Interview with Frank Watson

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DePue: Today is Tuesday, August 7, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm in Greenville, Illinois with former Senator Frank Watson. Good afternoon.

Watson: Mark, good afternoon.

DePue: I hope this is the first of many sessions that we have.

Watson: It's hopefully not as many as Jim Edgar had (laughs).

DePue: But if we can get as much history as I think you've got in your mind down and recorded, I think that would be wonderful. We always start with these, and even though you were senate minority leader for many years and assistant minority leader for a long time before that, under James "Pate" Philip, you obviously had an earlier history as well. Let's start it up with when and where you were born.

Watson: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri—but I always lived in Greenville—1945, July 26.

DePue: St. Louis is quite a ways off.

Watson: We didn't have a local hospital back then. Highland had a hospital, about twenty miles away, but I'm not sure why we ended up in St. Louis.

DePue: How long would the drive have been, to get your mother over to a hospital in St. Louis?

Watson: Probably an hour and a half. You had to go Route 40, U.S. 40. Seventy, of course wasn't there, and went through East St. Louis, Collinsville, all those metro east areas, so it was probably about an hour and a half.

DePue: Did you have any older siblings?

Watson: I have a sister, Melissa, who is older, six years older.

DePue: Any younger siblings?

Watson: Nope, just the two of us.

DePue: I know that you have deep roots in the Greenville area. Tell me how the family got here in the first place? Do you know that history?

Watson: We came here from Dayton, Ohio, the Watson family did. At that time, Charles W. Watson owned Watson's Drugstore, and that was my great, great uncle. Then my grandfather came here in 1903, and he and George became partners in the drugstore. That's when our family arrived here.

In 1923, my dad, Charles I. Watson, got into the drugstore. Then, of course, I came in in 1968, into the drugstore. So we've been here a long time. Eighteen eighty-one is when the drugstore was founded by Charles I. Watson.

DePue: So there's a Charles I. Watson, a Charles W. Watson…

Watson: Excuse me, Charles W. Watson founded the drugstore in nineteen… We'd better go back.

DePue: Now I'm confused.

Watson: Yep. Charles W. Watson founded the drugstore in 1881.

DePue: Is there a Charles I. Watson?

Watson: Charles I. Watson, my dad.

DePue: And he picked it up in 1923?

Watson: Nineteen twenty-three.

DePue: That's forty years difference there, thirty-eight years difference between those two. Did he come pretty late in your grandfather's life?

Watson: I'm not even sure. My grandfather was Frank E. Watson.

DePue: Charles W. was your great… ?

Watson: Great-great uncle. Then when my side of the Watson family arrived here… That was Frank E. Watson.

DePue: How many generations of pharmacists are there?

Watson: Four.

DePue: Does that include your son?

Watson: No. Both my kids were not interested in pharmacy. I was in politics for most of their life, so they never knew really much about the drugstore, although they did work in it. But they were not interested, and I didn't press them. I didn't push them, because I kind of felt like I was, a little bit. Not that I was pressured to do it, but I was expected to do it, and I did. I went to school at Purdue, the same school my dad went to, and then came back here in 1968 and took over the store.

DePue: We should mention, Watson's Drugstore is one of the most prominent businesses on the square, downtown Greenville, right?

Watson: South side of the square, Greenville, Illinois. We've been there a long time, the same location. There's a lot of businesses that were founded in such and such a year, but they moved. We, the same location and, other than we expanded into the two buildings next to us.

DePue: How about your mother's background? What was her maiden name?

Watson: Logsdon.

DePue: Her first name?

Watson: Pauline.

DePue: Logdson?

Watson: Logdson. L-o-g-d-s-o-n. She was from Sorento actually, which is in Bond County. That's where my grandmother, Synell [?] Logsdon—we called her, "Mangie,"—that Synell Logsdon came from New Mexico, where my grandfather had to be out there because of an illness, had to be in New Mexico. Then they came back here, and she came to Sorento and worked at DeMoulins, which is a band uniform company.

DePue: The what again?

Watson: DeMoulin, DeMoulin Band Uniform Company [has] been here a long time and still here. They make band uniforms. I'm on their board of directors, as a matter of fact. My grandmother worked there as a seamstress, and then my mother and her sister, my Aunt, Dorothy, my mother's sister, worked for a lawyer here in town, and then my mom was a teacher, fourth grade teacher.

