosecutor. Teamsters, of all people, didn't like the feds. But Thompson went out of his way to court these guys. He would go down to Miami, he would go to their club, and he would sit around the pool with these guys and talk with them. And a governor's never done that, Republican or Democrat, so they liked this. They liked the fact that they thought they could trust him, and they thought that whatever their issues were, whether highway weights or whatever, at least they would have a voice, they would have someone who would listen to them.

DePue: What strikes me listening to you talk about all these different constituencies he's reaching out to is, well, he'd have a beer with this group or he'd have a shot of bourbon with this group, and he was kind of like the everyman. And there was always alcohol involved in these things?

Gilbert: Isn't that the way? Isn't that the tradition that these guys come out of? You don't go into a room where a bunch of union guys are sitting around smoking cigars and drinking whiskey and say, "Okay, put your cigars out, please. I'm

[47] In fiscal year 2012 dollars, actual general fund appropriations in 1977 totaled 22.5 billion while 1991 actual general fund appropriations were just shy of 22 billion. If measured by actual total appropriations, Thompson's 1991 budget was 4.5 billion more than Walker's 1977 budget. [Placeholder for *Handbook*, Budget Tables]

not a smoker. Let's put a cap on the bottle." That doesn't work. It was about this time on the campaign trail that we ran into a little Lebanese man in East Peoria named Jug Anthony; Jug Anthony ran a tavern across from the main gate of the Caterpillar plant. So one morning at 6:30, we're standing out in front of the main gate at Caterpillar as the shifts were changing and the workers were coming out, "Hi, I'm Jim Thompson. I'm running for governor. Hi, I'm Jim Thompson. I'm running for governor," shaking hands. He noticed that some of these workers were going into Jug Anthony's little tavern across the street. So after everyone had come through the gate, after he shook every hand he could shake, he said, "Let's go in. Let's go in."

We go into Jug Anthony's, and Jug Anthony, little Lebanese man, glasses, portly, says, "Oh, Governor Thompson, come in and sit down! What'll you have?" And he looks around and sees all these guys are having a shot and a beer. So he says, "I'll have what they're having." They put a beer up, and then Jug Anthony says, "Governor, I got something just for you. This is one of my favorites. It's called Arrack." He gets this jug, pours him a shot of Arrack whiskey. So Thompson's-- you know, and everybody all around, toasting shots, and chasing it with a beer. And boom, word travels in a Caterpillar plant, in any plant, when something like that happens. The chief communicators in a big plant like Caterpillar are the forklift drivers. You get a forklift driver who's on your side and willing to openly say, "I like this guy Thompson," he's going to all parts of the plant. He's driving around on his forklift. So anytime we could find a forklift driver, he was our man inside. I don't know that many campaigns think like this. I don't think any other candidates think, "At eight o'clock in the morning I'm not having ham and eggs at the local restaurant, I'm having a shot and a beer with the local workers." I mean, you cannot have any campaign commercial that is more effective than something like this. It's just golden.

Now, back to your issue with Louie Pike. That's the same attitude he approached Pike with. It wasn't Mr. Pike, it's, "Louie, here's what we can do. I need your help. I need your support." And Pike says, "Well, Governor, we got some issues." And he says, "Louie, my door is always open. You can **always** come in and we'll talk about your issues." Didn't give him anything. Didn't buy his vote. But it was the relationship. It was the same relationship he established with Louie Pike that he established out in the parade route, going side to side, sweating, stopping, patting a baby on the back, or chugging a beer, or going into Jug Anthony's. This is the kind of person he was. I mean, here is a guy that started out so bashful he stood in a corner in a campaign event, who moved to being one of the most effective campaigners this state's ever known.

DePue: There's a picture, and I think it's from the 1978 campaign, where he's at some rock concert with a bunch of young kids with their t-shirts off; they're bare chested, and they're holding a beer high, and he's holding it with them as well.

Gilbert: Yeah, I think that may have come out of Western Illinois, when he went to Western Illinois University. But yeah, I remember that.

DePue: Was he courting the UAW and AFL-CIO?

Gilbert: He was courting anybody who would listen at the time. I'm trying to remember the guy in Chicago who headed up the hotel workers, the service employees union. Once he got his foot in the door with the Teamsters, the word spread that Thompson's open to talking to unions. And when that happened, that was very important.

DePue: I've got a quote here, and this deals with public sector unions, which were quite different from what we've got now: "I will not be satisfied until every public sector employee has the right to collective bargaining. If the legislature passes a collective bargaining bill, I will sign it."

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And at that time I believe Walker had signed an executive order to that effect, but it wasn't a fact of law.

Gilbert: Right, exactly.

DePue: Did that quote get him into trouble with his Republican base?

Gilbert: With some. But as I mentioned before, Thompson's the only horse they can ride, and they didn't like it. There were plenty of non-union people, right-to-work people in the Republican Party who would oppose something like that.

DePue: He also said he would veto any right-to-work legislation, so let's start with what's the definition of right-to-work legislation?

Gilbert: Right-to-work legislation means that you cannot say that you can only work in this place if you join the union. You don't have to be a union member to work there.

DePue: So he did not support that. He was willing to have the unions have that clout?

Gilbert: Right. That was probably a trade-off.

DePue: What's the trade-off?

Gilbert: The trade-off would be you work for me, I'll work for you. And that is a legislative issue. That is fair game for a governor to take a position like that. If you can get this legislation passed, I'll sign it; or, if you pass this legislation, I'll veto it. People know where he stands. So the union's saying, Hey, we've got a Republican governor here who will support us on right-to-work, who will support us on these issues. That's a big step. But going down to the

Jockey Club in Miami and meeting with the union leaders down there, plus being open in saying what his intentions were on these employment issues, was a huge step, especially for a Republican governor.

DePue: Unions had been around for a long time in American history at this time, but I don't know that there were a lot of states that were allowing collective bargaining for public sector employees. And jumping ahead thirty, thirty-five years into the future here, the complaint now is that public sector unions have collective bargaining and they support a political candidate. The political candidate makes sure they get good benefits, decent pay scale, and then the public sector unions end up funneling money back into the campaign. Was that at all part of the discussion at that time?

Gilbert: Not to that extent. What you see going on now actually is the reverse; I'd say the pendulum's swinging back in state government, and if you look what's happened in Wisconsin and Michigan and Indiana in particular. But in this case, there was no quid pro quo. Thompson's a prosecutor. He knows the law. He knows what he can do. He knows what his boundaries are. There's no way he's going to step across a legal boundary and get himself in trouble. He did it by the book, but he took steps that you would not see a Republican governor, especially in a state like Illinois, normally taking. But you've got to remember, Thompson wants to get reelected, and he is a Republican. He's a minority. He has got to expand his base. He's like Jabez, the little prophet in the Bible who says, "I've got to expand my territory. I've got to put my stakes of my tent out a little bit further. I've got to cover more ground here." (laughs)

DePue: Spoken like the son of a preacher.

Gilbert: I knew you were going to say that!

DePue: Well, that's a little bit more obscure person from the Old Testament, I think.

Gilbert: Yeah, very. The prayer of Jabez, it was called.

DePue: A couple more issues, maybe a little bit more minor, but they're the kind of thing that garners lots of attention at the time: potholes and infrastructure. (Gilbert laughs) You laugh.

Gilbert: I laugh because it's *still*—you know, I drive through—

DePue: After a tough season like we've had.

Gilbert: Oh, I drive through Chicago and my wife is, "Look at this! It looks like a battlefield! Look at these craters!" Potholes are *always* an issue. I mean, there are issues like potholes, snowfalls, floods that defeat politicians. We changed mayors in Chicago because of a snowfall. Thompson, being a man of the people, was very aware of the pothole issue, bridges, infrastructure. And fourteen years later, at the end of his administration, if you look at the

fourteen thousand miles of highways that were created and the five hundred-and-some bridges that were rebuilt, he was very aware of the need to protect the infrastructure of Illinois, beginning with potholes.

DePue: The next issue on the campaign trail is off-track betting.

Gilbert: OTB. Hot issue, as a matter of fact, one that you wouldn't think much about if you're planning a campaign. Oh, off-track betting, what's our stance going to be there? But it's just amazing how deep this root goes into Illinois, and how important it is to a lot of people. So off-track betting was an issue here. Off-track betting, lottery, machines in bars and so forth, casinos—all of this.

DePue: Things that the Thompson folks were generally in favor of allowing?

Gilbert: Thompson, being a federal prosecutor, you would normally think his stance on gambling and things like this is he's going to be against it, because of the image that gambling has in other states—run by the mob—and the negative image that gambling has.

DePue: He took Otto Kerner down because of the whole issue about racetrack stock.

Gilbert: And he ended up funding legislation to rebuild Arlington Racetrack, so you take these issues as they present themselves. You try to find what the common thread is that ends up as being good for the people of Illinois, and I think that's how he looked at OTB.

DePue: Here's an issue that would cause every campaign to swallow hard, perhaps: July twenty-second, you guys got news that there had been a very bloody riot in the Pontiac Corrections Center. Three prison guards were killed and three more were seriously injured, and that's on the governor's watch now.

Gilbert: That's the same place a prison guard was killed on the day of his inauguration. So the inmates are sending messages. What are the inmates upset about? They're upset about the common issues that you find in prisons, especially in a state like Illinois: overcrowding, two, three prisoners in the cell, bad food, long hours for guards. It's a mess. It's a mess. And here's a governor who's promoting Class X legislation, which is going to mean more prisoners in a limited space, so that's where he came out with the plan to build more prisons throughout the state. I think he ended up building fifteen new prisons in Illinois.

DePue: But all that is in the future. How much was he talking about pushing for new prisons at that time?

Gilbert: Oh, that was part of Class X. Definitely part of Class X. If we're going to do this, we've got to have the facilities. I don't know that he realized—oh, he probably did—how popular that issue was going to be, especially in downstate Illinois. Prisons mean jobs: construction jobs to build them, bringing money

into the community, and then permanent jobs to staff the prisons. Building fifteen new prisons in the state, great economic development for small towns.

DePue: Especially when it's very tough economic times in the state.

Gilbert: Definitely.

DePue: The next thing I've got on my list for the timeline is going to play completely differently: August third, Samantha Jayne Thompson is born in Springfield. Do you remember that day?

Gilbert: I remember that night. (laughs) My phone was listed in the Springfield directory. Didn't make any secrets about that. And my phone was ringing all night long, from the news media, from AP, UPI, from concerned people, and from one little old lady in Wisconsin. She called me every hour, "Hello, Mr. Gilbert. This is…" I don't remember her name. "Hello, Mr. Gilbert, this is Bertha. And I was just wondering if Mrs. Thompson's had her baby." "No, ma'am, not yet, but thanks for calling." I'd hang up. An hour later Bertha's back on the phone. I finally said, "Look, I'll make a deal with you: give me your phone number, and the minute that baby is born you'll be the first call. I'll call you back." She said, "Oh, that would be so wonderful!" One of the state police at the hospital called me when she went into labor, then called me when the baby was born. I called this little old lady in Wisconsin. "It's a girl." And she was so happy. "Oh, thank you very much! Does it have a name?" I said, "No, not yet." But that was an exciting time.

DePue: Who was the second call?

Gilbert: (laughs) Reporters. We put a statement out on UPI to the press right away that Mrs. Thompson had given birth to an eight-pound-whatever little baby girl. Both are doing well.

DePue: I don't know how you would possibly calculate this, but did that give you a couple percentage points boost in the polls?

Gilbert: What do you think? (laughter) I'm sure it did. Like you said, you have no way of calculating that, but that's always good news. I know it was probably the happiest day in Governor Thompson's life, even surpassing his election to office. He could not have been happier, idolized his wife and his baby daughter, and still does. Samantha is living in London right now, and he trots over there several times a year to make sure she's doing okay, probably talks to her every day on the phone. That's just the kind of a dad he is, and he loved his baby daughter.

DePue: I have seen press reports. He wasn't bashful about presenting her to the public soon after that.

Gilbert: He's Jim Thompson, and he's a public kind of a guy. He loves the public. He loves the interaction. And having a baby, he was very happy to hold her up so the pictures could be taken.

DePue: How soon after she was born did Samantha end up having pneumonia?

Gilbert: I don't remember how soon that was. She was still very young, I remember, but I don't remember all the details on that.[48]

DePue: What's your reaction to this quote that I found in the newspapers? He's talking about his daughter being born: "The truth is, she's got her father's look and her mother's temper"?

Gilbert: (laughter) I would say she's got both of their looks, but in his eyes, of course—it's all in the eye of the beholder.

DePue: But what was he saying about his bride?

Gilbert: Jayne Thompson did tell it like it was. I think we talked earlier about if there was one person who said no, it was his wife. She's a prosecutor. She's a litigator. She has a strong backbone, mind of her own, very sharp. I have never seen Mrs. Thompson display her temper, but I've certainly seen her display her opinion on a number of occasions.

DePue: In a forceful way?

Gilbert: Very forceful, yeah.

DePue: Okay. What were the issues where she did have an opinion that you'd be willing to say?

Gilbert: (laughs) She almost threw me out of the executive mansion one time. We were having a meeting, and we were talking about a good campaign slogan for the fourth campaign. I said, "Now that we've been here so long, give us a chance," or something to that effect, and she said, "Gilbert, get out of here." But she was a very opinionated… I think she was very opinionated on the Thompson Proposition, and I think she was one of the people who said, "I don't know if we should be getting into this." But she certainly expressed her opinion.

DePue: It wasn't too long after Samantha was born that Thompson was able to deliver on another pledge. This wasn't a campaign pledge, but it was a pledge to his high school class. So you had a high school class reunion in the mansion.

[48] On the place of their family in public life, see [Placeholder for JRT and JCT interviews with Mark(??). Also see Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014, [update final pages; currently pages 6-10(??)].

Gilbert: Right, invited everybody down. It was a big deal. He never forgot his roots, and that was a fun part about him. He remembers the people that he grew up with, who helped him along the way. So that was just another example of that. They were so excited to come to the executive mansion. Thompson realized the value of the executive mansion more than any other governor, and that's why he loved to show it off. He loved to improve it. He put on campaigns to raise money to restore the mansion, to buy things for it. And he used it. He used it really well. I don't know that any other governor used the mansion quite like Governor Thompson.

DePue: Yeah, I pulled out an article; this is April 8, 1978, so early in the campaign season. It's the *Alton Telegraph;* it's got a picture of a chef, and the headline is "Governor Lives High on Taxpayers." The mansion food bill: shrimp, lobster, crabmeat, $1,550; one trip to the liquor store, $1,100; monthly meat bill, $1,100.[49]

ALTON TELEGRAPH

Serving Madison, Jersey, Macoupin, Greene and Calhoun Counties

# Governor lives high — on taxpayers

Mansion Food Bill

Shrimp, lobster, crab meat $1,550

One trip to liquor store $1,100

Monthly meat bill $7,100

Total monthly grocery bill $9,500

Gilbert: That's not a lot, is it? (laughter)

DePue: Those are 1982 dollars.

Gilbert: The *Alton Telegraph* is a great newspaper, always has been. Has a great history. I would see stuff like this and I'd go, "Oh boy, what are we going to do about this?" But it goes back to Thompson's philosophy. He liked good

[49] According to a note in a scrapbook kept by Thompson's aunt, this story and several others were reprinted and "distributed by the Democrat booth at the Sandwich Fair. However, we noticed that most people picked up the free Illinois road maps instead of the enclosed sheet." This image is from the Sandwich Fair pamphlet. In 2014 dollars, the monthly grocery bill would total $9,100.

things. He liked fine art, and he wanted to entertain in an acceptable manner to his guests, and he did. It didn't always sit well with everybody, but he kind of took the heat and moved on.

DePue: When we talked about the '76 campaign, you talked about the evolution of your candidate, how he became so much more comfortable and better as the campaign went along. Was he definitely in the groove, then, by '78?

Gilbert: Yeah, he was developing his campaign style. Jimmy Skilbeck, who worked on my staff, was kind of his parade director. I would call him his event director. He's the one who would be out front in a parade, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, the Governor of Illinois, Jim Thompson!" He'd have his bullhorn going, then Thompson would be coming along with his t-shirt on. He kind of carried that style, which became known as Big Jim's campaign style. You walk in a parade, you don't ride. And if you look at any politician today in Illinois, they're walking in parades, they're not riding—unless they're unable to, like Adeline Geo-Karis, (laughter) up in Waukegan, rest her soul. But his campaign style had really come into play in late 1976 in the county fairs and the state fair and the Labor Day parades and so forth. By the '78 campaign we had a really good campaign structure going.

DePue: When I was looking at pictures of the '76 campaign, most of the photos I saw in the newspapers had him in a shirt and tie, maybe even a coat and tie. Oftentimes the tie would be loose, and it would be a little bit casual. But you mentioned t-shirts now. I talked to the governor a couple days ago, and he said, "I've got hundreds of t-shirts." Hopefully we can get those donated. But what was the thing about the t-shirts?

Gilbert: When you're coming into the high season of a campaign it's summertime, and you're in parades and on college campuses. You're not going to wear wingtip shoes and a coat and tie in a parade or county fair in the summer. So [t-shirts reading] Citizens for Thompson, or the Thompson Proposition, or Big Jim—it was just in style. And he did wear it well. Some politicians cannot wear a t-shirt. I don't think Mike Howlett could've carried it off wearing a t-shirt. He was a portly man, and it would've looked funny. But Thompson was constantly concerned about his weight and not being overweight. He was always on a diet, the latest diet, the latest fad—which I don't—included Jim Beam and Budweiser beer, (laughter) but he put that on the side.

DePue: Or corndogs.

Gilbert: Or a corndog at the state fair, or a county fair.

DePue: Or rubber chickens?

Gilbert: Yeah, rubber chicken circuit.

DePue: Did Bakalis present himself the same way?

Gilbert: He tried to. Gosh, there was a great quote from Bakalis. Bakalis one day made a statement about Thompson and his dogs. He said, "He goes out and he buys the dog, and he campaigns with the dog, and what kind of an image is that for a governor of Illinois?" The media came and asked Thompson about it: "Bakalis just said you're not representing your office by buying a dog, naming it Guv, and campaigning." And Thompson just said, "Well, I guess that's his issue if he doesn't like dogs." (laughter) Of course, every dog lover in the state loved that. They couldn't wait to meet Thompson at the next county fair, in his t-shirt with a dog. So I don't think Bakalis really understood.

DePue: That's a perfect setup for my next question, and I think this is also the August timeframe. There was some kind of event that Bakalis was having at the state house, and he was hoping to garner lots of press attention, but it happened to be the same day that somebody had decided to bring a horse to the State Capitol building. Do you remember that?

Gilbert: Yeah, I remember that very well. Bakalis was having a press conference on education, and he was doing it on the steps of the state house. I think it was at eleven o'clock in the morning. And there had been this guy with a horse—I'm trying to remember the horse's name—and he had been bugging us, I mean bugging us, "I'd like to bring my horse into the Capitol to meet Big Jim." I had said, "Today wouldn't be a good day to do that, but give me your card." So that morning I heard Bakalis was having his big whopper press conference on education, and I called Skilbeck and said, "Skilby, we gotta get the horse today. Find this guy. See if at ten o'clock he can have his horse coming into the Capitol, into the governor's office."

Skilbeck was all over this. This is his bread and butter; he loved it. He finds the guy. The guy shows up with his horse about 9:30 or ten o'clock. I make a call to the press room that this horse has shown up. It'll be down in the governor's office at eleven o'clock. We scheduled it right at the time. And some TV reporters had already set up their cameras for Bakalis's press conference. So the guy shows up at the Capitol, backs his trailer up, leads Tricks, I think was his name—Tricks, the Magic Horse—into the governor's office. We go through the side doors, right into his office. All the press is there, and they'd left Bakalis just hanging. He postponed it and did it later, but he was so angry. But Tricks the Magic Horse, [his owner] would say, "Count to three," and he'd go one, two, three with his hoof, and, "Say the governor's name." (imitates horse's whinny) Everybody would laugh, (DePue laughs) and stuff like that. So that was the magic horse, and left Bakalis kind of hanging.

DePue: And Thompson got a chance to have his picture with him riding the horse?

Gilbert: I don't know that he rode the horse.

DePue: I think I've seen pictures of it.

Gilbert: Yeah, he may have. He may have rode the horse. (laughs) Those were the days.

DePue: I can imagine that Bakalis would've been fuming over that one.

Gilbert: Yeah, he was.

DePue: It was this kind of stuff, though, that Bakalis was charging was all just campaign buffoonery.[50]

Gilbert: Right, campaign show. But people loved it. At the same time, Thompson had strong messages, and people trusted him, and they liked him. He was a likable guy. There's a story: we're at the Jersey County Fair, and he stops in the men's room. There's a trough urinal, which was pretty common at county fairs, and the guy next to him, relieving himself, looks up and sees it's Big Jim. He turns around and goes, "Oh, Big Jim!" and consequently peed all over the governor's leg. So the governor came out, and his leg is all wet. I said, "Governor, what happened?" He said, "This guy got a little carried away when he saw it was me." I said, "Yeah, you can go home and tell your wife you just pissed on the governor of Illinois." (laughter) And we tell that to the press. The press just **absolutely** loved it. But it wasn't that he was setting this stuff up. That's who he was, and I think that's why people liked him. He was fun. And you didn't see that side on Bakalis. You certainly didn't see it on Adlai Stevenson for two campaigns.

DePue: What were the polls telling you as you went into the fall, into the real campaign season?

Gilbert: In 1978, the polls were fair. We knew we had to work hard, and we knew we had a race on our hands. We stuck to our messages, stuck to our campaign strategy of making news downstate, and trying to get it in the press on TV, in particular every day in Chicago. We continued that strategy, and it worked very well.

[50] Michael Bakalis, interview by Mark DePue, June 10, 2014, [update final pages; currently 18-20(??)]

DePue: One of the things that a challenger oftentimes wants to do is see if he can get some debates, and I know that you had four debates between Bakalis and Thompson. Were you involved again with the negotiations of setting those up?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm. I met originally with Bakalis's people, and I think they wanted eight debates. We agreed to have four, and where they would be, and so forth. The debates are pretty simple to set up because you usually have a number of groups that want to host them—the League of Women Voters, and Common Cause, and the traditional groups. What you want to do in a campaign is look at the timing, and look at your vulnerability. If you have vulnerability, you want to put the debates out as far as you can away from the election. If you believe that the opponent has vulnerabilities that you want to expose, you want to position that at the right time so you can make hay.

Thompson was a great debater, as you might imagine. He wasn't always on in his debates; some of his debates were good, some we kind of said, "Oh, boy, why didn't he show more enthusiasm? Why didn't he put the hammer in at the right time?" Debates are funny. But we knew we had a really bright person who was good in a prosecutorial style, and if any allegations were made towards him he could handle it. The other image that we loved about debates was just the size issue. I mean, he's a big, imposing man. So it was Big Jim and Little Mike.

DePue: So having four debates didn't put you guys off at all, then?

Gilbert: No.

DePue: The first one was in June—that's pretty early in a campaign season—focused on taxes.

Gilbert: Right, let's see what he's got. And taxes was a tough issue. So let's see what Bakalis has, let's get it out there in time that if we need to do something about it, we'll know what the issue is.

DePue: Second one, September sixth in Carbondale?

Gilbert: Yeah, I remember that. We had been on a campaign swing downstate, and came over to Carbondale that night, at Southern Illinois University. I'm trying to think what the issue was for that one. I don't recall.

DePue: The third one was in Peoria on September nineteenth; it was just a couple weeks later. And from what little I've read on it, it got a little bit nasty. Each one throwing barbs about my opponent's not telling the truth, not being truthful.

Gilbert: Yeah. That's always going to be the case with an incumbent, and it's usually going to be the case with the challenger. I don't think I've ever heard a debate where those famous words weren't uttered. It did get nasty. Bakalis realized, I

think, that he was the underdog. He was running behind in the polls at the time. So he's going to try to throw Thompson off of his guard any way that he can, and calling him a liar, basically.

DePue: Without actually using the words.

Gilbert: Right, is probably the best way he thought to do that.

DePue: The last of the four debates was October fourteenth in Oak Brook, and it was there, apparently, that Bakalis pledged to reduce property taxes by 20 percent over a four-year time period.

Gilbert: Right. Good luck. That was his big pledge, and that promise sounded good to everybody, that's for sure. But following up with how you're going to balance a budget with a huge drop in state revenues like that…

DePue: I'm always confused when I hear that anyway, because isn't it local counties and districts that determine what their tax rates are going to be? How does a state governor determine that?

Gilbert: He was going to do it by legislation; with the Democratic legislature, he thought he could introduce legislation that would reduce property taxes on a statewide issue. Thompson came in and he focused on the budget. A, we need a balanced budget; B, what tax increases can we provide to balance the budget, and through tax breaks offset those tax increases? That was basically his strategy. And there's a lot of "I'll never raise taxes." I don't think he ever made that pledge. But that approach caused Thompson some problems with certain legislators and certain voters. But for Bakalis to make sure a wild promise like that, that's why I said good luck.

DePue: Was there any talk about increasing gas taxes? Especially when you get into the issue of potholes, that's where the money would come from.

Gilbert: When you've got an issue of potholes… The gas tax is an interesting tax. As I recall, 75 percent of road funds come from the federal tax on gasoline in the various states; 25 percent comes from the state. So increasing the gas tax a penny or two pennies is not, with the fluctuation in the price of gas, something that is going to knock you out of the ballpark, but it is going to provide revenue that you're going to need for potholes.

DePue: How did Governor Thompson do that year with press endorsements?

Gilbert: Not as well as he did in the first campaign. There were some tough editorial sessions. We focused, of course, on the Chicago endorsements—the *Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, the *Daily News*—and then the *Rockford Morning Star*, the *Peoria Journal*, *Decatur Herald*, *Champaign News Gazette*, even St. Louis, making sure we had the St. Louis papers covered. Even though they were in Missouri, they covered Illinois. And Carbondale, making sure we had

southern Illinois. I know we did not do as well with endorsements, but we still had some major endorsements.

DePue: What was the mood of the campaign going into election eve?

Gilbert: The mood was good. It was hopeful. It was not quite as positive as in the first campaign, but we felt pretty good. The polling numbers were looking pretty good. So you never know until the ballots are counted.

DePue: Where was the celebration on election night? Another Chicago location, I assume.

Gilbert: Oh yeah, definitely. We always were up here at a hotel.

DePue: But it must've been a pretty early night for you all.

Gilbert: Yeah, the results came in. I think we made the ten o'clock news right on schedule. I think that night we were at what was the Sheraton Hotel, which is now the Intercontinental. I think that's where the celebration was held for this campaign.

DePue: Here's the tally I have for that election: Thompson polled 1,859,684 votes, or 59 percent of the votes, against Bakalis, 1,263,000 and change, 40 percent.

Gilbert: Right. Thompson was reelected by 60 percent of the vote, which was the largest plurality ever for a reelection of a governor in Illinois. I don't know how many counties he carried in that election.

DePue: A lot less voters turned out in that election than in 1976, apparently.

Gilbert: Yeah. Well, it was their first off-year election.

DePue: But an overwhelming victory. So you've got to walk away from that feeling you've got—what's the term they would use now? We've got a…

Gilbert: We've got a juggernaut going. (laughs)

DePue: We've got a mandate.

Gilbert: We got a mandate. We've got a mandate now.

DePue: But what were the promises that he was making, now that he feels he might have a solid mandate?

Gilbert: I don't know [there was a] feeling that now we have a mandate so here are the promises. I think the mood was that now we've got a four-year term to work with, so we can back off on the campaigning a little bit and begin to focus on administration, developing programs, and issues, and attacking some of the real problems that are plaguing government in Illinois—the welfare system,

education, jobs. And DCCA, I think, comes into play at this point, Department of Commerce and Community Affairs.

DePue: How about the Thompson Proposition? How did it fare in the election?

Gilbert: I think overwhelmingly it was approved.

DePue: I've got 83 percent, so that's definitely in that territory.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: November twenty-ninth, then, the state legislature—this is only a couple weeks out from the actual election itself—is that normally during the veto session?

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: The state legislature approves an $8,000 pay increase for themselves, essentially a 40 percent increase, and the first one they would have seen since 1973. So there's an awful lot of inflation between those two years. Forty percent sounds like a lot, unless you factor in the extent of inflation. But it also includes the governor, department officers, constitutional officers, state judges.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: On November twenty-ninth.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Thompson apparently is out east, vacationing in South Carolina?

Gilbert: Vacationing in South Carolina. Had said that he would veto this legislation in advance.

DePue: And he vetoes it the same day by using the autopen. Now, explain quickly what that means.

Gilbert: The autopen is a legal procedure which attaches the governor's notarized signature to a document. The autopen was used on legislation, it was used on resolutions, it was used on proclamations—it was used extensively. The governor cannot take the time to sign everything he needs to sign.

DePue: If it's a big piece of legislation, you oftentimes see the president would have this whole array of pens that he would use to sign a piece of legislation.

Gilbert: With a dozen or two pens, inching his way through his signature, and giving the pens away as souvenirs. No autopens were given away the day he signed (laughter) a legislative pay raise.

DePue: I think perhaps part of the problem was the legislature passes this, and the governor, on the same exact day, vetoes the legislation using the auto pen. He's in South Carolina. And that same exact day, the legislature overrides his veto.

Gilbert: They did. You would think there was a deal in the works, wouldn't you? You would think that this had been agreed to.

DePue: Okay, now, this is the time when I don't want you to be coy at all.

Gilbert: Okay. Me? (laughs)

DePue: Because the question obviously is, was there some kind of an agreement?

Gilbert: I have no idea. And I mean that honestly. I assume that there was, because this is too slick for anybody to believe. Oh, the governor said he's going to veto it, and boom, they're in a veto session, and whoa, we have the votes to override it, and the pay raise goes through. And Thompson's sitting on a beach in South Carolina saying, "Let's have another margarita."

DePue: Was it true to his character to make a deal like that?

Gilbert: No, this was probably the first one that was kind of out of Thompson's character.

DePue: But we had mentioned previously he was sympathetic to what he felt was a need to have these pay increases go through.

Gilbert: He was, but he also was a politician, and he realized that all politicians—state representatives, senators, governors—have to go back to their home districts, and they have to face the music. So what is the best way for them to do that? I guess through this process, that's what they were thinking. The governor later apologized to the state of Illinois in his second inaugural address.

DePue: I want to kind of develop the story line a little bit more before we get to that point, if you don't mind. And this is where you're going to have to get involved now, I would think. What was the public response almost immediately after that?

Gilbert: They were upset. The teabags and the corn started coming in to the executive mansion. There were literally boxes of used teabags that were sent in, symbolic of throwing the tea into Boston Harbor, taxation without representation, only this was pay raise without representation. Also they were sending corn in, for the hogs in Springfield to feed on, so ears of corn started showing up. Teabags caught all of the attention. And while it was ha, ha, ha, this is pretty funny, in the eyes of some people, it was serious, because I think it was regarded by some people that Thompson had lost a little bit of that image, "I'm Jim Thompson, I'm an honest man; you can trust me in

Springfield." Here it seemed he had partaken in a deal and was in bed with the legislators. He had become one of them in this deal. And I think that bothered him. It bothered him a lot. He thought the legislature and himself and his cabinet officers and so forth deserved an increase in pay, because it had been a long time. But the way that it was handled, although it was easy to do, didn't sit well with people.

DePue: Must've caused you, as the press secretary, some headaches.

Gilbert: Yeah. I think our whole staff resonated with the feedback on this. Oops, you know? This isn't Big Jim who came to Springfield in 1976. This is a different governor. But at the same time, it was politics. So we had some discussions about it. And he realized it too; he realized that it was a letdown on his image and his style and his promises.

DePue: Did he get the same kind of response in editorials across the state?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah, especially out of Peoria. Peoria, it seemed, led the way in not only this issue but the cutback issue that follows. There was a Capitol reporter there who just passed away recently, Bill O'Connell, and I think he was responsible for having the *Peoria Journal* kind of take this stand. He liked Big Jim Thompson, but I think he also felt, Whoops, there's kind of a crack in the veneer here; this is not trademark Jim Thompson stuff. So they led the way, and the whole teabag movement and opposition kind of came out of central Illinois. It was an interesting time, that's for sure.

DePue: I know that it didn't take the governor's office long—I'm sure working through legislative liaisons—before he was able to sign a piece of legislation on January seventh that basically phased these pay raises in and softened the pain involved with this.

Gilbert: Tried to soften the pain a little bit, but the issue didn't go away.

DePue: It was only the next day, as you already had mentioned, that Thompson was inaugurated. Thompson said in his inauguration, "I did veto them, but many people concluded that the manner in which I did so, to phrase Macbeth, kept the word of a promise to your ear and broke it to your hope. And you were right, and I apologize."

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Who wrote his inaugural speeches?

Gilbert: He did. He wrote most of them. What we did on major speeches—inauguration, state of the state, budget message—people would give input. Inaugurations were different. Thompson was a great writer, and Gary Starkman participated a little bit. I participated a little bit. But it was basically Thompson and a legal pad; he would write his speech out and send it over. I'd

have it set in speech type, in the way that we had it formatted, but he wrote most of his speeches, especially his inauguration. His '77 inaugural speech was pretty short compared to some of his other speeches, which were pretty long. But '78, I don't know if you've ever heard a sitting governor apologize for something in an inaugural speech. I certainly haven't, and it's not usually in a sitting governor's makeup to apologize for anything. For him to take this step, especially in an inaugural speech, I think he was saying, "Okay, Illinois, I screwed up, and I want your trust back, because we've got a long way to go. I'm sorry, I apologize, I hope you accept my apology, and let's move on."

DePue: Had you been consulted about his decision to apologize?

Gilbert: There was some talk about this, but this was totally his own decision. This was his deal.

DePue: Was he right to do so?

Gilbert: Oh, yeah.

DePue: That gets us up to the point of talking more about Pat Quinn.

Gilbert: (laughs) Here comes Pat Quinn, Quinn the Eskimo.

DePue: Quinn the Eskimo? Why that phrase?

Gilbert: Oh, it's a song. Haven't you ever heard that song?

DePue: No, I'm sorry.

Gilbert: Bob Dylan song. Quinn the Eskimo, here comes Quinn the Eskimo.

DePue: Okay.

Gilbert: "The Mighty Quinn."

DePue: Tell us about his proposal for the Cutback Amendment.

Gilbert: Pat Quinn was a graduate of Northwestern Law School, worked for Dan Walker, and was a community organizer type person. He's a man of the people. If ever there's a rate increase before the legislature, he's in before the Commerce Commission, opposing any rate increases.

DePue: So by the time Thompson's in office, he's an outsider?

Gilbert: Definitely an outsider, rabble rouser. I think those famous quotes we were talking about before, Mike Madigan said he didn't deserve to be called an Irishman, and Dawn Clark Netsch said we should hang him by his feet from the third floor rail in the Capitol rotunda. (DePue laughs) Wasn't well thought of in Springfield.

DePue: And these are fellow Democrats.

Gilbert: Those are Democrats; I don't know if I'd call them fellow Democrats, because they were certainly of a different ilk.

DePue: What was the actual proposal, then, that he was presenting? Do you mind if I paraphrase it here?

Gilbert: No, go ahead.

DePue: The proposal was, if the legislators want a pay raise, then let's reduce the number of legislators because we've got too many of them. That's one way we can save the state some money. In the old system, you had the cumulative voting process; you have fifty-nine Senate districts, and within each of those fifty-nine districts you had three House representatives who ran at large. The way the system normally worked, two of them would be from the majority party and one would be from the minority party. His proposal, the Cutback Amendment, reduced that by one-third, so you go from 177 House members to 118 House members, and all 118 then have to run from a specific district; you're going to have to divide each Senate district in half, and they're not going to be running at large. That was, as I understand, the essence of the proposal.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: What was the governor's view towards the proposal?

Gilbert: His position, and the position of the legislative leaders, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Chicago Sun-Times*, was that this was going to eliminate minority [party] representation in a lot of districts, and that's what cumulative voting was designed to do. The 1970 constitution put this issue up to the legislature. They said if there's going to be a change, if there's going to be a change via a constitutional amendment, that's going to be up to the legislature to decide. So they did not mandate it, but they did provide a way to do it.

DePue: My understanding was that was one of several issues that they couldn't decide at the constitutional convention, and it ended up on the ballot. At the same time the public had to vote on the constitution, they voted on these four initiatives, and the public, I think, retained cumulative voting.

Gilbert: Keep cumulative voting, right, which left it up to the legislature if there were going to be any changes.

DePue: It didn't take long for the public to respond positively to Quinn's proposal. Where was Thompson on the issue?

Gilbert: I believe he sided with the legislative leaders on this issue. It was the largest statewide petition drive ever conducted in the state, and that really put Quinn

on the map. So then it went on the ballot of the 1980 election, which was a non-gubernatorial election.

DePue: A presidential election year.

Gilbert: A presidential election year.

DePue: And it won rather handily.

Gilbert: It did.

DePue: Let's go back to 1979. In March the governor presents a pretty lean budget. Would you say he was following through on his campaign pledges that year?

Gilbert: Oh, he was following through on his campaign pledges, but he was following through on reality. I mean, the economy is in the dumps. Inflation's higher than it's ever been. Unemployment is going out of control. So for him to do anything else would not have been good.

DePue: April third, Jane Byrne is elected mayor of Chicago.

Gilbert: There had been a huge snowstorm in Chicago and in northern Illinois, and Mayor Bilandic thought he was on top of snow removal. But the people who lived there didn't think so. Side streets didn't get plowed for weeks, and so little Jane Byrne kind of came out of nowhere, made this a huge issue, ran against Bilandic, and won. On this date, April third, Governor Thompson was in the White House for a dinner that night. I think it was for a Governors Association dinner. I was in Washington with him. I was at a hotel, but the press corps had my number, and the first call that I got was from an AP reporter. He said, "Jane Byrne has just been elected mayor of Chicago, and we need a quote from the governor." I said, "Okay, he's at a dinner in the White House. Let me see if I can get him. I'll call you back."