DePue: In Greenville.

Watson: In Greenville.

DePue: Are there any private schools in Greenville?

Watson: No.

DePue: What's the earliest memory you have growing up?

Watson: Vacations, I guess. I can remember going to Pikes Peak. When I was five years old, I was at Pikes Peak, and when I was six years old, I was at Mount Washington, I believe it was; that's out east. I think that's right. Anyway, those two birthdays, that's where I was. I do remember those trips, so that's probably… I was probably about five years old. Remembering things here locally, other than growing up as a kid… Later on I remember a lot.

DePue: How would you describe your childhood, especially the first ten to fifteen years?

Watson: Oh, I had a great childhood. I played baseball every day. In the summer we'd get out; all we did was play, from sunup till sundown. We had a great neighborhood. Everybody kind of just stayed in their neighborhood. If you got out of your neighborhood, that was like going twenty miles. Everybody kind of stayed in their five or six block neighborhood. We had a great group of people, the kids in that neighborhood.

We lived right across from Greenville College. Greenville College was a playground for us. There was all kinds of access there, the gymnasium, the front lawn of Holt Hall, the football field; Scott Field it was called. We spent a lot of time at Greenville College, playing ping-pong in the dormitories. Yeah, I grew up on the Greenville College campus (laughs).

I had a great childhood. We went on trips to Sam Baker Park, down in Missouri, in the Ozarks. My dad, being a pharmacist, he couldn't leave for a long period of time, so we would go over the Fourth of July. We had friends from the area, from Greenville here, that went with us. There would usually be ten, fifteen people would go down there, and we'd have a great time. So, I have fond memories.

DePue: The 1950s and early '60s, most people look back very nostalgically, especially if you're a kid, that baby boomer generation. Were you technically a baby boomer?

Watson: I guess I was right before, '45.

DePue: Was your father in the military?

Watson: No. He was too old for World War II and too young for World War I.

DePue: Did you have some other relatives who were veterans of the war?

Watson: Actually not. We have a memorial, up on the square here, and there's only one brick in the memorial, of a relative of mine. And that was the Civil War. He fought for the North, by the way (both laugh). He was in the cavalry. I can't think of his last name; it was Justice, I think. But anyway, that's the only one that I know of in our family, our immediate family.

DePue: Did you have a pretty tight-knit family growing up?

Watson: I would say so, yes.

DePue: Both sets of grandparents were from this area as well?

Watson: They were, but I didn't know them, although I knew my grandmother. In fact, my grandmother, Logsdon—Mangie, as we called her—actually lived in our home as I was growing up. She had retired and stayed there.

DePue: Why didn't you know your other grandparents?

Watson: Oh, they passed on.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about Greenville's economy and maybe expand it into Bond County. Let's start with, not just the economy, but ethnically and culturally, who founded this area; who settled this area?

Watson: A fellow by the name of Bradford, who was one of the first founders. Everything in Illinois was founded from the south, north. In fact, I have a map that shows that Bond County was one of the largest counties in Illinois at one time, and now we're one of the smallest.

DePue: Population-wise?

Watson: No, no, geographic. We went all the way up to the northern border of Illinois. Bond County and Madison County, and I think it was Jefferson County was the next county, and we all three went from north to south. Anyway, as far as the history of the county, I'm really not a good historian of that. It is named after the first governor of Illinois, which is Shadrach Bond, and we were… I think it was about 1818 when Greenville was founded, right? Something close to that.

DePue: How about any particular group that settled here from Europe, Germans or Swedes or Irish?

Watson: No, the German were all south of us and east of us. The French were over around Highland.

DePue: But as far as you know, it sounds like it was coming from Kentucky and Tennessee, coming from those southern areas?

Watson: Right, yes.

DePue: How about when you were growing up and even to this day, how would you describe the economy of Bond County?

Watson: Rural. It's been agriculture forever, and then we've got some good businesses here locally. They've done a good job over the years of attracting industry. We've had a lot of industries that were founded here, like I mentioned, DeMoulin Brothers. That was two brothers founded that band uniform company. They weren't a band uniform company in the beginning. They actually have a museum up on the square. A local fellow by the name of John Goldsmith started a museum of DeMoulin Bros.