I called the White House, and I said, "I need to talk to Governor Thompson of Illinois. This is an emergency." He said, "Well, I'm sorry. He's at a dinner with the President. He's not available right now." I said, "I'm sorry, but this is an emergency. I need to talk to the governor right now." And they said, "Okay, let me see if I can get him." So they go in and they pull Thompson out of the dinner. He said, "What's up?" I said, "Jane Byrne's just been elected mayor of Chicago." He goes, "No shit?" (laughter) I said, "And the AP is looking for a quote. Want me to tell them that?" We both laughed, and I think he said, "Yeah, yeah, tell them that." I said, "No, no, no, no, we can't do that." So we talked and put together a quote. I don't even remember what it was. But obviously [something like], The people of Chicago have spoken, and Mayor Byrne is the new mayor of Chicago, and I look forward to working with her, and blah, blah, blah. Michael Bilandic had been a good partner—I wouldn't say partner—a good mayor of Chicago for Thompson to work with. They got along well. And who knew what the relationship was going to be with Jane Byrne? So we said nice things about her.

DePue: How did it end up?

Gilbert: Fair. I think she, looking for any kind of partner she could get in terms of help in the legislature, was willing to talk. I don't remember there being any big blowups between Byrne and Thompson, but it wasn't a love affair, either.

DePue: Yesterday we talked about some of Thompson's trade missions, and the first one that he took overseas was in late May, eighteenth through the twenty-second, to Japan.

Gilbert: He took three trade missions to Japan during the time I was there, and built a successful trading relationship with Japan. That first trade mission, the Japanese consulate, I think in Chicago, called my office and said, "Oh, we're very pleased that Governor Thompson's going to be coming to Tokyo, and we understand that his nickname in the States is Big Jim." I said, "Right." And he said, "We just want to make sure he's not insulted if we characterize him in that manner." I said, "Oh, no. He loves people, he loves nicknames, so that's fine."

We get to Japan, and at the first luncheon where he's meeting with the trade consulates and some of the higher Japanese officials, they're introducing him. They couldn't find a name in Japanese that translated from Big Jim. It didn't make sense to the Japanese people. So their way of translating it was, "And so, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the governor of Illinois, James R. Thompson, also known as Tokyo Tower." (laughter) Tokyo Tower was this huge communications tower in the heart of Tokyo. Tokyo's such a big place, 13 million people. Traffic jams are impossible to get through. And your point of reference in the city is always Tokyo Tower. I'd go out for a jog early in the morning and get lost, but I see Tokyo Tower. Ah, I know Hotel Okura is not far from there. So he was known in Japan as Tokyo Tower, and in the United States he's known as Big Jim.

DePue: August, he signs legislation raising the minimum drinking age to twenty-one. It was about a decade before that the voting age had been lowered to eighteen across the country. And here's a guy who made a reputation for himself, and we've talked about it a lot today, of drinking on the campaign. He's got it under control, but he likes to drink. He had no hesitation of signing that legislation?

Gilbert: No, not at all. He thought it was the right thing to do. He signed a couple pieces of legislation that dealt with drinking. Another one was allowing park districts the right to control the sale of alcohol in public parks. That was the legislation, but it also allowed the Chicago Park District to approve the sale of alcohol at Soldier Field for football games. The day this piece of legislation was signed, it was an exhibition game, and I believe it was against either the Cleveland Browns or the Pittsburgh Steelers. I am up in the booth in Soldier Field with George S. Halas, and we're watching this legislation be signed at halftime of the game on the fifty-yard line. They have a table set up. And Jim

Thompson is signing legislation that is going to allow beer to be served in Soldier Field. He signed the legislation. You have never heard a roar in your life. George Halas turned to me and said, "I think they like this bill." (laughter)

George Halas was an interesting man, wonderful man. The first time I shook hands with him, I've never seen a bigger hand in my life. He had paws. And I don't know if bear paws, if that's where the image came from with George Halas. He came to Springfield a couple of times. He came to meet with the governor about this bill originally. The Halases had always been supporters of the governor, and the Bears had always been very good to the governor.

DePue: Next I wanted to see if there's any kind of Illinois connection to things that were happening on the national stage late in 1979: November, the Iranian Hostage Crisis begins; December 24, the Soviet Union invades Afghanistan, and not too long after that, Carter cancels the U.S. participation in the Moscow Olympics. And on January 4—this one definitely has an impact in Illinois—he declares a grain embargo against the Soviet Union.

Gilbert: Right. That had a big impact on us.

DePue: Anything you wanted to say about those events?

Gilbert: I don't recall anything directly that the governor did in response to those. I know Illinois farmers were greatly upset about the grain embargo, but there wasn't a heck of a lot we could do about it, except register any disagreement with the White House, and through the Governors Association. I know there were other grain states, Kansas and Nebraska in particular, that were upset about this. But at the same time, there wasn't much we could do about it.

DePue: Those were wheat states. Illinois and Iowa, those are corn states. So it had a bigger impact on wheat sales, you think?

Gilbert: I don't know if it was bigger. Illinois was the second largest agricultural exporting state in the nation at the time, and soybeans and corn were our main exports. So yeah, that was tough.

DePue: That gets us into 1980, which is a presidential election year. And we've talked a lot already about whether or not Thompson had presidential aspirations. Obviously there are two heavyweights on the Republican side that are going to be running that year: one is George Bush, the other one is Ronald Reagan. Do you think it was a matter of timing, as far as Governor Thompson was concerned? That if you got those two heavyweights involved, his chances of emerging in that field are pretty slim, so the timing wasn't right for the governor in that respect?

Gilbert: Well, the timing wasn't right, and the circumstances were not right. Reagan was coming through strong, Bush was a very formidable candidate, and

Thompson really had not established much of a record on his own at this point in time. So the discussion started among the media, when they're seeing how things are playing out, Thompson would be a great number two; he'd be a great vice presidential candidate.

DePue: The kind of name you put on there to balance the ticket.

Gilbert: Yeah, exactly right. He was asked about it by the press a number of times, and I think he always said no, he really wasn't interested. The governor and I once talked about vice presidential ambitions, and he said, "You know, there are only two positions in Washington that I would really consider." One, of course, is being number one, running for president. And that still appealed to him, even as he was governor, although there was no activity planned for him to run for president, sorry. And the second one was head of the CIA. All of these other positions that people, the media in particular, carved out for Thompson in Washington—attorney general was mentioned most often, the Supreme Court, and third one was vice president—nobody ever mentioned the CIA except Thompson, (laughter) in his private discussions. The whole intrigue of the CIA and intelligence, I think that was his… I couldn't think of a better director of CIA than Jim Thompson. He would've been fantastic.

DePue: Of those two main candidates for the Republican ticket—I know the answer here—George Bush or Ronald Reagan?

Gilbert: Was?

DePue: George Bush.

Gilbert: Right. He had come through Springfield, and Thompson hosted a dinner for him in the mansion. There was a great relationship between the two, and I think that's why he felt comfortable in backing George Bush.

DePue: It was a heated primary campaign between those two men, and I'm sure you remember this phrase: voodoo economics. This was a response to the supply-side economics that Ronald Reagan was pushing. How did Thompson view that subject?

Gilbert: I don't know that he took a stand on that position, but how does it affect Illinois is the way he would look at that. What's in it for Illinois, and how's this going to affect us?

DePue: Was he careful not to burn any bridges in terms of that race?

Gilbert: Oh yeah, very much so. And later on, it definitely paid off for him.

DePue: Was he able to be an enthusiastic supporter of Reagan once he got the bid?

Gilbert: Oh yeah. And I'll tell you some stories down the road about the Thompson-Reagan relationship.

DePue: Yeah, it's probably going to be next time we meet. You'd mentioned before, when we were talking about 1980, the Chicago school summit. Anything else you wanted to illustrate in that one?

Gilbert: That was probably the strongest bridge that was built between Thompson and the Byrne administration. This was her salvation, so it was very important to building relationships between Thompson and Chicago.

DePue: The budget that year was $14.5 billion, so a pretty significant uptick.

Gilbert: Yes, it's ticking up. Most of this is going to increases for education, and not necessarily for capital projects, but economic development projects with the implementation of the new Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, DCCA, and foreign trade's on the plate. I'm sure there were some other issues that were driving up the budget.

DePue: Do you remember anything else of significance in 1980? Most of the attention for the press would've gone to the 1980 election campaign, at the presidential level especially.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: November fourth. Ronald Reagan wins in a landslide, I think carries forty-eight or forty-nine states.

Gilbert: Yeah, it was a landslide for sure.

DePue: Was Thompson, or you, surprised by the scale of his victory?

Gilbert: Yes, surprised by the scale, but knowing the mood of the country and the ability of Reagan to communicate so effectively, I think his victory, certainly, was to be expected. Maybe the size of the landslide was more than had been anticipated.

DePue: But as you've already mentioned, this is a very tough period economically for the United States, and certainly for the state of Illinois. So November sixteenth, Thompson announces a hiring freeze.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: How did that go over?

Gilbert: That was kind of a double-edged sword. The hiring freeze, of course, was an act of austerity and holding the budget down. The budget had crept up to $14 billion, which was over his initial budget of $13.5 billion. So we're holding

expenses, we're watching our budget; we're not allowing hiring to take us out of our budgetary limits.

DePue: Was an aspect of that, Hey, if we're going to have any hiring it's got to be approved by the governor's office?

Gilbert: That's kind of the way it turned out. I think you're beginning to see a change at this time in Thompson's political stance. He's gone from a position of, Man, we can't get a job through Springfield—all the croaking that the Republican county chairmen were doing—to, Oh, maybe this guy is kind of getting the drift here, that any hiring's going to be controlled by the governor's office, i.e. it's going to be Republican. He may not tell you this, but I would say this was the beginning of Thompson becoming a political boss—seeing the value of patronage, of hiring your own, of building your own base.

DePue: So that plays well in Republican circles, but is there a pushback in the Democrats or in the press?

Gilbert: I don't know that the press was pushing back on it. At the time they probably saw this as an austerity move. The Democrats, what jobs were they going to get anyway? I don't know that it was a big deal with them.

DePue: It was a big year for the Republicans in 1980, so George Ryan ends up being the Speaker of the House in 1981. I think the Democrats have a very thin margin in the Illinois State Senate. What I don't understand is how Republican David Shapiro ended up being selected as the Senate president.

Gilbert: You must remember that this '81-'82 period, when Ryan is Speaker of the House, is the only time Thompson had one house Republican, the same as he was. So this was a big deal, the thin majority, and the dissension in the Senate over president pro tem is an interesting time. Thompson steps in to the Senate—

DePue: Remind me again of his role in the Illinois State Senate.

Gilbert: It's called for by the constitution. Thompson, from the time he was elected in '77 up until '80, had this kind of underlying spirit of cooperation with the Democratic leaders. They had come to him. They were able to work out deals. They had worked through the Chicago schools summit situation, so things are good. But all of a sudden, we have a situation develop in a Democratic-controlled Senate where they cannot pick a president pro tem, and the Illinois constitution calls for the governor to come in and preside over the Senate in its first meeting to choose its own presiding officer. I'll read you a little excerpt here. "While the thirty fractitious Democrats squabbled, with dissident holdouts refusing to support reelection of Senate President Philip J. Rock"—Thompson's good buddy—"Thompson declared elected David C. Shapiro, an Amboy dentist, who was the unanimous choice of the Senate's twenty-nine

Republicans…" So we're thirty to twenty-nine, and Thompson comes in, bangs the gavel, says Shapiro's the Senate president. Because the Democrats couldn't decide, being in the chair, he made this declaration.

Ultimately, the Illinois Supreme Court came in and saved the day. They sorted out the mess and declared that the votes of a clear majority of the fifty-nine Senators, or thirty votes, were needed to elect the Senate president, not just a plurality of the votes cast. So Phil Rock then was put back in the seat by the Supreme Court, basically. Rock, who harbored no grudges, and Thompson went on to be great allies through a lot of legislative budget deals, and through the rest of his administration.

DePue: Were you reading from this Charlie Wheeler article in *Illinois Issues*?[51]

Gilbert: Yeah, that's Charlie Wheeler's.

DePue: I understand that when he gave his state of the state address on February third, the Democrats didn't even bother to show up for it.

Gilbert: (laughs) Yeah. That was a good one.

DePue: How did the Supreme Court end up getting involved with this discussion?

Gilbert: I think a suit was filed, or some type of legal action was taken, which the Supreme Court had the authority to do. They settle elections, as we'll find out later on in Thompson's case.

DePue: Well said, yeah. So an interesting start to that 1981 legislative session. You don't think the governor suffered any permanent damage because of that?

Gilbert: Not permanent, no. When the Democrats failed to show up for a state of the state message, they were sending a message. The message was received, and politics as usual, life, went on. And Thompson, being the great conciliator that he was and knowing the art of compromise, soon everybody was back at the table.

DePue: I'm going to ask you about the four legislative leaders. You've already addressed, to a certain extent, your view and the governor's view towards Phil Rock. Anything else you'd want to say on him as a Senate president?

Gilbert: Very decent man. Came out of Oak Park, a lawyer. Knew the Chicago political scheme extremely well, but also had a good feel for his downstate senators. He was a man you could sit down with and talk with. The four tops, the four legislative leaders, at that time would have been Phil Rock and Pate

[51] Charles N. Wheeler, "Gov. James R. Thompson, 1977-1991: The Complete Campaigner, the Pragmatic Centrist," *Illinois Issues* (December 1990), 12-16. [Placeholder for Thompson, Fletcher, and D'Esposito interviews(??) *Handbook* entry "Theft of the Senate"].

Philip in the Senate, George Ryan as the Speaker of the House, and was Madigan the House minority leader?

DePue: By this time Madigan was minority leader.

Gilbert: Bringing them over to the executive mansion to sit down to discuss issues, it was a pretty interesting group, interested in solving problems rather than fighting each other and poking each other in the chest.

DePue: Fair to say that James "Pate" Philip was a different kind of animal than Phil Rock?

Gilbert: (laughs) Yeah, I think it's fair to say that Pate Philip was a different kind of animal than just about anybody else in Springfield. But not to say he wasn't a loyal soldier, and he wasn't fighting for what he thought best. Ex-Marine, wonderful, wonderful guy, who could rant with the best of them on conservative issues. Although he wouldn't agree with the governor all the time, when it came crunch time, Pate Philip was usually there.

DePue: How about George Ryan to work with on the House side?

Gilbert: Same with George. Didn't always agree with the governor, but when it came time to carry water, George was there.

DePue: I've heard that one of the things that George Ryan was pushing for was the right-to-work legislation. That that was something he tried to push forward several times.

Gilbert: Yeah, that was a big issue with him. You can understand where he's coming from. In a way, he was kind of a visionary. If you look at what has happened to states surrounding Illinois on right-to-work, all those chickens have come home to roost. Right-to-work has been implemented in one way or another in Wisconsin; in Michigan, one of the biggest union states you'll ever find; in Indiana.

DePue: For Michigan, I think, after the demise of Detroit.

Gilbert: Yeah, definitely. So I can understand where Speaker Ryan was coming from.

DePue: How about Thompson's relationship with Mike Madigan?

Gilbert: At the time, Madigan is beginning to build his Democratic power base, which will develop as the years go on. And Mike Madigan is realizing that in order to succeed he must get a majority in the House. That's his goal, even during this time. He is going to be acting out of a strict, narrow focus on what does Mike Madigan have to do to get control of the House to become Speaker of the House. So his relationship with Thompson was a real chess match. You got two smart people kind of dealing off the same deck, and Thompson's also

realizing, If Madigan succeeds, how am I going to work with him? So he's going to be careful about not stepping on any legislative toes here, Republican or Democrat.

DePue: It sounds like then there's a different kind of relationship between Phil Rock in the Senate and Mike Madigan in the House.

Gilbert: Yeah, and that's probably due to the type of people each one of them is. Phil Rock has control of the Senate by only one vote, so on some tricky issues he may need Thompson's support. At the same time, he's got to keep his thirty votes in house. Madigan, on the other hand, is in the minority, so that's going to be different, although Mike Madigan does control some Republican representatives from Chicago who are probably in office due to the opponents they were running against were so bad.

DePue: Well, this is still the last two years that cumulative voting is in effect.

Gilbert: And cumulative voting. So Madigan's going to pick off a few of those guys.

DePue: Makes for interesting politics in Springfield then.

Gilbert: Oh, it's fascinating. Fascinating. Our legislative liaisons were, from time to time, Jim Edgar, who was on our staff as a legislative liaison.

DePue: He was appointed in '78, maybe early '79.

Gilbert: Early '79. Johnny Washburn, who came in, and Kirk Dillard, who was there. Zale Glauberman was one of the early ones. These guys earned their pay. They earned their pay, big-time. They were good. They knew how to work the floor, and they knew when to bring Thompson into the picture.

DePue: You just mentioned Jim Edgar, and it's January 1981 that Governor Thompson decides to select Jim Edgar as the new secretary of state. First of all, how did that happen? Because that's a constitutional office, we're supposed to vote on that.

Gilbert: Right. Well, who had been the secretary of state?

DePue: Alan Dixon.

Gilbert: And what happened to Alan Dixon?

DePue: He ran for the U.S. Senate.

Gilbert: And was elected. If there was a strong contender from the Democratic Party to oppose Thompson for the governorship, I would've said it would've been Alan Dixon. He had such a strong base as secretary of state, but I think he saw the opportunity to run for the Senate, and that really appealed to him.

DePue: Why did Stevenson leave? Do you know?

Gilbert: Stevenson?

DePue: Was it Stevenson who stepped away from the U.S. Senate? I should know this, but I can't recall specifically. Because, of course, it's going to be Stevenson two years later that's going to be running for governor.

Gilbert: Yeah, exactly.

DePue: Well, go ahead.

Gilbert: Yeah, we'll figure that one out. Under the constitutional convention, the governor has the job of appointing Dixon's replacement. And while it's a Democratic-held office, he doesn't necessarily have to appoint a Democrat—although the Democrats would've loved that, holding onto the biggest patronage office in state government. He appoints Jim Edgar, a downstater from Charleston, who had been a representative in the Illinois House and had worked for Thompson as a legislative liaison.

DePue: I think he had two years in each of those jobs.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: So that's not a lot of experience at the time. Why Jim Edgar instead of George Ryan or some of the other Republicans who were vying for the job?

Gilbert: That's a good question. He wanted to put someone in there that he thought could carry on the job in the style that Thompson had [brought] into state government, and Jim Edgar filled that to a T. He was a Christian. He was a nondrinker, a Baptist. He loved racehorses. (laughs) I don't know how that works out, but it did. And he represented the eastern part of the state that had kind of been neglected, I think.

DePue: Personality-wise, there's a huge difference between those two.

Gilbert: There's a big difference. There's a big difference.

DePue: But did Thompson see gubernatorial potential in Jim Edgar at that time?

Gilbert: Yeah, he may have, or he may have seen U.S. Senate potential. I think he saw a person that had the ability to keep moving up the ladder.

DePue: I think this is probably as good a time as any for us to call it a day. Next time we get together, it's going to be a little bit more on '81 but a lot about 1982 and beyond. This has been a fascinating discussion today. Thank you very much.

Gilbert: Thank you, Mark, and I'll look forward to seeing how all of this comes out. (laughter)

(End of interview #4. #5 continues.)

# Interview with David Gilbert

# IST-A-L-2014-011

Interview # 5: April 22, 2014

Interviewer: Mark DePue



DePue: Today is Tuesday, April 22, 2014. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. My goal today is to finish up my interview series with David Gilbert. Good morning, David.

Gilbert: Good morning, Mark.

DePue: It's been a fun series of interviews. We've still got 1981, '82, and into 1983, and then very briefly we'll talk about what you've been up to since that time. We've also got one of the most fascinating elections to talk about; I'm really looking forward to that. But I thought I'd ask you to start with your comment to another journalist about the way you felt about your job as Jim Thompson's press secretary.

Gilbert: Bob Herguth interviewed me a few years into my job. Bob Herguth was a longtime columnist for the *Chicago Daily News*, and later the *Sun-Times*. I told him I had the best job in the world, being press secretary for Big Jim Thompson. This was about two years after he was first elected. Thinking about the course of politics today—the back and forth of politics, and how there just seems to be no coming together, no compromise, no thinking about the common good of the people of Illinois—I don't think it would be a very good job to be press secretary for Governor Quinn or Bruce Rauner.

DePue: How about if it was a guy like Jim Thompson running again?

Gilbert: Rauner does have a lot of the same skills that Thompson possessed as a political candidate. Thompson kind of brought a new face to politics in Illinois. Dan Walker was a very populist candidate for governor. Thompson, I wouldn't call him a populist as more of a centrist. His philosophy was bringing the people of the state of Illinois a government they could trust, led

by a governor and an administration they could trust. History has borne out—and I think will continue to bear out—that of all governors of the state, perhaps with the exception of Jim Edgar, Thompson certainly had the longest tenure of a scandal-free government.

DePue: We left off in the early stages of 1981 last time we finished, and today we'll just pick it up right there. I wanted to start with March first, when the newspapers announced that Thompson had decided to run for reelection in 1982. Was that always a foregone conclusion, or was that something that he had to think about?

Gilbert: It's something he thought about, for sure. Any politician who's worth his or her salt has to make that decision on their own, in their own heart. You can seek advice from your spouse, from your family, from your friends, and from your advisers, but when it comes right down to it, that decision has to be made by the candidate or the officeholder themselves. For this reason, there's a vital ingredient that comes with being a successful candidate or an officeholder who's going to be reelected, and that is, you have to have the fire in the belly. You have to have the will to do it. Politics has a way of bringing people up to the highest peak. There is no greater feeling in the world for a politician than to be elected. And to be elected by an overwhelming margin, as Thompson was in 1976, then reelected by the largest margin any governor had been reelected by two years later, that takes a lot out of a person emotionally. Anytime you go up, there has to be a period where you come down. So if you don't have the fire in the belly, the desire to do it, it's not going to work.

Thompson did think long and hard about it. He did want to seek reelection. It was not a good time to be seeking reelection. The national economy was in the pits. State of Illinois economy was definitely in the pits. School funding, which seems to always be a problem, was at a crisis at this point in time. So there were a lot of good reasons for him to fold his cards and go home. But he, along with his wife Jayne, decided that he was going to do it. They did have a young child, Samantha, who was literally born while they were living in the executive mansion in Springfield. Did they want to continue raising her in the eye of the public, the eye of the tiger? But he decided that he wanted to do it; there was a job that still needed to be done, and he thought he was the right man to handle it.

DePue: Were you consulted at all about this?

Gilbert: We talked about it, but it was always an open-ended conversation. It was never, Do you think I should run again? Thompson didn't operate like that. He would operate with open-ended questions: What do you think the state of the state is now, and what could we do about it if we chose to run again? What's our relationship with the media?—which was my job—Has that changed? What are some areas that need to be addressed if we decide to run again? So it was never seeking, Should I do it or shouldn't I do it, because that was his

decision. It was always more, Let's kind of view the landscape here and see what it looks like.

DePue: Were you surprised when he announced?

Gilbert: No.

DePue: Were you surprised he announced that early?

Gilbert: No, because if he was going to do it, he had to come out early and run hard, run really hard. As it turned out, it was going to be his most difficult campaign. We thought the first campaign was going to be the toughest. That ended up to be very rewarding, carrying 100 out of 102 counties in the state. So we knew it was going to be difficult. We knew the economic conditions in the state had to be addressed, and that it would be tough, so we had to lay out a strong game plan and go at it really hard.

DePue: Was it at all awkward or difficult? Because you'd just gotten past this selection of a Senate president, and that was ugly. I don't know if that damaged Thompson or not.

Gilbert: It did, to a certain extent. In true Thompson fashion, which I don't know is very characteristic of many politicians, he made a mistake in presiding over the Senate during a very cantankerous election process in the Senate; he kind of swung the vote to his candidate. He realized that he had alienated some of the legislative partners that he really needed to have his arms around if he was going to proceed in the next term with any progress at all. Phil Rock became one of his strongest legislative allies, and the two of them forged some legislative issues through the legislature that he signed into law.

DePue: March fourth apparently was the day that Thompson made his budget address, a $14.9 billion budget that he was recommending. Of course, that's before the legislature starts to take a whack at it, but that was certainly the biggest budget proposal that had been made up to that time, and somewhat reflective of a pretty high inflation rate for the past several years.

Gilbert: Huge inflation rate, because if you recall in his first budget address, I think the state budget totaled about $11.3 billion, something like that. So this was a pretty big jump. It also reflected, as you have mentioned, inflation soaring out of control, interest rates heading up, and unemployment going up in the state and in the nation. Energy is also becoming a crisis, which we're going to have to deal with down the road. So it was a tough time.

DePue: I'll put some numbers to our discussion about economics once we get to 1982, but we still need to talk a little bit more about what was going on in '81. I would assume that Thompson was happy to hear that in early April, President Reagan lifted the grain embargo, which meant that Illinois farmers were going

to have a chance again to start selling to places like that huge market in Russia.

Gilbert: Right, exactly. This was very big. Soybeans and corn in the Illinois agricultural economy were huge. Fifth largest state in the nation at the time, second most agriculture-exporting state in the nation. So when President Reagan lifted the embargo, it was like a new day had arrived in downstate Illinois.

DePue: This was also a time of some severe crisis in the farm community because of people who'd gotten overextended in those heydays, the late '70s—lots of bank foreclosures and things like that.

Gilbert: A lot of farm equipment for sale, a lot of farms were being gobbled up by the big industrial operations. It was a difficult time. Land values also were being affected. Back in the day—and back in the day being the '70s and the early '80s—an acre of farmland in McLean County was selling in excess of $3,000 or $4,000 an acre, and that was pretty cool. But the economy had all of a sudden taken a turn, and those numbers were not there anymore.

DePue: And the equity wasn't in the land, so the farmers really struggled. Did the governor try to do anything to address the banking crisis that was going on in the farm community?

Gilbert: He was doing everything he could as a governor, but most banking regulations are regulated by the Fed, and there's not a whole lot you can do from the banking standpoint. Illinois, at the time, had a wonderful network of community banks, and these were owned and operated by people whose families had owned and operated that bank in that community for a long time. While they were as sensitive as they could be in terms of extending loans and providing relief, after a while it just became too much to bear for even some of these small banks, and they got gobbled up. They were picked up or closed down, so this was a time of a real shift, especially in the agricultural community in Illinois.

DePue: We're talking right out in your home in Deerfield, so let's shift gears and ask you about RTA. That was a topic of discussion in '81, and I think into '82 as well, but what was the nub of the issue about the Regional Transit Authority? Is that the correct name for RTA?

Gilbert: Regional Transportation Authority is the correct name, right, the RTA. I had a lot of background in this because before I joined Jim Thompson in his first campaign for governor; I was transportation editor for the *Chicago Tribune*. This was at the time when the RTA was being formed, and there was a lot of controversy about it.

DePue: You're talking about when you were a journalist.

Gilbert: When I was a journalist. This was back in 1974 and '75. The proposal for an RTA was to consolidate into one governing body all of the public transportation in Chicago and the six-county surrounding area: all the commuter railroads, all the bus lines, and the CTA elevated trains and buses in Chicago. The fear, the great fear, which still is there today, is that, Well, Chicago's going to run the whole thing, especially in areas like Peoria and Joliet. I remember going in and interviewing people, public officials as well as the man on the street in Joliet, and they would say, "Hey, all it means is that we're just going to pay the price to fund the transportation for all those people in Chicago, and we don't want to do it." That's been the classic distinction between Chicago and downstate Illinois for ever and ever. The RTA just kind of consolidated this feeling and these emotions and brought it to a head. So as you're referring in 1981, that was a serious issue. Now, the reason for consolidating all this transportation was capturing more federal funding for mass transit in the metropolitan area. That's what made it make sense.

DePue: What was Thompson's position?

Gilbert: He was pro RTA, but he also knew how to walk the fine line on a sensitive issue like this. It was a topic of one of his summits. He was a summiteer; whenever there was a big division over an issue like this, he tried to bring both sides together.[52] Oftentimes it was Republicans and Democrats. It was the city of Chicago; it was downstate. It was union; it was nonunion. He was pretty successful at it, as you look back over his career.

DePue: Was one of the issues his control of the board, and whether or not there were more Chicago versus suburban people serving on that board?

Gilbert: It was that issue then; it's still that issue today. The RTA is, once again, up in the air about who's going to control it.

DePue: Do you recall who won the fight, or whether there was a fight back in '81 or '82?

Gilbert: Yeah, I believe it turned out to be a pretty bipartisan resolution, where the governor had appointments, the mayor had appointments, the county board had appointments, and everyone seemed to be moderately satisfied at the end of the day.

DePue: I'm not sure the exact date for this, but the next issue I wanted to talk about was unions. I think we talked at the last session quite a bit about Thompson's position on unions, which, maybe looking back from today's perspective is surprising; it was very pro-union, and especially very pro-public sector union. But I wanted to ask you about a protest by the unions at the State Capitol

[52] On both the RTA and summitry in general, see Julian D'Esposito, interview by Mike Czaplicki [placeholder for dates and final pages(??)]

building, where both Thompson and Democratic legislative leaders went out to the crowd and were appealing to the crowd, the union people protesting outside the Capitol building, that they were basically on their side in this issue. I'm just going to read from this article by Mitchell Locin and Daniel Egler: "But Thompson one-upped the Democrats in showing his support of labor by inviting everyone to a beer party on the executive mansion lawn."[53]

Gilbert: (laughter) I remember that day well. It was a nice, beautiful day, and it was kind of a spur of the moment deal. All hands were on deck to get the beer, get the hot dogs, get everything set up; that was a beer summit, I guess you would call it. Thompson exhibited this ability, right from the very beginning, not to be afraid to wade into an issue or a crowd where he might be perceived as unpopular.

We were in southern Illinois, and there was a miners' strike in this area where we were going. We're driving by, and everybody had advised him, "Whatever you do, don't cross the line. Don't even talk to these guys. You might get hurt. It's a sensitive issue." So we're driving down the road, he sees the picketers outside the mine, and he says, "Stop the car, stop the car." He hops out, and the miners are looking at him. They know it's Big Jim Thompson, the governor of Illinois, and they don't know what in the heck's going to happen. He walks up and says, "Hi, how you doing? What's going on?" Probably put his schedule back by an hour, but he sat and talked to those guys. At the end of the time, he gets back in his car. They're all waving, "Hey, Big Jim, don't forget us when you get back to Springfield," and a very cordial reception. So it's not unusual that he would join Democratic leaders and go out and address these upset union people, then throw a beer party for them over on the mansion lawn.

DePue: Here's my next question: who paid for the beer?

Gilbert: (laughs) That's a good question. Was this a legislative event? Was this a government event? I don't know if it came out of the campaign fund or out of the executive mansion food fund, but no one seemed to be upset about it at that time.

DePue: Nobody raised any questions in the press?

Gilbert: There were other occasions when questions about who was paying for the food was brought up, but not on this day.

DePue: September fifteenth, Governor Thompson signed a couple bills. One of them dealt with workfare, which was a new proposal that if you're going to get some welfare payments you had to work, and also a welfare fraud bill. Do either of those ring a bell to you?

[53] "Thompson Beer Bust Cools Labor's Wrath," *Chicago Tribune*, June 3, 1981.

Gilbert: Yeah, they do, because there was kind of a national trend in this direction at the time, and even into the Clinton years—you'll remember that Clinton was saying that welfare should be provided for people who were out seeking jobs and trying to get on the payrolls of companies. I think that for the voting public in downstate Illinois, this was a very popular position. Chicago was probably divided, and in Cook County it was probably something that most people favored.

DePue: Was he already running for election by this time, actively on the campaign trail?

Gilbert: As we discussed before, while a decision maybe had not been made at this point in time, at least a public decision, Jim Thompson was always running for reelection, whether he was going to run for governor or not. I think after fourteen years, even when he had decided not to run again, he did not stop campaigning until he turned the lights out on the final day.

DePue: Did he know by that time who his likely opponent was going to be on the Democratic side?

Gilbert: Probably had a pretty good idea. Stevenson seemed to be the most popular name thrown about. He had been elected to the Senate twice, and he seemed to be a pretty likely candidate.

DePue: Was Stevenson somebody that the Democrats essentially drafted to do this?

Gilbert: I'm not sure. It was my understanding that Stevenson drafted himself. He really wanted this job.

DePue: The Fall of '81 might seem like an early time to put your campaign team together for most people, but certainly not if you're actually serious about running. Was it essentially the same team that he put together for the first two elections?

Gilbert: Essentially. Names of people were always coming and going. But we're in a different position in the second and third elections in that he is the incumbent, so the governor's staff had to be very careful about doing campaign work on government time. We watched this very, very closely. There are always stories that pop up about phone calls that have been made, computers that have been used—or word processors, back in that day—for campaign work on government time, but we watched it very closely. Myself, I stayed on the governor's staff payroll, on the state payroll. I had recruited David Fields, who was UPI bureau chief in the Springfield press room, to come in as an assistant, and we moved David over to the Citizens for Thompson office. So he was off the state payroll but on the campaign payroll. Jim Skilbeck, who was another assistant of mine, also moved over to Citizens for Thompson at the time. We watched this very carefully.

DePue: Where was that office?

Gilbert: We had a Chicago office on Michigan Avenue, near Symphony Center. Back then it was called Orchestra Hall. And we had a campaign office in downtown Springfield, but I forget what the address of that was.

DePue: Which one of those two was considered to have the lead?

Gilbert: Wherever Thompson was. (laughter)

DePue: I mentioned earlier that I'm going to put out some figures here for 1982. Of course this is not a presidential year, but it's going to be an awfully tough year for the Republicans to run nationwide, because the national economy was just in the toilet at the time. National inflation rate at the beginning of '82 was 8.4 percent. **Eight-point-four percent**.

Gilbert: And rising.

DePue: And rising. That would stagger us today.

Gilbert: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Unemployment rate in January was 8.6 percent, and I think that was roughly where the state was at as well.

Gilbert: Mm-hmm, which is a little bit lower than it is today in Illinois. (laughs) I thought I might throw that in.

DePue: Just to put a marker on there. The inflation rate's not quite the same.

Gilbert: No.

DePue: And here's one that would just amaze anybody from today's perspective: the interest rate was 15.37 percent for a thirty-year loan in January, although it's trending down. Fifteen-plus percent.

Gilbert: Yeah, isn't that amazing? Can you imagine? And we are seeing rates available today at 2.5 percent, 3 percent, 4 percent.

DePue: Who would want to invest their money, buy a house, start a business, when those were the rates that you had to do it at? This is going to be a very, very tough time for anybody to be running for reelection, so the outsiders have a leg up in that respect, I would think. Misery index is 17 percent. Any more reflections on those dismal numbers I just threw out?

Gilbert: Oh, it was terrible. It was a terrible time. The governor was the youngest governor ever elected governor of the state of Illinois. He always had a youthful appearance about him. He loved to play racquetball, and he was on

the cover of *US Racquetball Magazine* or whatever [it was called]. I don't know if he was that good, but he loved to play; it was a good form of exercise. He had always been perceived as a young man, a young governor. So now he's running for his third term, even though one of them was short. And as any politician who runs for more than three terms, he's got a little moss that's beginning to gather. His hair is thinning out a little bit more than when he ran in 1976. That fire in the belly that I talked about before could easily get diminished in a person who is facing a set of numbers like you just read. So it was a tough time, but he was fired up. He loved a challenge. He said, "If I could do it the first time, I can certainly do it the third time," in the face of such depressing numbers.

DePue: One of the keys in running for reelection is always going to be whether or not you got the money to do it. Do you remember who headed up the fundraising efforts this third time around?

Gilbert: I don't, offhand. Bob Malott from FMC Corporation was always a stalwart. Bill Cellini was a big fundraiser for us in that election, with the road contractors. But who was in charge? David Paulus, I believe, was our campaign staffer who headed up the fundraising. Dave Paulus was a wonderful man. He came out of First Chicago. He knew the financial industry, knew a lot of the movers and shakers who had money, and I believe it was David Paulus who led our fundraising effort.

DePue: Do you remember any of the names of the deep-pocket funders who were supporting the campaign?

Gilbert: They were on both sides of the fence, and I should leave this up to the governor and others who know more about this than I did, but I know Arthur Rubloff, who had one of the largest commercial real estate groups in Chicago, was there. Bob Malott, who I'd mentioned before. And others.

DePue: Would A. Robert Abboud have been one of those?

Gilbert: Bob Abboud, I believe, did. I remember Bob Abboud, who was very controversial in his own right as a banker, but fond of Big Jim.

DePue: This is more of a name contemporary people would recognize, but certainly there must've been some fortune back in the 1980s for the Pritzker family.

Gilbert: I don't recall the Pritzkers really being involved in our campaign or our fundraising.

DePue: Who got the advertising budget for the campaign?

Gilbert: We had been very successful working with Bailey-Deardorff out of Washington; Bob Teeter, who was the pollster who worked closely with them;

and some associates that they had who actually produced the commercials. But it was not a large advertising firm.

DePue: You had mentioned this before, but how well do you think the governor himself was able to separate his role as governor from his role as campaigner?

Gilbert: There was no separation. He was a governor of all the people of Illinois, and he campaigned for all the people of Illinois. He firmly believed in his heart that when he went out on the campaign trail he was campaigning for reelection as their governor, and Democrats, independents, Republicans—it didn't make any difference to him. Democrats for Thompson, as we had talked about before, was very important in that first election. Running against a historical name in the state of Illinois like Stevenson, it was even going to be more important, because you would think that all the Democrats would fall in line with Adlai. But that remained to be seen.

DePue: First election in 1976, Governor Thompson gets married in the midst of the election, and we talked about that before. From what you said, essentially there was no connection with that being a political decision. Second election in '78, Samantha's born. Third election in 1982, well, he's not going to get remarried, and Jayne's not pregnant. (Gilbert laughs) Were Jayne and Samantha factored in as part of the political strategy for the campaign?

Gilbert: I don't know if you would say factored in as part of a political strategy. What you were dealing with was the first family of Illinois, and by this time Samantha is becoming a smart young lady and able to speak her own mind in certain ways.

DePue: Three years old?

Gilbert: Yeah, definitely at three years old. I mean, she took to the campaign trail early, and I think they went down the big slide together at the state fair, and a few things like that.[54] But as far as coming in as a political strategy, I wouldn't put it that way. How I would phrase it is that the governor loved his family. He was very proud of his family. And anytime he had a chance to showcase his young daughter or his wife, I don't think that stopped him.