There's a lot of history of local people, successful people, doing well in the area of business. Nevinger, there's a scoreboard company here by the name of Nevco, and Ralph Nevinger—"Bus" Nevinger as we knew him—started that company. They made basketball scoreboards starting out. Then they made all kinds of scoreboards for everything. Now they're into all the electronic stuff and really have advanced and kept up, and they're a good, major employer for us.

DePue: Is the farmland as high quality as you get if you go north, around the Champaign area?

Watson: Oh, no, no, not at all. No, I'd say production and price is about half of what it is up in Champaign, the northern part of the state. We call that "black dirt" area. We're not as bad… We're okay, but when you go further south, it gets worse.

DePue: I expect that you'll know this one a little bit better. Politically, how would you describe Bond County? (Watson laughs)

Watson: Very conservative. Although, when you talk about conservatives, you talk about Republicans generally today, but even Democrats are conservative here. Generally they'll vote with the Republicans on a national ticket. Then locally, they would elect a lot of Democrats over the years, because they have good candidates, good people running.

DePue: I know if you go back a generation or two, there were a lot of very strong pockets of Democrats in Southern Illinois. Would that have been true for Bond County?

Watson: No. Those were mostly, probably coal miners, when the unions got started down in Southern Illinois and all that. That was primarily further south.

DePue: Anything special about going to school here in the early years for you?

Watson: I went to Ingles School, which is no longer there. We had two junior highs in Greenville. My mother taught at Central School, and then I went to Ingles.

DePue: Ingles?

Watson: Ingles, I-n-g-l-e-s. You wouldn't have a school like that today. It was just a box, three stories and no elevator—no way of getting down—no access. Fire escapes were the tubes that ran down; that was a playground too for us (laughs).

I had a real good… In fact, my second grade teacher—and my dad was a lot older; he was probably in his mid-forties when I was born—my second grade teacher was the same teacher he had. Things didn't change a lot in Bond County (laughs). People, when they got here, they got a job, and they stayed at it. Miss Ward was her name, a good example.

DePue: How big was Greenville at that time, when you were growing up?

Watson: Forty five hundred probably, somewhere in that [range], 4,000.

DePue: Was religion an important part of your family life?

Watson: I always say I was baptized in the Episcopal Church, grew up in a Presbyterian Church and married a girl who goes to the Christian Church. I'm now a member of the First Christian Church, here in Greenville. But I was Episcopalian, and then, of course, that church folded, but they still have the building. It is now another church here in town.

Then I went to the Presbyterian Church. My folks moved there, and that's where I grew up in, the Presbyterian Church. Then the church right across the street from us at the Presbyterian Church, was the First Christian Church, was where my wife went.

DePue: Was your family the type that made going to church every Sunday part of the routine?

Watson: No, not really, because my dad worked on Sunday morning. We would open the drugstore, and a lot of times I went up there with him and helped out. I'd run the register or doing something, while he was back in the back, filling prescriptions.

DePue: Was that something you enjoyed doing?

Watson: Oh, yeah. I enjoyed that a lot. It was my introduction to people, so to speak. Besides my classmates, it [meeting people] was through the drugstore. We had a soda fountain there, and people—not necessarily on Sunday morning—a few people would come in and just hang out, as we would say now. Nickel Cokes, we had nickel Cokes, nickel ice cream cones. I always told them, when I fixed a Coke for them, "If it isn't any good, I'll make you another one."

DePue: So, there was a soda fountain in the drugstore?

Watson: Yeah, there was a soda fountain.

DePue: At the drugstore.

Watson: In fact, we have it in the basement here, of our home.

DePue: Oh, really?

Watson: Yeah, the back bar, the back bar.

DePue: Can we go down there afterwards and get sodas (laughs)?

Watson: Sure. By the way, no sodas down there. We might get a beer (both laugh).

DePue: How about politics? Did you have any of your father or your ancestors who had gotten into local politics?