DePue: Would it be appropriate to say that Samantha, at three years old, was a tad bit precocious? (laughter)

Gilbert: She was probably precocious the day she was born into this environment. I mean, growing up in the executive mansion. There's one story about Samantha when a state trooper dropped her off at school or something like that in Springfield. This was a little later on. And she was kind of throwing a

[54] For her memories of campaigning, see Samantha Thompson, interview by Mike Czaplicki, April 4, 2014, [placeholder for final pages(??)]

snit and saying, "Where's my trooper? Where's my state trooper?" I'd say that's a bit precocious.

DePue: Mike Royko, on April first, April Fool's Day, wrote an editorial, "The Kid's Got To Go." (laughter) I'll just read a couple quotes from this article. "Many people accuse Thompson of showing off the child in order to try to win the sizable baby-lover vote." Towards the end of the article he says, "I'm telling you, that Samantha is nothing but trouble. If they don't get rid of her, she'll cause even more trouble. Why, she's already becoming a campaign issue."

Gilbert: (laughs) That's a classic Royko. I mean, he just had a way… I would say, reading that article, that's definitely all tongue-in-cheek for Royko, and he loved to do that. I think he was an admirer of Big Jim in a lot of ways, as much as he could be of any politician. Politicians were fair game in Royko's mind. But the issue here, again, is the contrast between Big Jim Thompson and Adlai Stevenson III, a young governor with a young family and an older statesman. When they would contrast Thompson and Stevenson, a lot of times they would say Thompson's very outgoing, very aggressive, very progressive, "compared to the more sedate, cerebral Stevenson." We didn't mind that comparison at all, because anytime you could have a young, six-foot-six governor standing next to a balding former U.S. senator, that's a good comparison in our mind.

DePue: Just a couple more things, then we'll get to a little bit more discussion about Stevenson here. The primary: Did you have any concerns going into this? Because he did have a couple primary opponents, John Roche and V.A. Kelly.

Gilbert: Yeah, and that's about the amount of concern that we had. Like, who are they? Not well-known names.

DePue: Are they both coming from more of a conservative bent?

Gilbert: As far as I remember. But didn't seem to cause us much concern.

DePue: The Governor won 75.5 percent of the vote on primary day. Roche came in with 8 percent, and Kelly with 6.5 percent. So not much of a challenge at all. Now, from what I can read here, Stevenson had no opponent, and got a whopping 77 percent of the vote.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: What is that reflective of?

Gilbert: Well, it reflects that Thompson still has a pretty broad base.

DePue: But when Adlai Stevenson only gets 77 percent of the vote, and he's got no opponent?[55]

Gilbert: That kind of reflects how people thought about Stevenson. Also, Stevenson was kind of a given. I think there were people who said, Oh, the state's in the pits. Thompson's been here for two terms, trying to be reelected to a third term. Shouldn't be any contest, because we don't elect governors more than two terms in Illinois. So I think maybe the Democrats were kind of sleeping during that primary.

DePue: Was that a sense that there wasn't much enthusiasm in the Democratic circles for Stevenson at that time?

Gilbert: There wasn't. There were some stories that we knew of and Thompson had experienced himself while Stevenson was in the Senate. There's one story about labor had set up a meeting with Senator Stevenson in his Washington office. They get to the Senator's office, and there's a long hallway from the receptionist's desk that you could look down, and the receptionist is apologizing, "Oh, I'm so sorry, the Senator's tied up in a meeting crosstown, he's just so sorry he can't meet with you." And as she's alibiing to the labor leaders, they look down this hall and see Stevenson tiptoeing across in the back of the hall, apparently dodging this meeting. But he was kind of aloof in that regard. He was aloof in terms of addressing the issues of Illinois. He wasn't a firebrand on the political stump. He didn't excite a lot of enthusiasm. Thompson was a great speaker. He was a great orator, and he could bring people out of their chairs. Stevenson I don't think quite stood up to that test.

DePue: Up to this point in time, as I recall, Thompson had no lieutenant governor because O'Neal had stepped out of the picture.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: How did he come to make the decision to bring in George Ryan as his running mate?

Gilbert: That's a good question. I don't know how the decision was made. I know Ryan had been a Republican leader in the House, was seen as a very influential downstater. He had great rapport with Republican county chairmen. I'm sure all those things came into play in Thompson's decision.

DePue: What did you think of George Ryan as a running mate?

Gilbert: I don't think I had any thoughts in particular one way or the other, other than he's going to be running as lieutenant governor with the governor.

[55] Of the 949,426 ballots cast in the Democratic primary, 731,041 voted for Stevenson and 94 wrote in another candidate; the remainder did not vote for governor. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast at the Primary Election*, March 16, 1982.

DePue: You think he was an effective speaker?

Gilbert: In his own way. Certainly he contrasted Thompson's style, but at the same time, he was a more traditional, fist-pounding, get-out-the-vote kind of a politician.

DePue: I know he also was much less enamored with the unions, because he had been pushing right-to-work through the legislature several times. So to some extent—I put you in the position of speculating—is Thompson trying to shore up the conservative side of the Republican Party?

Gilbert: I don't think there's any doubt about that. There's an expression in golf: ham and egg. If you have a partner and you're playing in a tournament, and you hit a good shot on one hole, you're doing the ham; the next hole, you're not doing so good, but your partner steps up and he's the egg, so you're ham-and-egging it. I think Thompson and Ryan were ham-and-egging it *a lot* in terms of Thompson trying to keep his union support together, and Ryan playing the other side of the coin.

DePue: We already talked about the backdrop of the national and the state economy, as well as what was going on in the farm community in Illinois. Certainly the economy's going to be a huge issue to deal with. What were some of the other issues in the campaign?

Gilbert: Some of the other issues were focused on campaign style. As we had talked about before, especially with Thompson and Howlett, Thompson would wade into a county fair with his cowboy boots and his sleeves rolled up. And even though Stevenson was a farmer—he said, "I own a farm, I'm a farmer"—he was a gentleman farmer. You just didn't see him in the same arena as Thompson in that regard.

DePue: I doubt that most farmers saw him in that light. (laughs)

Gilbert: Yeah, getting that Thompson would go to the state fair, and he would get a group of people together to set the record to buy the championship steer because that was great publicity. It's going to be sold to this group in Chicago. You didn't see Stevenson playing that role. So that was an issue. Campaign style, campaign postures. In terms of substantive issues, it focused around jobs: jobs for Illinois, balancing the budget for the state, not raising taxes—all the themes that are common today.

DePue: But the previous year, 1981, he actually did try to push through a two-cent gas tax increase.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Was that part of the dialogue, then? Was that successful in '81?

Gilbert: I believe it was, and he caught some heat after the election about that. But that was always one of the albatrosses that Thompson dealt with, saying he wouldn't raise taxes, but then he did slip some tax increases through.

DePue: Was the gas tax more or less popular with the general public than something like an income tax?

Gilbert: Oh, gas taxes were probably one of the easier taxes to pass, carries less political heat than most other taxes.

DePue: Why is that? Because people can see the direct connection with too many potholes on the streets?

Gilbert: Yes, going to fix our roads, fix our bridges, fix our crumbling infrastructure.

DePue: Now, I believe that Thompson's 1982 budget proposal was pretty austere and actually decreased from what he had in '81.[56]

DePue: It was a decrease, and as you'll recall, when Thompson ended up his fourteen years, the budget was a little bit lower than it was when he came out.

DePue: Factoring out inflation.

Gilbert: Yeah. And this was a big influence of Bob Mandeville. Mandeville knew the power of the budget. Thompson did too. Dick Ogilvie told him before he campaigned for governor the first time: the most important thing you can do as a candidate for governor is learn the state budget line by line. Take your time, go through it, and learn that budget; learn where the money goes, where it comes from. Dr. Bob Mandeville was the professor in that regard. He tutored Thompson in budgetary issues, and Thompson was a good student. He listened well.

DePue: Here's something that we do need to mention. I'm not sure it's necessarily one of the main issues of the campaign, because it's going to be over in June, but that's the year-in/year-out fight over the Equal Rights Amendment. The last year, according to federal law, was going to be 1982.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Thompson had come out in support of ERA, and for whatever reason, the pro-ERA forces thought he was way too lukewarm on the issue. Was he catching heat early in the campaign season for that?

[56] Thompson total appropriations request was $468 million higher in FY1982, but actual appropriations ended up $320 million lower. Both requested and actual general fund appropriations were higher than FY1981. [Placeholder for *Handbook* budget tables(??)]

Gilbert: He did catch heat, and he took it head on. He did work for ERA. There are some issues that some people just cannot be convinced on. Whether it was true or not, I do not know, but certainly the rumor at the time was that while Thompson was "for ERA," George Ryan was going around through the backdoor taking votes off. That seemed to be right, and when you consider Ryan's background and his political stance on issues like this, I think he had come out against ERA at certain points. So the pro-ERA people thought that if Thompson was going to allow Ryan to be doing this that he really wasn't for it 100 percent. There were also a couple of incidents. One group came in and threw blood or red paint—

DePue: Pigs' blood.

Gilbert: —pigs' blood on the door of the governor's office at the State Capitol, and it got a little steamy there for a while.

DePue: Yeah, I think you might be referring to the incident that happened after the final defeat. It never even made it out of the Senate committee meeting because Phil Rock knew he didn't have the votes, and they squirted pigs' blood outside the Senate chamber.

Gilbert: Right, right.

DePue: And that was a week or so before a bunch of the women had chained themselves to the Senate railing.

Gilbert: (laughs) That's right.

DePue: Which didn't necessarily endear them to the general public.

Gilbert: No, not at all. It didn't help their cause, that's for sure.

DePue: Was Jayne a factor in supporting or lobbying for the passage?

Gilbert: I don't recall Jayne being forefront on ERA.[57] She may have made a couple of statements or appearances, but the governor was very protective of his wife and daughter in that regard, not to involve them in governmental issues and decisions. He learned soon after being elected the first time that every time you take a gubernatorial action—whether you sign a bill into law, whether you veto a bill, whether you sign a resolution—no matter what it is, you're going to be pleasing some people, but at the same time you're going to be antagonizing another large segment of people. Realizing that, he was very careful to keep his family out of some of these issues, even when the teabag issue came up and the Cutback Amendment and all of these issues. He tried to protect his family from getting involved in them.

[57] [Placeholder for Mark's interview with Jayne(??)]

DePue: Do you think Jayne was not enthusiastic about being on the campaign trail, or she appreciated that she wasn't going to be taking policy positions?

Gilbert: Jayne Thompson was and is a very smart lady, very intelligent, a good lawyer in her own right, a good litigator, and very opinionated. And she would save her opinions primarily for the privacy of their home. She would certainly tell her husband how she felt about issues, but she was also very careful not to take them outside. That wasn't her job. She wasn't the one who was elected.

DePue: An issue that had helped the governor get elected the first time around was being tough on crime. Was this an issue in the '82 campaign?

Gilbert: Crime was always… Being tough on crime was an issue. In '82 it was the overcrowding of prisons. Class X was beginning to take effect. Some of the judiciary was saying, "Holy cow, my hands are tied here. I don't have any option. Guilty. Throw away the key." In a tough economic time for the nation and for the state, when money is tight and you've come in with a lower budget than you had the previous year, money wasn't growing on trees to build new prisons to house these people. So the pendulum had kind of swung back from the force that it took on that first campaign, when Class X was adopted.

DePue: Here's another emotional issue, and it's directly tied to being tough on crime, and that's the death penalty. Was that part of the discussion that year?

Gilbert: I don't know how much that came into the campaign. Thompson had always favored the death penalty, and there were some pretty heinous crimes that had been committed that kind of [generated] public support for the death penalty—John Wayne Gacy and that whole issue. He was put to death at Stateville during the Thompson administration. I think Gayle Franzen was the director of corrections when he went to meet his maker.[58]

DePue: Tough to get much sympathy for John Wayne Gacy.

Gilbert: Yeah. And there was another guy, William Heirens, who had been on death row for a long time. I don't think he was ever executed. Anyway, there were a few landmark cases like that, but I don't think the death penalty really became an issue until George Ryan was governor.

DePue: A couple that are perhaps more a reflection of Chicago politics: school funding. And you mentioned earlier in today's discussion that school funding was always an issue.

Gilbert: It is, and one of the arguments is that it costs more to send a child to school in Chicago than it does in downstate Illinois. Of course, downstate legislators didn't buy that. If you're going to be allotting *x* number of dollars per kid in

[58] Through a series of appeals, Gacy delayed his execution until 1994, when Howard Peters III was director of corrections. But, Franzen was invited to witness Gacy's execution.

Chicago, the same amount should be allotted for a child in downstate Illinois. So where does the money come from at a time when the budget is being reduced and we're trying to hold the line on taxes? Very tough question. You can push school districts to cut the fat out of their budget and to reduce their budgets, but school administrators are very reluctant to do that.

DePue: Was this a year that the Chicago school district was coming to the State in a crisis mode, asking for some support?

Gilbert: Yeah, they were, and there was a Chicago school summit that Thompson had called that brought people in to resolve this issue.

DePue: Another Chicago area issue was RTA. Was that something discussed in the election itself?

Gilbert: Yeah. I'm not sure what Stevenson's position was on the RTA, but Thompson's concern was that there was fair representation, equal representation between the Collar Counties and Chicago. There's no doubt that the RTA was here to stay, was necessary to capture all that federal funding, and so I think that was his position.

DePue: Talking about federal funding, one of the things that Ronald Reagan, President Reagan, was discussing at the time was this concept of the New Federalism. Essentially, it was that the states should take a greater role in managing some of the federal grants and welfare, things like that. Apparently Thompson came out in support of that concept and Stevenson did not?

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Was that one of the main issues? Or just kind of background noise?

Gilbert: Yeah, that was a big issue, because that translated to Chicago versus downstate. Stevenson, coming out of the Senate, I think was more inclined to take the position that he did, and Thompson, of course, is looking for any way that he can take control of welfare dollars and make them work more efficiently than if there's a big federal role in it.

DePue: So that's along the classic philosophical lines of Democrat versus Republican, then?

Gilbert: That's pretty classic, yeah.

DePue: How about taxes? Was that an issue in the campaign?

Gilbert: Taxes are always going to be an issue, and I believe Stevenson's argument was, Thompson cannot run the state on the budget that he's proposed without raising taxes. And Thompson, as any good politician who is campaigning, is saying there will be no tax increases.

DePue: I'm embarrassed to say I'm not sure I'm on top of a couple of these specific issues relating to taxes, but one of the discussions was the ending of the property tax multiplier.

Gilbert: Yeah, that's a good one. When your property is assessed, a multiplier then goes into effect to bring it to a certain level for tax purposes. The public view of that was that it was being manipulated in many cases, and subsequently property owners were having to pay more taxes than they really should.

DePue: So what would Governor Thompson's position on that be?

Gilbert: I would imagine that he was for a rollback of the multiplier or an ending of it, but I'd have to go back and refresh my memory on that one.

DePue: Let's talk about Stevenson some more, Adlai Stevenson as an opponent. Going into the election in early 1982, was the governor concerned that Stevenson was a very credible opponent, somebody he needed to take seriously?

Gilbert: Oh, he definitely took Adlai Stevenson seriously. Adlai's grandfather, the original Adlai Stevenson, was Vice President for President Grover Cleveland. He came back and ran for governor of Illinois, I believe in 1908, and was defeated by Charles Deneen, or Governor Deneen. Adlai Stevenson II was ambassador to the United Nations, was Governor of Illinois, was an unsuccessful presidential and vice presidential contender, and had a long history; he was a very smart man, considered very smart. So the Stevenson name is probably one of the most dominant political names in the history of our state. Then comes Adlai Stevenson III: a twice-elected U.S. Senator. He had been State Treasurer. He had a political biography that was to be contended with. So Thompson, of course, took him very seriously.

DePue: How was the campaign going to try to paint a picture to the general public of who Stevenson is? Here's where we get into your role as press secretary as well.

Gilbert: (laughs) I don't know if we painted any picture of Stevenson. What we tried to do was portray Thompson as being an effective leader, a good governor, who could manage the sticky problems that Illinois as a state was going to have in 1982 and going forward. It turned out to be pretty easy to let Stevenson paint his own portrait, and that's pretty much what we did. One of the classic stories is the St. Patrick's Day parade in Chicago. I forget exactly how the discussion came up, but reporters were asking Stevenson, who was marching in the St. Patrick's Day parade, "What about this issue with Big Jim Thompson? Thompson says this, and Thompson says that." And Stevenson says, "Is he trying to portray me as some kind of a wimp?" So the press goes to Thompson, and they say, "Adlai Stevenson just said 'What are you trying to do, portray him as some kind of wimp?'" Thompson says, "I never called

him a wimp." And just like that, all of a sudden the headlines are, "Stevenson says he's no wimp." (laughter) That's an example of the way that Adlai kind of portrayed himself. So I would say Stevenson was painting his own portrait; we really didn't have to.

DePue: And it doesn't hurt when you've got a talented cartoonist like [Jeff] MacNelly of the *Chicago Tribune*, who comes out with cartoons like that one.[59]


Gilbert: (laughs) "Big Gym, one flight up!" "Go for it, Adlai!" And there he is in his droopy little shorts and bald head and glasses.

DePue: With boxing gloves on.

Gilbert: With boxing gloves on, yeah.

DePue: So how many votes is something like that worth?

Gilbert: They say a picture's worth a thousand words, so I'd say a picture's worth a thousand votes, for sure. (laughs) A picture like that, anyway.

DePue: Once that topic comes up, is that something the campaign tries to build on?

Gilbert: Sensitively, you build on it. You never want to degrade your opponent and get into name-calling, but when an opponent labels themself, like the wimp, that's just money in the bank. It produces a laugh. It's more than you could ever design yourself as a campaign strategy.

DePue: The kind of thing that morning and evening talk show hosts on radio talk about?

Gilbert: Yeah. (laughs) And do they ever! We were firm believers in radio. Radio in Illinois is great. TV news is fine, but how many people really watch the five o'clock evening news in Chicago? Most people are either working or getting home from work. But talk radio is on all day long, all night long. People are in their cars, on their tractors. Anytime we could put Thompson on a talk radio show, that was great. And he did great. He handled it really well. Again, the comparison—I don't think Stevenson was that great. He wasn't perceived to

[59] MacNelly's cartoon is also referencing the popular movie *Rocky III*, which had been released in May.

have a sense of humor. Thompson did; he could mix it up with a radio host or with a TV host.

DePue: What were some of the favorite radio venues for him?

Gilbert: Oh, all the big eight. We would start in Rockford. BBM in Chicago. MAQ in Chicago was talk radio at the time. Joliet, Peoria, Springfield, Decatur, Carbondale, St. Louis—KMOX in St. Louis—even Paducah, Kentucky. That reached across the Ohio River, into southern Illinois. So when we would go into a town, even smaller markets, and could get Thompson on a radio talk show, that was part of the strategy.

DePue: How about some of those main Chicago-based stations, WGN and WLS?

Gilbert: Yeah, WGN, WLS both were, and still are, good talk shows. WGN TV has a big reach, and WGN radio, when the sun goes down, reaches all the way out to Missouri and Kansas, so that was always…Who was the late-night host on WGN radio? We used to try to get on his show all the time; he came on at eleven o'clock at night—Milt Rosenberg, Extension 720 and after that.

DePue: How did the governor deal with the topic of baseball teams?

Gilbert: Did I tell you the story about St. Louis?

DePue: I don't think so.

Gilbert: Alan Dixon, when he was State Treasurer or Secretary of State, used to have an outing every summer. The Cubs and the Cardinals would play a twilight double-header: start three o'clock in the afternoon the first game, and the second game would start about seven. So he would take busloads—there would probably be eight to ten buses from Springfield to St. Louis for the Cardinal-Cub doubleheader. As you know, Springfield is pretty divided in terms of Cub/Cardinal fans. Southern Illinois, of course, is Cardinal country.

DePue: And that's the classic national league—

Gilbert: Rivalry.

DePue: Rivalry, yeah.

Gilbert: Yeah, that was a good one. Thompson was invited by the St. Louis Cardinals to present a plaque, in between games, to Jack Buck for his twenty-five years of broadcasting Cardinal baseball. The stadium is sold out. Dixon may have bought half the seats, I don't know, or been given half the seats. But it's a hot summer day, the first game is over, and Thompson steps to home plate with Jack Buck. He says, "Jack, I'm happy to present to you this plaque on behalf of the St. Louis Cardinals for your twenty-five years of broadcasting Cardinal

games, and I wish you another twenty-five years." Everybody cheered, and it was wonderful.

Then Thompson takes the mic, and he says, "And I must let every one of you know that I was born a Cub fan and I will die a Cub fan." (laughter) And you have never heard such boos in your life. I mean, the place just erupted. Beer cups are flying out of the stand. Hats are flying. It was nasty. Thompson ran for cover, but he didn't know where to go, and he ran into the St. Louis Cardinals dugout. I'm with the state police, the security police. We had been down behind the fence, and I see which way he's going, and I say, "Oh gosh, we've got to get down there." So we go down. I meet Thompson, and I say, "Come on, we're going up to see Jack Brickhouse," who was broadcasting the Cub games on WGN. We go up to the broadcast booth. Thompson sits down with Brickhouse, and Brickhouse says, "Governor, I've got to hand it to you, that was just the greatest speech I've ever heard." This is going back to Chicago and all over Illinois, to all the Cub fans. And this was during the campaign. He said, "How's the campaign going?" So Thompson does this interview. For *weeks* after that he would walk down the streets of Chicago, or mainly northern Illinois, and people were beeping their horn, "Hey, Governor, I heard you on WGN! Way to go, Cubs!" It was probably the most important campaign stop Thompson made (DePue laughs) during the whole campaign, in St. Louis at home plate in Cardinal Stadium.

DePue: Is there a Harry Caray story to share as well?

Gilbert: Harry Caray was always a Thompson supporter—whoever was in the booth, he was a Thompson supporter. Brickhouse, though, really worked for Thompson. He was a big Thompson supporter. And Brickhouse's wife, Patricia, was a strong Thompson supporter as well.

DePue: Was Adlai Stevenson a White Sox fan?

Gilbert: I don't know. I don't recall ever seeing Adlai at a baseball game, so… I knew Daley was a White Sox fan, but I don't know where Adlai came down. Maybe you can ask him when you talk to him.

DePue: So maybe that's part of the problem that Stevenson would have, that he's not connected with one of these teams in a loyal way.

Gilbert: Not only one of the teams, but just how he relates to people. There's a bar not far from White Sox Park in Chicago, called Shaller's Pump, where baseball players and managers and so forth hang out. Thompson, when there was a White Sox home game, would be known to frequent that bar and sit down with people and have a beer. And when on the South Side he'd have a Sox cap on, but he was a diehard Cub fan. There was no doubt about that.

DePue: The Illinois public forgive him for that? (Gilbert laughs) The diehard White Sox fans?

Gilbert: They did.

DePue: Who was Stevenson's running mate that year?

Gilbert: I'm trying to remember.

DePue: You mentioned her name earlier.

Gilbert: Oh, that was Grace Mary Stern.

DePue: Well, does that mean that she's somewhat forgettable?

Gilbert: She was, and I really don't know what she brought to the ticket.[60]

DePue: Well, this is—

Gilbert: She was a woman.

DePue: This is the year where ERA died.

Gilbert: ERA died, and Dawn Clark Netsch was a strong supporter of Adlai. I think Dawn Clark Netsch and Grace Mary Stern were strong, vocal supporters of the ERA.

DePue: Were there discussions about whether to stay on the high road or do attack ads?

Gilbert: Yeah, but we didn't do many attack ads. During the first campaign we had a beautiful one produced, but we never used it. It was a door hanger that we were primarily going to be using downstate. It was a photo of Mike Howlett that had been taken with Mayor Daley at a St. Patrick's Day Parade in Chicago. If you can imagine a side portrait of Mike Howlett with a gray fedora on, with his jowls, with his heavy overcoat and Sons of Ireland sash, they looked like twin brothers from the side. All the door hanger was going to say was, "Do you want this man running Illinois?" And the message was, is Mike Howlett going to be his own man, or is he really going to be a puppet for Richard J. Daley? But after Labor Day in 1976, when the *Tribune* polls came out that showed Thompson had really taken off, we decided we didn't need to use it. We continued to focus on the primary themes—This Man Thompson, who he has prosecuted, what he's accomplished, bringing jobs to Illinois, and so forth—and let Stevenson kind of take care of himself.

[60] Stern's base was Lake County, where she was elected to the county board in 1966 and clerk in 1970. She was the first woman to run for statewide office on the Democratic ticket. After her loss, she won election to the Illinois House in 1984, where she served until moving to the Senate in 1993. She died May 17, 1998. Inventory, Mary Grace Stern Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.

DePue: So you didn't have to.

Gilbert: We didn't think we had to, right.

DePue: Do you think it was in Thompson, that if he thought it was going to be a really tight race he would go negative?

Gilbert: You have to remember that back then, in this era, negative ads weren't as popular, *nearly* as popular as they are today. So it would've been considered very unusual. It would've been considered kind of desperation on Thompson's part. Going into the 1982 election, our polls by Bob Teeter, who had never been wrong a day in his life, were showing that Thompson was up by fifteen points.

DePue: Comfortable lead.

Gilbert: A very comfortable lead. A landslide, by anybody's calculation.

DePue: Who was the campaign manager that year?

Gilbert: I believe Phil O'Connor was a campaign manager.

DePue: How about Bob Kjellander? Was he doing that?

Gilbert: I don't know that Kjellander was the campaign manager. He was certainly involved. But your information might be better than mine.

DePue: Was there a strategy that was different from previous years? Now he's got six years of a record.

Gilbert: Right. And his record wasn't bad. It wasn't great; there wasn't a major thing that he could point to like he could later on, like Build Illinois, which had not been done yet, although he had been a good governor. He had submitted balanced budgets. He had reduced the size of the state budget from where it was previously. So he was singing all the right songs. He was bringing jobs into the state, so that was the thrust of the campaign.

DePue: I know that one of the things that Thompson worked hard on was to develop the labor vote. We talked about that classic story earlier of inviting all of these labor union members, who were there protesting at the Capitol, over to the mansion so they could share a beer together. I got this from a newspaper someplace—"Jim Thompson: a record for labor"—and here are the things that he was in favor of: prevailing wage, right to work, workers' compensation, pay raises. A lot of this is not just regular labor unions but public sector unions as well. At the time, he's trying to balance the budget, and the City of Chicago is coming with their hand extended because they're running out of money to run the school system, yet you're in favor of collective bargaining for teachers' unions and pay raises.

Gilbert: Right. Labor leaders each winter gathered down in Miami at a place called the Jockey Club; that's kind of their after-meeting hangout place. Every year Thompson would fly down to Miami and go to the Jockey Club, and he would sit in the cabanas with the labor guys from Illinois; he would talk with them, he would drink martinis with them, and the lines of communication were open. That's rarely the case with Republican politicians or incumbents, for sure. So Thompson protected that labor vote. Even if it was a neutral vote by the local or by the union, not to endorse a candidate, that was a win for Thompson. That's what he strived to do by taking these positions, not getting labor upset with him so they'd turn out the vote against him. Remember, a Republican has to get a majority of the Republican votes, a sizable number of independent votes, and a number of Democratic votes to win.

DePue: Did he end up getting endorsements from unions?

Gilbert: He did, from several of the unions. The Teamsters—Louis Pike endorsed him. I think the bartenders union endorsed him. There were several.

DePue: SEIU and the Chicago Teachers Union both endorsed him.

Gilbert: That's true, in '82, and that was because of his position on school funding.

DePue: Today, that could very well translate to a lot of Republican voters sitting on the sidelines because they are disillusioned with the Republican candidate being that cozy with unions. Was that not a concern in 1982?

Gilbert: Not as big in '82, that's for sure.

DePue: Apparently that wasn't a concern that the governor had.

Gilbert: No. He was conservative in some areas. He was more liberal in other areas. But he balanced out as a centrist, near the middle of the road. I think that's where you see Bruce Rauner, who's trying to become Governor of Illinois on the Republican side. He took a very conservative stance during the primary. Now he's moving toward the middle—because he knows if he's going to get that independent and Democrat vote, that's where he's got to be—at the expense of maybe offending some conservative Republicans. But after the primary, the conservative Republicans don't have any place else to go if they want a Republican in the state house.

DePue: There was a Chicago Teachers Union contract that was resolved in late August of 1982, so maybe that was the teachers' summit you mentioned.

Gilbert: Yes, that was one of the summits.

DePue: This stuff always come up in campaigns; it's somewhat inevitable, especially if you've got an aggressive media out there: were there some allegations of scandal within the Thompson office?

Gilbert: Mm…

DePue: Let me be specific here and see if this one rings a bell.

Gilbert: Okay. (laughs)

DePue: State Administrative Services chief Vincent Toolen, T-o-o-l-e-n. Apparently Toolen was accused of lying to a grand jury and state investigators about the delivery of campaign fundraising money for [George] Ryan about a year before this.

Gilbert: Yeah, Vince Toolen, I do recall that. I don't recall that that really became an issue. I think Toolen was dismissed.

DePue: Right.

Gilbert: Once that came out. But that's about as far as it went.

DePue: There were some other allegations that I read about in the press. Accepting gifts from potential donors: cash, flights, and significant discounts for purchasing antiques, (Gilbert laughs) 30 or 40 percent discounts on antiques.

Gilbert: There was a rumor. I do not know this to be true, but I've heard the story told several times that at one antique store in Chicago, there was the governor's shelf. He would go in and see a piece that he liked, and he'd kind of put it on the governor's shelf, and that would either be available at near cost, or someone else would come in and say, "Oh, Jim Thompson likes this. Well, that would make a nice birthday gift for him down the road." I do not know about that, but that's one of the stories.

DePue: A classic quid pro quo, though: you help the governor by taking him on a private aircraft to various places, and then you expect something in return.

Gilbert: I'm sure that would be easy to connect those dots. Knowing Thompson, I do not know when he *ever* gave a favor to someone who had been kind to him for anything in return; no quid pro quos that I know of. Early on in the first campaign I saw that just about every place he went people were giving him stuff, whether it was t-shirts, or a jar of homemade jelly, or a painting, or whatever, so we started the gift book.

DePue: Yeah, we did talk about that the last time.

Gilbert: Louis Pike, who was head of the Teamsters union, had given the governor five gold Krugerrands. And Thompson dutifully put "Five gold Krugerrands, gift from Louis Pike."

DePue: What are Krugerrands?

Gilbert: Krugerrands are South African, large pieces of gold.

DePue: Gold coins?

Gilbert: Yeah. They have a value, depending on the market, of anywhere from a $1,000 to $1,200 a Krugerrand. But they were a gift. Bob Hillman, who was the Springfield reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, would regularly come down and ask the governor's secretary or me to see the gift book. We'd always trot it out. That's what it was for, so there would be no secrets about, Oh, somebody gave Thompson something, and in return he got this back. That was the program that we had set up. So Hillman comes down, he looks at the gift book, and he finds five gold Krugerrands from Louis Pike. He goes, "Oh, my." Next day in the *Sun-Times* there's this big, front-page story, "Louis Pike, head of the Teamsters union, gives Thompson five gold Krugerrands." He talked to Thompson, and Thompson said, "Yes, it was a gift Louis Pike gave me for the birth of our daughter Samantha." But all hell broke loose when this hit the papers, that here's a head of a Teamsters union that is giving gifts to the governor. But in Thompson's mind, and in our mind, it was a legitimate gift. It was registered. It was put into the gift book. It was not a secret.

DePue: At that time, was there any law about the size of a gift that the governor could accept?

Gilbert: No, that came later.

DePue: I believe in July of 1982, at least according to a couple of newspaper articles, there was a bit of a shakeup in the campaign team, and Thompson brought Jim Fletcher in to help with the campaign.

Gilbert: Fletcher had been Thompson's campaign manager in the first campaign, and I think the second campaign. Fletcher then went off as a lawyer and a lobbyist in his own right, and I think he did come back during the closing months of that third campaign to help out.[61]

DePue: Did you sense, as you're one of the inner circle for Thompson, that the campaign was in trouble at all?

Gilbert: Not in trouble any more than we would expect from a governor seeking election for the third time. And as we had talked before, the longer you're in office, a little greener the moss gets on your administration. Again, it was the terrible economic times that we were in, and we're just trying to make sure that Stevenson didn't get a leg up on us in that regard.

DePue: It's about this time as well, in mid-July, that the governor has to furlough about 1,300 government employees.

[61] [Placeholder for JRT and Fletch's discussion of his return in 1982(??)]

Gilbert: Right, and that was a pretty dark time, mainly because of the symbolic move that that represented. All is not good. And if we've got to furlough these employees, and some employees are taking a day off without pay and so forth; these are tough times.

DePue: He'd worked so hard to get the union vote. SEIU is part of that, collective bargaining for public sector unions. But my guess is that this decision to furlough government workers can work both ways.

Gilbert: It can work both ways. With the voters, with the public, they say, "Well, he's doing what he's got to do." Of course, anytime a state employee loses their job or gets furloughed, they're not happy campers.

DePue: Was his campaign style in '82 any different from what he'd done in 1978?

Gilbert: Not that much different. He still marched in his holiday parades and attended county fairs—probably attended more county fairs in 1982 than he ever had before. I think we did forty-six county fairs that summer, which is a lot, believe me. Plus the state fair, plus the Du Quoin state fair, and so he was campaigning hard. He was working really hard.

DePue: Was Jayne more or less on the campaign trail that year?

Gilbert: I don't know if you can say more or less. I don't know how you would qualify that. Was she on the campaign trail? Yes, at times. But the governor was keeping a pretty fast pace. He was covering a lot of ground.

DePue: When Jayne was on the campaign trail, was it generally with the governor, or did she go her own way sometimes?

Gilbert: Usually with him. Yeah, it was a family affair.

DePue: And any difference, that year especially, in how he campaigned downstate versus Chicago and the suburbs?

Gilbert: No, we were leaning hard on the Collar Counties, especially DuPage, Lake, and Will—Kane was kind of so-so—and suburban Cook. But his campaign schedule was almost seven days a week, and it was tiring.

DePue: How much were you on the trail that year?

Gilbert: Just about as much as I had been the years before. Once we set up Citizens for Thompson, during the week I was pretty much confined to either the state house or the governor's office in Chicago. But after hours or on weekends, all hands on deck.

DePue: So essentially in a campaign year like that, you don't have much of a life outside of work?

Gilbert: No, not at all.

DePue: Did you thrive on it, or did it wear you down, or a little bit of both?

Gilbert: Both. It's real invigorating. I mean, anytime you walk into a campaign hall or campaign event and people are cheering, you say, "This is looking good." If you walked in and there's silence or mumbling, that would not be fun, but fortunately we didn't have that experience.

DePue: Except when you're down in St. Louis at a Cards game.

Gilbert: (laughs) It was loud.

DePue: Were you there?

Gilbert: Yeah, definitely.

DePue: How about going into tougher areas, the Democratic strongholds, black neighborhoods—

Gilbert: East St. Louis… I'm just trying to remember the mayor of East St. Louis, who was a Democrat and became a Thompson supporter. Thompson campaigned in black churches in Chicago. He was always well received. He had a way of adapting to, connecting with his audiences.

DePue: Yeah, I even read that he was at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Always sitting in the front pew.

Gilbert: Always sitting in the front pew. And I told him walking in, "Be sure to put something in the plate when they pass the offering." He said, "I don't have any money," so I gave him a couple of bucks to put in the plate, because people are always watching.

DePue: Is that typical, somebody like the governor doesn't walk around with a billfold or money on them?

Gilbert: One time, Jimmy Carter was president, and he invited the National Governors Association in for a dinner or something like that. It could've been the first time that Thompson went to the White House. But even as a governor of a state, when you go to the White House you have to go through the checkpoints with the guards and show them identification. So Thompson went, and he just went with the state troopers; nobody else was with him. And the only thing he had in his pocket was a credit card. They asked for some identification, so he pulled out his MasterCard or whatever it was. They said,

"Don't you have any other identification?" He said, "Nope, that's it." So they ended up letting him in anyway.

DePue: I was going to ask, how do you buy antiques if you don't have any money in your pocket?

Gilbert: That's what this traveling aide was for. He carried the governor's wallet.

DePue: We've talked so much before about his campaign style. Any distinctive stories on the campaign trail in 1982?

Gilbert: The one that sticks out is one we talked about with Adlai and the St. Patrick's Day parade. But the real action came on election day. We were cruising along, going into the election, and our polls were showing Thompson fifteen points up, so that's kind of what we were expecting.

DePue: Before we get there, I wanted to ask about debates. Do you recall any of the debates that year?

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: From what I've read, there was an agreement to have four.

Gilbert: There were four, and Newton Minow was the chief negotiator for Stevenson. He was a well-known lawyer and author, who came up with "TV is the great communications wasteland" or whatever his famous quote was.[62] I met with Minow and his staff, and we agreed to have four debates. We were actually pushing for a few more, because we thought putting the two side-by-side would be a good contrast, and also the speaking styles. Thompson, with his prosecutorial background and so forth, is considered a pretty good debater. They stuck to four debates, and we said that was fine. But Thompson was starting to accumulate a little baggage, and the debates didn't go as easily as we thought that they would.

DePue: The first debate was early September, and Thompson was making allegations about Stevenson lying. I don't know if you call that dirty politics or hitting back. You mentioned in an earlier campaign that that always comes up.

Gilbert: That was a fact. (laughs)

DePue: That was a fact, that Stevenson was lying? I know in today's politics you try to stay away from the word "lie."

[62] In his speech to the National Association of Broadcasters, Minow told his audience that if they were to watch television for an entire day, without distraction, "I can assure you that what you will observe is a vast wasteland." Newton Minow, "Television and the Public Interest" (address to National Association of Broadcasters, Washington, DC, May 9, 1961), http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm.

Gilbert: Lie, mm-hmm.

DePue: What was the lie that Adlai was making?

Gilbert: You'll have to refresh my memory.

DePue: I don't know if I've got it here quickly. "Unemployment rate for Illinois rose faster for the last five years among the ranks of all the states than any other." Thompson: "Illinois unemployment rate increased 2.3 percentage points, from 6.2 to 8.5. Eleven states had greater increases"—in the nature of those kinds of things, I think.

Gilbert: In any campaign there's going to be a perspective of making the facts work according to how you want them to work. So to say that Stevenson was lying… I think it was kind of Adlai's attitude. When he would do these things, he would almost get foaming at the mouth. It would be mean-spirited when he would throw these facts out, so I think that's what Thompson was probably reacting to.