Watson: I had—let's see, what would he be?—a great uncle, I guess, by the name of Hubbard, who ran for states attorney. I've still got a little card he handed out, "A vote would be appreciated." His office was actually upstairs from the drugstore. I never knew him—this was before me—but he was in politics. My dad was a precinct committeeman, very active in politics. He went to state conventions.

DePue: What party?

Watson: Republican Party, the only party (laughs). No, I just… That's how I grew up though. That was the only party. My mom was active in women's groups and things like that, but she also worked on campaigns along with Dad. That's how I really got interested. I was handing out campaign fliers and going door to door and doing the things that a precinct committeeman does to get out the vote or to register people to vote, you know, just get people interested in politics. That's what they were all about, but they were very strong Republicans.

DePue: You got started at the retail politics level then.

Watson: I would say so, yeah.

DePue: Were you the kind of kid who paid close attention to what was going on in the wider world, read the newspapers or followed the news?

Watson: Somewhat. I was more interested in sports; I still am. I read the sports page before I read the…especially the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. You don't read the editorial page of the *Post-Dispatch*. In fact, I told them, I says, "If you want to just send me the sports page, that's okay."

Anyway, I kept up with it. I had to, because we talked a lot about it at the dinner table. Back then, everybody had dinner together. We went out to eat on Sundays; we spent time with the family. It was a close-knit group, and we'd spend a lot of time talking about that, or at least my mom and dad would, and I would overhear or listen in on conversations. So, I would say I was.

Of course, television back then was a test pattern. I don't know if you remember that; you're too young for that. But a test pattern was on, with the Indian head on TV. Then the conventions, every single moment of the party conventions was on TV. That was a big deal and isn't any more.

DePue: Did you have any sense of where your parents were, in terms of political philosophy or just in their party affiliation? Does that question make sense?

Watson: Yes. Yes, it does. My dad was never a Rockefeller Republican, if that answers anything. That's the east coast establishment, and still is to a degree.

DePue: Do you remember hearing him talk about that, complain about that?

Watson: Oh, yeah. He was concerned about Eisenhower actually. I remember the discussions about that, because he wasn't… Eisenhower was a war hero; he wasn't a Republican. He didn't grow up in the ranks, so to speak. He was recruited. And I can remember my dad talking about concerns he had for Eisenhower being president. I think those were short-lived, because Eisenhower was a pretty good president.

DePue: What was his concern about Nelson Rockefeller?

Watson: Just too liberal, just had different views of… We're all Republicans, but within the Republican Party, you have different factions, and calling them the east coast liberals isn't really fair, not in today's standards. But back then, he was considered to be sort of on the fringe of the party. Today, the same thing, but maybe not to as much a degree.

DePue: They kind of divide up liberal and conservative today in terms of fiscal or social and cultural issues or national defense issues. So, what would his objection in saying Nelson Rockefeller was too liberal, on fiscal issues?

Watson: More on fiscal. Social was not an issue back then. I never heard abortion even mentioned or any of those type of issues, what you would call social issues, the religious right, all that. I don't remember that being a part of any kind of Republican. Not to say that it wasn't, but it wasn't as prominent as it is today.

DePue: Would you ascribe, at that time, to the same views?

Watson: I was a big [Barry] Goldwater… I can remember reading his book. In fact, I may still have it. Phyllis Schlafly wrote a book about Goldwater, *A Choice, Not an Echo*, but that was… I would say that my views were brought to me, developed in me, by my parents. I'm sure they were very much conservative as I've become or was.

DePue: Let's talk about your high school years. You attended high school in the local public school?

Watson: Yes. Greenville High School.

DePue: Any extracurricular activities you got involved in?

Watson: Well, athletics. I was involved in sports, football, basketball and tennis.

DePue: All year long.

Watson: We couldn't wait for one sport to get over and get into another. I think that's missing today. I think kids, they focus on one thing, and then they burn out. I got into everything I could get into. If I could have done more I would have, but we were limited to doing three sports a year.

DePue: In a city of 4,000, they probably needed everybody they could get.

Watson: It used to be, there was a guy here, went to school here, and got fifteen letters in four years of high school. That tells you that he did a lot of things. But we couldn't in our school. They limited the number of sports.

DePue: What position did you play in football?

Watson: I was an end, both defensively and…more of a linebacker, outside linebacker, than an offensive end.