DePue: And here's another one. Stevenson: "21,000 businesses failed in Illinois last year." Thompson: "There were 2,654 business failures based on U.S. district court records for Illinois."

Gilbert: That's a pretty good gap, isn't it?

DePue: Okay.

Gilbert: Seventeen thousand there, someplace.

DePue: Do you figure you won that first debate?

Gilbert: Was that the one in Oak Brook?

DePue: I wish I could tell you where that was.

Gilbert: I think it was. I think the Oak Brook debate, Thompson did very well; the League of Women Voters [hosted it]. It was the second or third debate where there was some concern that he hadn't done as well as…

DePue: The second debate would've been September tenth. You recall where that one was? I'm going to have to do a little bit more research before I talk to Thompson about these, because I'm not sure.

Gilbert: The first one I thought was in Oak Brook, League of Women Voters. I know a subsequent one was in Carbondale, I think at Southern Illinois, SIU.

DePue: Apparently by this time, the whole subject of "Stevenson is a wimp" was in the mix.

Gilbert: Yeah, wimp was in the mix, and pinstripe patronage was in the mix. What are some of his other issues?

DePue: You mentioned it; tell us what pinstripe patronage is talking about.

Gilbert: The allegation was that you take care of those who are helping you, which makes a lot of sense to me. If you're a politician, you're going to…

DePue: Because Democrats had never done that in the city of Chicago?

Gilbert: Apparently not. (laughter) Especially when it came to counting votes.

DePue: Did that get traction?

Gilbert: I think it got a little bit of traction. At least it gave them a rallying cry, which the campaign didn't seem to have up until that point.

DePue: Tax increases always come up, but both candidates seemed to be advocating that it's probably time for a state gas tax increase to support transportation infrastructure.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: The third debate was October third, with Thompson in Springfield and Stevenson in Chicago. Now, that might be the kind of thing logistically that would drive campaign managers and press secretaries batty. (Gilbert laughs) Do you remember anything about that one?

Gilbert: Yeah, I do, and I'm trying to remember why the logistics were as they were for that. There was a reason that we kept Thompson in Springfield, because originally the debate was supposed to be in Chicago.

DePue: It's October. Things are heating up in the campaign, so pork barrel and pocketbook issues, and personal attacks. I thought we talked before that you wanted to stay on the high road.

Gilbert: These issues are ones that are either in response to what the other candidate is saying, so there's a give and take here. I don't think that's all that unusual.

DePue: The fourth debate's in Carbondale on October sixteenth.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Overall, how do you think your candidate fared?

Gilbert: Oh, I think overall he fared well, because our polling numbers were still holding at 10 to 15 percent. We felt pretty good.

DePue: But were you surprised that Stevenson held his own in those debates?

Gilbert: Yes. I don't know if it was the amount of time he was spending campaigning, but his campaign style seemed to loosen up a little bit. He became a little more effusive in his speaking, and became a better campaigner the closer we got to the election. He was a force to be reckoned with, no doubt about it.

DePue: By October sixteenth, and then the last three weeks of the campaign, you start looking for endorsements from the newspapers. How were you doing in that respect?

Gilbert: Not as well as we had done in previous elections. Again, I think it was some of the moss from being in office for six years.

DePue: But I did find that both the *Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times* endorsed him.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Those are the two that you'd want to look for most, I would think.

Gilbert: Absolutely, especially the *Tribune*.

DePue: Why the *Tribune* more than the *Sun-Times*?

Gilbert: Oh, it has just such a wider circulation.

DePue: But wasn't the *Tribune* always Republican leaning? Was it at that time?

Gilbert: It was, but it was beginning to lean more toward the middle of the road. But it was definitely a big endorsement.

DePue: You also had the teachers. You still had SIEU. You still had a lot of the other private sector unions and support. Any other endorsement that you really recall?

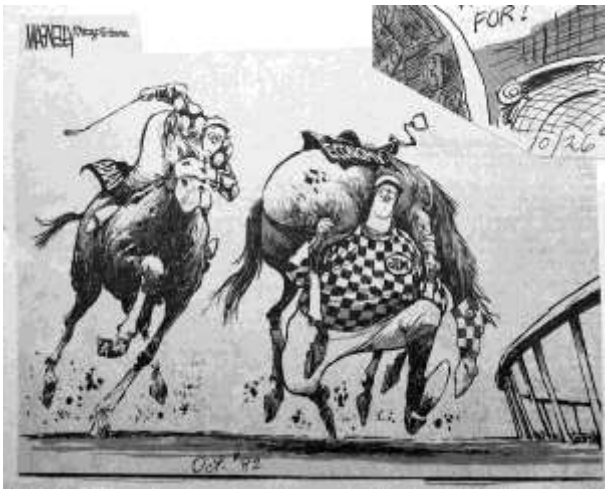
Gilbert: No, not particularly.

DePue: This one surprised me. Mohammed Ali endorses Thompson. How do you land an endorsement like that?

Gilbert: Man, that was a wonderful day. We were in a parade on the South Side, and Thompson was walking with Mohammed Ali. Mohammed Ali lived on the South Side of Chicago, I think on Wentworth Avenue. You would think it was the second coming; people were just beside themselves, mainly to see the champ. Then they go to a school, and it's younger kids, probably middle school to grade school. The auditorium is full. Mohammed Ali walks out on the stage with Thompson, and everybody cheers. And Mohammed Ali says something like this, "Now, this man's name is Jim Thompson, and he's running for Governor of the State of Illinois and one day he may be President of the United States. I want you all to go home and tell your parents. What's

this man's name?" They all say, "Jim Thompson!" And he says, "What's he running for?" And they all say, "President!" (laughter) I'm going, "Oh, wow. At least he's with Mohammed Ali. That's the picture we want. I don't care what he says." But how he set that up, I am not sure. It was someone who was a mover and shaker on the South Side who knew Mohammed Ali and arranged it, and it was too good to be true.[63]

DePue: Yeah, that's an amazing endorsement. You've mentioned this a couple times before, but you guys thought you had a pretty comfortable lead going into the election.




Here's another classic MacNelly cartoon. I'll let you take a look at that one, because that kind of sums up the weakness in the campaign, perhaps.

Gilbert: (laughs) That certainly was the issue. Here you've got Adlai aboard his horse, giving it the whip, and coming nose to nose with Thompson as they're rounding the turn. They're not at the finish line. You've got Big Jim carrying his horse on his back—his horse is named Economy—and slugging it down the home stretch. And that certainly was the issue. Jobs, lack of jobs, people getting laid off, high inflation, high unemployment—tough time to be running for reelection, for anybody.

DePue: Did you figure you had the agricultural vote?

Gilbert: Yeah, I thought we did, given everything that was going on. The agricultural vote, though, how big is that? When you look at the state of Illinois, it's eleven million people, and seven million of those people live in the six-county metropolitan area. So the agricultural vote is very important, but when you're looking at 3 to 3.5 million votes that are going to be cast, where are your margins? Where's your plurality?

DePue: Yeah, I guess to a certain extent when I look at the agricultural vote I'm thinking not just farmers, which are a pretty small percentage, but you've got so many of the major industries in the state that are based on agriculture, and you've got the Chicago Board of Trade and things like.

[63] [Placeholder for Thompson's discussion of this(??)]

Gilbert: And you've got the traders, and the traders were very supportive of Thompson, held a number of fundraisers for him. So that was a big source of finance for our campaign.

DePue: But you've mentioned a couple of times already, 15 percent is what the spread is looking like from Teeter. So how confident are you and how confident is Thompson going into the election day?

Gilbert: Everybody is pretty confident. We did not see any kind of… It's always going to narrow a little bit on election day, but we thought 15 percent, there's got to be a huge meltdown if there's going to be anything to worry about.

DePue: Was there a lot of emphasis on turning out the vote?

Gilbert: Yeah, always is, especially in our Republican strongholds. We thought if there was any kind of a problem it would be that the Democratic turnout would be stronger than we were projecting. We didn't think Stevenson had been enthusiastic enough to have created a strong Democratic turnout.

DePue: And we're talking Illinois politics, so how strongly was he supported by the Democratic machine in Chicago? Were they enthusiastic for their candidate?

Gilbert: The machine is not the same machine that it was in 1976, when Richard J. Daley was alive. Daley died that December, in 1976, before Thompson was sworn in for his first term in office. Things were changing in Chicago. Chicago's first woman mayor, Jane Byrne, was now in office and she was anti-machine, so how effective was the machine as a machine, first of all? Secondly, how enthusiastic would they be for a candidate like Adlai Stevenson? So to answer your question, it was not as influential as it had been in past elections, that's for sure.

DePue: That gets us to election day, November 2, 1982. And election day is what it is. I'll put you on the spot once again: where was the celebration that night?

Gilbert: Our celebration was at the Hyatt Hotel on the river in Chicago. The balloons were there. The band was there. I mean, everything was set up. Around the time the polls closed, we went into Thompson's suite. There were a few of us there. There was Greg Baise, myself, I think Jim Fletcher—Art Quern, who was chief of staff at the time, may have been there—and a few others, and Bob Teeter came in. He said, "I don't know what happened, but things are looking like we're running neck and neck right now." And we're going, "What?" And there was a silence in the room. Someone had brought in a magnum of champagne, which was sitting over on an ice bucket, and you could hear the ice going clink, clink. Then it was like everyone was saying, "Okay, Teeter, explain yourself." He said, "We're just not seeing the numbers. The exit poll interviews that we've done show that things are running pretty close, and we just don't know what happened, so it could be a long night." We shifted gears. You do the holding interviews. You know, "How's it

looking? Where's the governor?" My message to the reporters was, "The governor and Mrs. Thompson, they're up in the suite, and we know this is going to be a close election." And they said, "Well, I thought you had a pretty big lead?" "The latest numbers are showing that it's going to be a little closer than we thought." We didn't think it was going to be as close as the numbers were beginning to show, as far as exit polls went. And then when the votes began to be tallied, that kind of held true too.

DePue: When did the governor announce that he was the victor that night? When did you guys know that you were leading by a razor-thin margin but that you were able to make some kind of decision?

Gilbert: Do you want to pause it? (break in recording) So Teeter had come into the suite about seven o'clock, and by eleven o'clock that night everyone was gone from the election suite that we had on one of the top floors of the Hyatt. Thompson and Mrs. Thompson had gone to their room, gone to bed. All the staff had kind of disappeared, and about midnight I'm looking around; I am the only one left in the suite, except for Bill Wirtz—who was a supporter of ours and owner of the Chicago Blackhawks and a number of other enterprises—and his nephew, Bruce McArthur. There were just the three of us. And Bill looked at me and he said, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "Man, this is a toss-up, but somebody's got to keep watching the shop and making the calls to state's attorney's office, the U.S. attorney's office, City News Bureau," which was the collector of votes for city of Chicago, "and AP," which kind of tallied the votes for the whole state, "and the state police." He said, "Yep, you're exactly right. We're at the end of regulation," using a hockey term. He said, "We're now in overtime. When you're in overtime in a game like this, you've got to apply all the pressure you can, so keep making your calls, and I'm going to stay with you." So he did. I would call City News Bureau every thirty minutes. I'd call AP. Then I would call over at the U.S. attorney's office, "Anything coming out of Chicago? You got any arrests being made, any irregularities coming up?" And I'd call the Chicago Board of Elections, "What are your latest numbers?"

DePue: So your comment about applying the pressure was trying to find out if there was election fraud, possibly?

Gilbert: Yeah, and that we were on top of it, that we're still monitoring all the sources, that we haven't given up. I guess what was surprising was that everyone else had left—you know, Fletcher had left, all the campaign staff had left. They had gone to bed. Thompson had gone to bed. And about three o'clock, four o'clock in the morning I was getting the latest tally, and the vote from Woodford County came in and put Thompson over the top by about 1,200 votes. That's when I went down and knocked on Thompson's door. I remember knocking on his door, and Mrs. Thompson said, "Yes?" I said, "Jayne, is the governor there?" Of course, I knew he was. And I said, "Tell him that Woodford County just came in and he's ahead by about 1,200 votes."

At that point I heard him say, "Oh, thank God." He tells the story a little bit differently: When they awakened him in the middle of the night and told him that he was ahead by 1,200 votes, he said, "That's not enough" and went back to sleep. (laughter) I think my story's right. But that was a long time ago.

About eight o'clock in the morning, I start calling the staff people. I say, "Fletcher, get down here. We're ahead by a slim margin. We've got to rally the troops. We've got to have a press conference, got to make a statement, and you've got to seize it while we can." So everybody starts coming back into the suite, "Oh yeah, this is good news." Everybody's pretty excited. I look over, and Bill Wirtz, who had stayed up with me all night long, is over in the corner and he's putting on his hat and coat. I walk over and say, "Billy, where are you going? You can't leave us now." He says, "Oh, yeah. Everything's under control. I'm going to the office, and boy is my staff going to be surprised. They've never seen me in the office this early ever." (laughs) Because he was a nighttime guy, with sports teams and so forth. So that's when we first made the statement, and then Adlai—

DePue: At what time of the day did the official statement go out?

Gilbert: I think it was about ten or eleven o'clock that morning.

DePue: On the third.

Gilbert: Yeah, on the third. Couple things happened that were different in this election. If you remember the great JFK election, when they say that Chicago won the election for John F. Kennedy, Daley always held his votes back and was the last to report in the state. This time, for whatever reason—and there were a couple of reasons; there were some changes in the election laws—but the Chicago returns came in earlier than usual. DuPage County kind of held back its returns until later in the night. That helped our cause. But little old Woodford County, which usually votes about 85 or 90 percent Republican, finally came in, and they were the last ones to come in. So that's what put us over.[64]

DePue: The State Board of Election declared him the winner on November twenty-third, and ten minutes after that decision came out, Stevenson once again challenged the results. The vote spread by that time was 5,074 votes, which is about as paper thin as you can get.

Gilbert: About as paper thin as you can get out of 3.5 million votes cast, which was one of the largest turnouts we've had in the state. That was a good turnout. And in doing the math, I think it comes out to 0.001 or 0.003.

[64] Thompson won Woodford County by 3,302 votes. State of Illinois, *Official Vote Cast* at the General Election, November 2, 1982.

DePue: So 0.14 percent.[65]

Gilbert: Yeah, that would be about right.

DePue: Stevenson challenges. What's the basis of his challenge?

Gilbert: His challenge is basically downstate, and it's not in Chicago. He is challenging the now-infamous hanging chads. They were using punch ballots in a majority of the state, so you go in and you punch, and some of the chads would hang. Is that a legitimate ballot? Is that a legitimate vote? That's what his challenge was based on. He was demanding a statewide recount, so that was the issue that went to the Supreme Court of Illinois.

DePue: Was there a counterchallenge from the Thompson team?

Gilbert: Oh, we had people out throughout the state checking ballots and recounts and so forth. Our numbers coming out downstate [suggested] that there really wasn't an issue, and we felt that the issue was going to be in Chicago. That's when we challenged the U.S. attorney, who was Dan Webb at the time, to look at the Chicago vote.[66] It was the Friday before the Monday of the inauguration that the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that the call for a statewide recount was unconstitutional.

DePue: So the recount, flat out, was not going to happen.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: But only three or four days before the inauguration?

Gilbert: Yeah, Friday, and the inauguration was Monday. It was a Democratic-controlled Supreme Court. There were four Democrats and three Republicans on the Supreme Court, not that politics makes any difference on the Supreme Court.

DePue: But what is your gut and Thompson's gut saying about what the Supreme Court's going to rule?

Gilbert: We had no idea. No idea. We thought we had won the election, and we were very, very hopeful that they would not rule that the challenge was constitutional. Seymour Simon, a Democrat from Chicago, was the swing vote who voted with the three Republicans, saying that the challenge was unconstitutional; therefore, Thompson was named governor.

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[65] Voters cast 3,673,681 gubernatorial ballots in 1982.

[66] Webb was an Assistant U.S. attorney under Thompson and joined the administration as Director of the Illinois Department of Law Enforcement. He became U.S. Attorney in 1981. [Placeholder for Thompson and Fletcher discussions of the recount fight(??)]

DePue: Is there any background story to why Simon voted the way he did?

Gilbert: I don't know for sure. Justice Simon was a very, very interesting man. I know his son, John Simon, who is now on the appellate court bench, very well. And I knew Justice Simon fairly well. He had been supportive of what Thompson had done as U.S. Attorney, in terms of seeking out corruption in both the Republican and Democratic parties in the Chicago area. He had also been a Chicago alderman, so he had kind of come up through the Democratic ranks. Why he voted as he voted, all I can assume was just based on the constitutionality issue.

DePue: What's surprising to me, at least, is that the issue was decided because the majority asserted that the Illinois recount statute was unconstitutional.

Gilbert: Right, exactly.

DePue: Can you explain that?

Gilbert: No. (laughs)

DePue: What does that mean, though?

Gilbert: It means that the recount issue, as it was drafted by the new constitution, was not constitutional. What the reasons were, I'm not sure. Governor Thompson could probably explain that much better. I know that he could. But they had ruled as they had ruled, and the balloons were pumped up, and the inauguration went on.

DePue: Where were you when the decision came down, when you heard that news?

Gilbert: I was in Springfield, and I believe I was at the State Capitol when I got a call. I'm not sure who it was; I think it was from the governor. He had been told how the Supreme Court had just ruled, and he said, "Will you put together our press conference and our statement?"

DePue: Do you remember the governor's reaction when he found out? Were you privy to that?

Gilbert: He was at the executive mansion, and I think he called me and said, "Davey, we won." I said, "Oh, man, this is fantastic."

DePue: Big sigh of relief?

Gilbert: Big sigh of relief, because it had been a long time, and there had been a lot of legal manipulating going on from November second to January—what would that have been, the sixth or the seventh?

DePue: So you were keeping more than one lawyer busy during that interim period?

Gilbert: Oh, jeez. As we can discuss, what followed kept a lot of lawyers busy, because the vote count was not as close as the 5,074 votes that the State Board of Elections had eventually certified.

DePue: Before we get to that point, though, anything memorable about the inauguration?

Gilbert: Yeah, it was a wonderful inauguration. (laughs) It was happy. We had planned the inauguration to go on, and we were hopeful that the Supreme Court would rule the right way. We didn't think it was going to take as long as it did, but once it did, it was a very joyous celebration.

DePue: From everything you said, though, the Stevenson team had to have been planning an inauguration as well.

Gilbert: They may have. I really don't recall any conflicting plans. That would be an interesting topic to look into.

DePue: If the decision had gone the other way, though, that would've meant a recount, which wasn't going to happen overnight, right?

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: Talk to me about what we've learned about that campaign in the succeeding years.

Gilbert: It was very, very important from the standpoint of yes, it was close; yes, you had a very popular sitting governor that was challenged very effectively. Even if you look at what transpired later, Stevenson did mount a very aggressive campaign that finished much closer than anyone ever expected, I think possibly even Stevenson. Then, when we and the U.S. Attorney, Dan Webb, looked at the Chicago election, it was remarkable that Chicago could still manipulate the vote to fraudulently count what turned out to be 100,000 votes for Stevenson that had not been cast legally.

DePue: In fact, when we first met you gave me this article, and this article is by Hans A. von Spakovsky. The title of the article is "Where There's Smoke There's Fire: 100,000 Stolen Votes in Chicago." I'll read just one short passage from this article. He states that, "The U.S. Attorney in Chicago at the time, Daniel Webb, estimated that at least 100,000 fraudulent votes, 10 percent of all votes in the city, had been cast. Sixty-five individuals were indicted for federal election crimes, and all but two—one found incompetent to stand and another who'd died—were convicted." This was something that happened long after

the actual campaign was over. And I'm reading from an article that came out in 2008.[67]

Gilbert: Right. The actual grand jury investigation into vote fraud in Chicago lasted about two years after the election. Another paragraph, "Republican James Thompson was a fifteen-point favorite going in, and yet on election day Stevenson came within 5,074 votes from capturing the governorship, out of 3.7 million votes cast statewide, a 0.14 percent margin. Stevenson had carried Chicago by a three-to-one margin, with a winning margin of 469,000 votes, although Thompson won 60 percent of the vote in the rest of the state." So something was wrong someplace, and that's kind of what Dan Webb picked up on.

DePue: When you first started hearing about this, and obviously the Thompson team had to know about Webb's investigation—after all, Webb is one of Thompson's guys to begin with—were you surprised that there was vote fraud going on in Chicago?

Gilbert: No. Never surprised at vote fraud in Chicago.

DePue: Were you surprised, or was he surprised, by the scale of vote fraud?

Gilbert: Yes, I think anybody would be surprised when in a city like Chicago you could steal 100,000 votes. "On December 14, 1984"—now, this is two years after the election—"Chief Judge Frank McGarr of the U.S. District Court of the northern district of Illinois publicly released the federal grand jury's report on the 1982 election, only the third time in the history of the court that a grand jury report had been made public. The evidence revealed substantial vote fraud in Chicago during the November 2, 1982, election, and found that similar fraudulent activities had occurred prior to 1982." So this was a big deal, and this is why I feel that the 1982 election is one of the most significant in the history of the State of Illinois. It not only exposed rampant vote fraud in Chicago in the 1982 election, but as Judge [Frank] McGarr said, that had gone on in prior elections. So that strongly hints that Daley was able to steal the election for JFK.

DePue: You just read from a passage of this; now I'm going to read, and I think it's the next paragraph. It's talking about FBI agent Ernest Locker, and "how routine vote fraud was for the precinct captains, elected judges, poll watchers, and political party workers that he'd interviewed." So this was based on his work.

[67] Hans A. von Spakovsky, "Where's There's Smoke, There's Fire: 100,000 Stolen Votes in Chicago," Legal Memorandum 23, The Heritage Foundation, April 16, 2008, http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/04/where-theres-smoke-theres-fire-100000-stolen-votes-in-chicago.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And this is essentially the Democratic party machine he's talking about. "They had been taught how to steal votes and elections by their predecessors, who had in turn been taught by their predecessors. Based on his investigation, Locker came to believe the claims, hotly debated among historians, that Mayor Daley threw the 1960 presidential election for John Kennedy with massive ballot stuffing in Chicago." I read someplace that there's only a few thousand votes, something like 10,000 or so votes, that separated Nixon from Kennedy in Illinois that year.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And if you don't mind reading further here, once they did all this investigation, "they figured that more than 3,000 votes had been cast in the name of individuals who were dead, more than 31,000 individuals had voted twice in different locations, and thousands of individuals had supposedly voted despite being locked up." A little bit later in the article it goes into breaking down all the different kinds. Apparently there were 80,000 aliens registered, so aliens aren't, obviously, going to be able to vote. Buying votes, altering vote counts, false registrations—the whole works. I'm kind of stealing your thunder. What else would you like to say about all of this?

Gilbert: If you apply the 100,000 to the vote figures, it wasn't 5,054 votes; it was more like 105,054 was the margin, if you knock these votes out. It was so rampant, they were taking punch ballots and running them through the machine several times. That's how people were voting more than once; it wasn't necessarily that they would come in and give their name again and vote again. Part of the voter reform that came out of this election was that once a ballot was counted, it had to be negated. It had to be certified as counted, then disposed. It couldn't be counted twice. So this is a very, very significant election. The heat that Thompson took, and the totals that were being turned in from Chicago, made this a much closer election than it actually was.

DePue: Based on this, and based on your many years of reporting in Chicago and your intimate knowledge about Chicago politics, what do you think about the assertion that Nixon actually won Illinois in 1960?

Gilbert: Ernie Locker said it best; he sees how this could've gone on before. There are other accounts by Theodore White, who was JFK's biographer, so to speak. In his first account of that election he kind of ignores the conversation between Daley and JFK. In his subsequent biography he recounts that Daley called Kennedy, or Kennedy called Daley. JFK didn't know where they were coming from, but Daley said, "Don't worry, we've got the votes." So how did Daley know that? (laughter)

DePue: Because he had the pulse of all his precinct captains.

Gilbert: The word went out.

DePue: So I think your answer is, Nixon actually won that election.

Gilbert: Well, I have no knowledge of that, only what I have read, but based on what I have read, I would say yes.

DePue: Why isn't this massive vote fraud more public knowledge?

Gilbert: That's a very good question. Thompson went on to not only win this election but win four years later and become the longest serving governor in the history of the state, fourteen years. History has a way of kind of losing its punch when you're close to it. That's what I was saying earlier when we were talking, that scholars may go back in fifty years and look at the 1982 gubernatorial election in Illinois and say, "Holy cow, this was really important. Why didn't this receive more attention? Why didn't the Nixon-Kennedy election receive more attention? Watergate sure as heck did." You look at Deep Throat and all the articles and movies and stories that have been written about Watergate, but you say, Wait a minute, there was a JFK-Nixon election where that election was basically stolen by the mayor of Chicago. Maybe someday it will get the attention that it deserves. And as a result of the 1982 gubernatorial election, that's where the fact came out: where there's smoke, there's fire.

DePue: Let's take this to the 2012 presidential election. I suspect you've heard the allegations that some staunch Republicans have made about election returns that were coming out of cities like Philadelphia.

Gilbert: Yeah.

DePue: The allegations are there were precincts in Philadelphia that were voting 100 percent for Barrack Obama, and that there were one or two where more people voted than were registered.

Gilbert: That are registered in the precincts, exactly.

DePue: Was there, you think in your heart of hearts, vote fraud going on in Philadelphia?

Gilbert: Yeah, in not only Philadelphia, but Cleveland and Chicago and any major city in the country. That's why election reform is such a big issue. Everyone says, "Yeah, we need election reform," but at the end of the day, Congress doesn't have the guts to pass it, because it cuts both ways.

DePue: And control of elections: clearly the U.S. Constitution gives that to the states. That's their purview.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: We've talked about this quite a bit, but in 1982 there are still plenty of people in Illinois, lots of your former colleagues in the press, who thought that Governor Thompson had presidential aspirations. This is a *Chicago Tribune* cartoon. I'll let you respond to that one.


Gilbert: (laughs) I'm not sure what the significance of this is. I would disagree with the implication.

DePue: Let me describe the cartoon. You got Thompson sitting at the desk. His little nametag is Guv, and he's got this little thought balloon here with a picture of the White House with a bomb stuck into it, destroying the White House, and the bomb's got "wimp" on it.

Gilbert: Right. Which would indicate that it was the closeness of this election with Stevenson that kind of dashed Thompson's hopes of ever going to the White House. I don't see that at all as being accurate. If Thompson had hopes of going to the White House, it wasn't the closeness of this election that caused his demise, it was a man named Ronald Reagan. And for that, I don't think there's any dispute. Clever cartoon, but I would say it's off base.

DePue: That gets us to 1983. At what time did you start to consider that you might be ready to bow out of the public stage?

Gilbert: Probably not until 1984. Things were moving along during the third term, but I had to start thinking about a career and a future, and did I want to do this until they turned the lights out. I pretty much decided no, and a couple of reasons. I was getting tired; it had been ten years, and it had been a long haul. Did I have, quote, the fire in the belly, that I originally had? No. And I was ready to start looking ahead. The other way that I've described it is that we set three records while I was press secretary for Governor Thompson. The first record was that he was elected by the largest majority in the history of the state that any governor had been elected by, and carrying 100 out of 102 counties was pretty monumental. Second record was he was reelected by the largest majority any governor had ever been reelected by, in his victory over Michael Bakalis. And the third record was he was elected by the smallest majority (laughs) any governor had been elected by, the 5,074 votes. So

looking at that, I said, "I've set three records. It's probably time for me to see what I can do in the private sector."

DePue: Where were you in terms of your family life?

Gilbert: I was single for most of the time that I was in Springfield. I got married in 1984 and had a stepdaughter, and that also played into my thinking that it was probably time to leave Springfield.

DePue: Was that something your new wife was mentioning as well?

Gilbert: It was pretty much up to me, I think, in that regard.

DePue: What was your wife's name?

Gilbert: Dru.

DePue: How about the timing of the decision to leave?

Gilbert: It was the middle of his third term, and I didn't want to wait to get too close to the next election. I wanted to give my successor a chance to get his feet on the ground, and that was David Fields, who had been the head of the UPI bureau in Springfield. I met with Thompson and told him I thought it was time, and he said, "That's completely up to you, but if that's your decision, who do you think should become the press secretary?" I said, "My choice would be Dave Fields." I had a couple of veterans in the press office, David Fields and Jim Williams. Jim Williams had been correspondent for the *Rockford Morning Star*, and a good guy. I think with the Fields-Williams team, and Jim Prescott, who I had brought in and was kind of managing the Chicago office, that was a pretty good group. Susan Mogerman was also an assistant press secretary. She lived in Springfield. I had a good press staff, so I felt comfortable that it was a good time to leave.

DePue: When, specifically, did you move away?

Gilbert: I left in August of 1985.

DePue: Did you have specific plans of what you were going to when you stepped out of the picture?

Gilbert: No. I had several offers, and I had a number of options. The three offers that I was considering—Daniel J. Edelman Public Relations. Dan Edelman wanted me to start a government relations unit in his PR office in Chicago. I was talking with McDonalds, and Dick Starmann, who was head of corporate communications for McDonalds, had offered me a job to head up their media relations group. That was very appealing. And then Continental Bank had made me an offer to be vice president of corporate communications for Continental. Continental Bank had just failed, it was in receivership by the

FDIC, and they were bringing in two chairmen of the bank, co-chairmen, which had never been done before. John Swearingen from Standard Oil of Indiana was coming out of retirement to be one chairman, and William Ogden, who was an officer with Chase Bank in New York, JP Morgan Chase, was coming from New York to be the other co-chairman. The feeling was that Ogden would handle the banking side, and Swearingen would handle kind of the political side of the bank. So I had an opportunity to come in as a vice president reporting to these two guys, and an opportunity like that was very unique in U.S. banking history. I came in as part of the workout team and stayed there for two years. I figure that's when I got my MBA, during that experience, because it was very unique, and it gave me a side of my career that I had never had before in corporate America and big banking. I did that for two years.

DePue: I'm sure you feel like everything that's happened after you stepped out of the public eye and the Thompson administration is just as important, but I'm going to ask you to talk about the rest of your life now in just a couple minutes.

Gilbert: (laughs) When I left Springfield the governor asked me what I was going to do, and I told him what my options were, what the offers were that were out there. He said, "You're not going to go into political consulting?" I said, "No, I don't think so. I would like to go into the corporate world." He supported that decision 100 percent. And I pretty much stayed out of politics. After Continental Bank, I was president of Lesnik Public Relations for the KemperLesnik group for four years. Then I went to Golin Harris International, and I was general manager of the Chicago office for about a year, and then I became president of Golin Harris International. While I was president of Golin Harris, we grew to be the seventh largest public relations firm in size in the world, and I was in charge of offices in Chicago, New York, Washington, DC, Atlanta, and Dallas, as well as Frankfurt, Germany, and two offices in London. I was also making an acquisition in Paris, and made an acquisition in Berlin. So I was spending a lot of time traveling overseas, and I was probably in an airplane more than I was in my office in Chicago. But a fascinating experience. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. Then I headed up a startup office called Clear!Blue in Chicago, and I grew that to twelve employees and $2 million in income. Then I decided enough was enough and I went out on my own.

DePue: When?

Gilbert: In 2002. I met my wife, Karen, in 2003; we were married in August of 2003, and have been happily married for almost eleven years.

DePue: Very good. That's a lot of years to be involved in politics in a variety of different ways. How has politics changed during your life?

Gilbert: Oh, it's changed dramatically. I look at some of the things that we did in Springfield, and today it would be frowned upon: the beer blast for labor on the mansion lawn. If Governor Quinn tried to pull off something like that now, I just don't know how it would be looked at. There are campaign rules in place now that we did not have, which I'm not saying we would've violated any of those rules, but it was so much easier to conduct a campaign than it is now. They've taken a lot of fun out of the process—needlessly, I think.

DePue: Your boss was responsible, while he was U.S. attorney, for sending Otto Kerner to prison, and since that time—I think since you stepped out of the public arena—Dan Walker went to prison for things that were unrelated to his time while he was in office.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And of course, you've got George Ryan, who ended up going to prison because of things that were going on when he was Secretary of State during the Edgar administration.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: And now, of course, you still have Rod Blagojevich in prison.

Gilbert: Right.

DePue: As a guy who devoted so much of his life to a governor and to Illinois as a state, what's your feeling about what's happened in Illinois?

Gilbert: It's sad. My feelings are one of sadness. I look at Thompson's fourteen years as the head of the fifth largest state in the nation, and basically scandal free. There were a few hiccups along the way. But when you look at his administrations, he ran a clean ship. And it can be done. Governor Edgar basically did it, although he had some problems with his toll road chief, Bob Hickman, who ended up going to jail. And—

DePue: MSI.

Gilbert: Right. So it ain't easy. I know that. Anytime you're the head of a large, sprawling, bureaucratic group such as we have in the state of Illinois, it's tough. But it can be done. And I look at the contrast between the two candidates who are running for governor now: Governor Quinn, who was just elected after taking over for Rod Blagojevich, and Bruce Rauner, who's ready to throw the rascals out, and it's very popular with voters, I think.

DePue: Has Illinois earned the reputation as maybe not the most corrupt, but certainly one of the most corrupt states in the union?

Gilbert: Oh, I would say it has, and rightfully so. I mean, the Democratic controlled legislature has run this state into the ground, and there's got to be a change. There has got to be a change.

DePue: Let's put the focus back on you. I'm going to read a short quote from Bob Hartley's book on Jim Thompson. I think this came out in 1979, so you were in the administration for six years after this. But this is what he wrote in the book, "Thompson was far and away the state's most successful user of the media. The media has no match for cruelty when love turns cold. So far, Thompson has sidestepped the traps and kept the media hustling after him." As his press secretary, you're a big part of that. What would you say to that quote? Accurate?

Gilbert: Knowing Bob Hartley, I would say that's a compliment. Hartley was an interesting editor. I knew him fairly well. I think his assessment in 1979 was pretty accurate. The media, right on through to the end of Thompson's career as governor, I would say they were fair. But they liked Big Jim. He was an interesting guy. He was fun to cover as a reporter, and that's why they liked him. The four governors who have followed after him haven't been cut nearly from the cloth that Thompson was cut from. I wouldn't say we won't have a governor quite as exciting as Thompson, because Rauner has the potential. If he is elected, he is going to shake things up.

DePue: But weren't you the guy who marveled that Rauner hadn't had any press conferences when he was running in the primary?

Gilbert: Right, right. He since has had one or two press conferences, very controlled; one was to announce all the Democratic leaders who are now supporting his candidacy, which I thought was a good move. But it is a different type of an operation. He's certainly not open like Thompson was.

DePue: Yeah, it doesn't sound very Thompson-esque.

Gilbert: No, it's Rauner-esque. My personal name for Rauner is Rowdy Rauner, and that is because he's doing it his own way. And the media has changed. If Thompson would've run a campaign like Rauner did in the primary, he wouldn't have been the media darling that he was, for sure. But the media today is a different animal. They allow candidates to run like this and get away with it.

DePue: Well, here's the rub, and this, again, would be something coming more from the conservative side of the fence: the media today is much less objective, much more biased in their reporting. Would you agree with that statement?

Gilbert: Certainly on a national level. I don't know what the media is in Illinois today. It's tough to get a read. Editorial staffs, as far as newspapers go, have been cut back drastically. Rick Pearson, who is probably the chief political writer for the *Chicago Tribune* today, and even covered part of Thompson in his later

years, his hands are tied by the newspaper. He doesn't have the freedom to get close to the candidates like reporters did back when Thompson was in the state house. It's too bad. I think the public suffers as a result. The media doesn't provide that fourth estate presence that is needed.

DePue: Playing the role of watch dog?

Gilbert: Mm-hmm, exactly.

DePue: If you were to look back at your career, and this isn't exclusive to your time working for Governor Thompson, but the accomplishment that you're most proud of—and leave aside the standard, "Well, it's my family."

Gilbert: (laughs) Oh, there are seasons in every man's life. There's a spring season when you're zero to twenty years old. There's a summer season when you're twenty to forty years old. There's an autumn from forty to sixty, and then there's your winter, when it's from sixty on. I look back at my spring season as a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* as just a very exciting, vibrant time. I look at the season when I was press secretary for Governor Thompson. I wouldn't have traded either job for all the money in the world. Then I left and headed up one of the largest public relations agencies in the world, which was growing, and it was vibrant, and it was dynamic. And I wouldn't trade that for all the money in the world. Right now I have my own consulting business. I report to myself. And I wouldn't trade this for all the money in the world. It's not one where I would pick being press secretary over being a reporter or being head of a large corporate group; they all fit together, and they all come together to make a very content, satisfied person. Whatever my accomplishments may have been, I don't take credit for Jim Thompson's fourteen-year run or the ten years I was with him, but it was a lot of fun being part of the team that put it all together.

DePue: The next couple questions I am going to restrict to just the Thompson years. Your most exhilarating moment with Thompson?

Gilbert: The first election in 1976. That was a huge, huge win, a huge accomplishment, and a lot of fun and very exhilarating.

DePue: And on the flipside, something that sticks out in your mind as a disappointment or a painful moment?

Gilbert: That's a good question, because nothing really pops up. I can think of a few issues that gave everybody in the administration pause, including Thompson. The Thompson Proposition, when we fell victim to old-style politics. People were round-tabling petitions for something as silly as the Thompson Proposition—not that the proposition was silly, but good grief, why can't you do it the right way? (laughter) That was very disappointing. I feel very proud of having been part of the Thompson administration. We put together a group of people who I think did it the right way.

DePue: What would you like to close with?

Gilbert: Why don't we say a prayer and then we'll sing a song? (laughter)

DePue: In the true Thompson style, huh?

Gilbert: I don't know about that. I would close with, first of all, my acknowledgement of what you're doing, putting together an oral history of important things that make Illinois what it is. Secondly, I think the fourteen years that Thompson served as Governor of the State of Illinois are the most successful administration that this state has ever seen, in terms of its accomplishments and the periods that it went through—you know, the high unemployment, inflation rates, and all the things we were talking about in 1982. He left the state with a budget that was smaller than when he came in, and that's huge. And when you look at what's happened to the state since then, I would say well done, Jim Thompson.

DePue: I think that's a great way to finish. This has certainly been a blast for me to share your memories and to hear all of these great stories, and to get some real insight into Governor Thompson's administration.

Gilbert: Thanks. It's been fun for me too. Thank you.

DePue: You bet.

(End of final interview)