DePue: How about basketball?

Watson: Well, I grew early. My biggest problem is I grew early, so I never learned to face the basket. I tell kids today, learn to dribble the ball; learn to shoot from outside, and I always had my back to the basket. I grew until I was a freshman in high school and I stopped, and then everybody passed me by. So did basketball for that matter. I loved to play it but…

DePue: So you played inside until you were outgrown by everybody else, huh (laughs)?

Watson: Yeah, right (laughs).

DePue: Which one of the sports did you enjoy the most?

Watson: Oh, I'd say I had the most success in tennis actually. But just from the camaraderie, I would say basketball.

DePue: We didn't mention baseball, except you said you played it all summer.

Watson: I could have played baseball in high school, like I said, if I could have played everything, I would have been in it. But I decided on tennis.

DePue: Oh, that went through the summer as well, not just the spring?

Watson: Summer was, we had summer leagues in baseball, but not at the high school level, not organized by the high school, a sanctioned sport.

DePue: Did you have any aspirations to play at the college level or to become a professional or anything in sports?

Watson: No, no. I played a lot of intramurals. I was a pretty good intramural player at Purdue. But I was in a lot of things, squash… Like I said, anything they'd give you a racket, I could play and did, enjoyed it.

DePue: Did you get to listen to your fair share of Cardinals games on the radio?[1]

Watson: Absolutely.

1 The St. Louis Cardinals is an American professional baseball team based in St. Louis. The Cardinals compete in Major League Baseball as a member club of the National League Central division. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Louis_Cardinals)

DePue: Did you attend some Cardinal games growing up?

Watson: Well, I actually went to a Browns' game, the St. Louis Browns.[2] In 1954, they moved to Baltimore; they became the Orioles. My dad took me to a St. Louis Browns-Cleveland Indians game. I can remember that, but I can't remember the first Cardinal game I saw. Of course, I only saw one Browns game, and they left.

But I'm a diehard Cardinal fan, season ticket holder today, have been for a long time. Yes, I listened on the radio, Harry Carey; Jack Buck came in 1954, and Joe Garagiola. That was quite a broadcasting team they had. They didn't have it on television back then; it was all radio. I'd listen to it in my room, go in the bed. Oh yeah, that was…

In fact, KMOX Radio out of St. Louis—a major station there—every now and then plays all these old...maybe a game or two or excerpts. I just enjoy listening to that kind of stuff because that's what I remember as a kid.

DePue: Browns **and** the Cardinals. Were your parents Browns or Cardinals fans?

Watson: They were Browns fans. My dad was a Browns fan. My uncle George, who I did not know, who died before I was born, he was a huge Cardinal fan. He had a lot of Cardinal memorabilia—we don't know whatever happened to it—which would have been nice to have, because I've got a lot of stuff. I have a huge amount of stuff (both laugh) that I've collected over the years, and of course, that my dad had too, for that matter, some, not a lot.

DePue: I think I know the answer to this one. Did you work during high school?

Watson: I did. When I could. I was in sports so much, but I would work on weekends at the drugstore. I mowed grass; I mowed a lot of lawns. I did that kind of work in the summer, baled hay. That's a good job for everybody; everybody ought to go through that one. They ought to put up baled hay in a loft in an old barn (laughs). You're just dirty and got stuff all over you, you itch and sweat.

DePue: That doesn't sound too romantic.

Watson: No, no.

DePue: So why does everybody have to have that experience?

Watson: I think that would be good for everybody. I can remember, we'd go out, after we were done, and everybody would just take a hose to each other. There was nothing like that, drinking out of the hose, pulling that cold water out of the well (both laugh). That was fabulous.

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2 The St. Louis Browns were a Major League Baseball team that originated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as the Milwaukee Brewers. Charter member of the American League (AL), the Brewers moved to St. Louis, Missouri after the 1901 season, where they played for 52 years as the St. Louis Browns. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_St._Louis_Browns)

DePue: Were you involved in school government at all?

Watson: I was. I was vice president of our… Yeah, I guess vice president. I was the president of our class, and then I was vice president. I never made it to the top. I was lieutenant governor my senior year, but I wasn't governor. Of course, I always had an interest in that, again, from back in my childhood. So when I got into high school, I stayed with the Student Council and things like that.

DePue: You kind of alluded before that it was expected that you would go into the pharmacy business. What were you thinking you wanted to do when you were in those high school years?

Watson: That's what I wanted to do. I always thought it was Purdue or bust.

DePue: Why?

Watson: I guess I really didn't have any other influence on me, except my family, in that regard. The Watsons had always been pharmacists, and so Frank's going to be one too, and that's what I did. It wasn't like I was pressured into it or anything. It's just what I did. I wanted to go to Purdue, there wasn't any doubt about that. I wanted to go to Purdue, I was a big Boilermaker [Purdue basketball team] fan, and we went to football games up there, growing up.

DePue: You're not that far from Champaign and the University of Illinois.

Watson: Well, pharmacy school is in Chicago. I had no interest in going to Chicago, none. And it made sense. The other one was the St. Louis School of Pharmacy; that was close. A lot of people who were pharmacists from this area had gone to the St. Louis School of Pharmacy, but it was never mentioned in our house. It was always just Purdue.

DePue: What were your favorite subjects in high school?

Watson: History. I really enjoyed history.

DePue: That doesn't match up with pharmacy very well at all.

Watson: No, no. In fact, I was only here… I came back in '68; in '78 I got elected to office. So it wasn't like I really wanted to be in that drugstore. I hate to say that, but I wanted to get into politics. I always say, one of the best things I ever did was run for office, because it got me out of the store and got a friend of mine, Algren Anderson, into it, who ran the store while I was in politics and doing what I did. And he did a wonderful job.

DePue: What was his first name?

Watson: Algren. A-l-g-r-e-n. Danish, from Belleville, (Illinois).

DePue: When you're in high school, were you thinking that you wanted to get into politics?

Watson: Yes. Back when I got married… Before I got married, I told my wife to be, I said, "Someday I'd like to run for office, just so you know." That may have been one of the better things I ever did, because I did. And she said, "That's fine." Of course, she was very supportive of me all the time I was in office.

DePue: Did she believe you when you said that the first time?

Watson: Probably not (laughs). She didn't know much about politics at that point in time.

DePue: Were you telling people when you were growing up, that you wanted to be in politics some day?

Watson: I think people just kind of expected it.

DePue: It's not something you go around saying, like "I want to be a pharmacist" or "I want to be in politics." That's not the kind of thing most kids would say.

Watson: No, I don't think I did. I think it was just obvious that someday I would run for office. I didn't know what office. It could have been county clerk or something local. I had no idea, but I just wanted to be involved in [the] service aspect of what I considered government to be, is service. I still do today.

DePue: So that was what appealed to you?

Watson: Oh yeah, oh yeah, very much so. Like I always say, when I talk to kids about... "If you want to do something that's really rewarding, and you get a lot of pats on the back for what you do, but you get a little criticism too, it's politics, because you can help people, you really can. You can open doors for them." Things are different now; things are a lot different than when I started.

DePue: Different how?

Watson: Oh, you can't… Everything's documented. It isn't like we're doing anything wrong, but whenever you call an agency or try to help somebody, all of a sudden, it's like you're making a special consideration for a certain somebody, where, "Why isn't somebody else getting that consideration, because they're a supporter of yours?" It's gotten out of hand.

To me, politics is service; it's doing for a lot of people what they maybe can't do for themselves, helping them. I think our hands are tied in some cases now. A good example of that is this General Assembly scholarship, which they just threw out. I understand why they decided not to do it any longer; it was abused by some of the legislators in Illinois, a lot of them. But it was a great thing for kids. Kids going to medical school and going to dental school or going to a university, a state university, and we're able to help them get through school.

In fact, since I've been out of politics, the more I hear from people is, "I don't know if you remember this Frank, or not, but in 1979, you gave me a scholarship to go to Eastern Illinois [University], and I became a doctor"—or I

became a dentist, whatever—"because of that" and how much they appreciate it. That's all gone now, because somebody abused it, mostly the legislators.

DePue: When you were growing up, especially high school and early college years, from your perspective, growing up and living in Greenville and going to Purdue, what was the general public's view towards politicians and public service?

Watson: I'd say very good, honorable career. And I still think it is today, but you hear this, "They're all crooks, except for you, Frank" (laughs). They're all crooks except for you, and everybody feels that way about their elected official. The perception is, unfortunately, that they're all in it for themselves. That's not the case, but we have a lot of bad apples that create that image.

DePue: I'm going to kind of get up above the Greenville level for the next couple questions. October 4, 1957, that's when the Soviets put up Sputnik; do you remember that event?

Watson: I remember it being catastrophic, that Russia put… I don't remember the event. I just can remember the headline and the fact that we looked like we were defeated; we got beat. I remember that part of it.

DePue: This would have been close to the end of your time in high school. October of 1962, that was the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Watson: I don't really remember much about that. I do remember the talk about the Bay of Pigs, and how we let the Cubans down; I remember that.

DePue: That would have been '61. Would that have been dinner table conversation, do you think?

Watson: Oh, yeah, it definitely would have been. But I don't remember that much about it. You can always put these events… you can say where you were when such and such happened, that really etch in your mind, but that one does not.

DePue: Looking back in your years growing up here in Greenville, who would you say had the strongest influence on you?

Watson: My dad, Everett Dirksen. You're talking about local?

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: Everett Dirksen was somebody that… You couldn't say enough about him, at least that was the way my parents were.

DePue: So, that was their kind of Republican.

Watson: That was definitely their kind of Republican. I'm trying to think locally, who…

DePue: Do you remember any comments they would have made about Adlai Stevenson?

Watson: (laughs) They were not big fans. Here's a guy from Illinois, running for the U.S. presidency. You would think that there would be more support for somebody from your home state (laughs), but not at all.

I've still got a picture of Eisenhower, the big campaign poster. It's in immaculate condition, and they kept it all those years. Like I said earlier, they were concerned about Eisenhower, but after a while… Of course, he beat Adlai twice. I remember him being from Bloomington, I wanted to think, wasn't it a newspaper or Galena?

DePue: I don't know enough about his history. I should, but I can't recall.

Watson: Maybe that's… still, even a downstate Democrat [laughs]. Everybody thought a lot of Adlai Stevenson. I know that from just listening to people talk during that time period. Of course, he became UN ambassador, I believe.

DePue: That's right, because he made a pretty famous speech during the Cuban Missile Crisis. But that's a different story. Would there be anybody in your early years that you'd classify as a mentor for you?

Watson: Politically?

DePue: No, just overall.

Watson: Boy, coaches, definitely coaches. People involved in any kind of athletics that I was in, always had a good influence on me. But I'd go back to my dad and my mom, of course, hardworking people. I can't put a finger on that one.

DePue: It sounds like you got to college with two goals in mind: one, you definitely wanted to be a pharmacist, and two, you liked this idea of being in public service, a politician. Was that a good match, those two things together?

Watson: Very much so. Politics and pharmacy is a great match. I always used to say, when out on the campaign trail, "I'm not a politician, I'm a pharmacist," because pharmacy was always ranked as one of the top respected jobs. *Parade Magazine* would roll out the most respected, used car salesman and all those people, not politicians (DePue laughs); they were down at the bottom, but there at the top was always pharmacists.[3]

So, being in a pharmacy and visiting with people, being part of their healthcare team, you had a high degree of respect for that. It gave me the opportunity to communicate with people and to have access to their thoughts, because it wasn't always counting pills. You had a lot of time to interact with your customer. You don't necessarily have that anymore. That, I think, pharmacy and politics is a good combination.

In fact, when I got elected, there were five pharmacists in the General Assembly. The lieutenant governor was a pharmacist, and then George Ryan

3 *Parade* is an American nationwide Sunday newspaper magazine, founded in 1941 and distributed in more than 700 newspapers in the United States. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parade_(magazine))

was a pharmacist, and then there were three others in the General Assembly. So, pharmacy breeded politicians.

DePue: You already explained why Purdue University. What year did you graduate from high school?

Watson: Sixty-three.

DePue: And you started then, in the fall of ’63?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: What was your major there? Pharmacy?

Watson: Yes, pre-pharmacy.

DePue: That was right from the beginning?

Watson: They had a two-year pre-pharmacy, to get into pharmacy school. So you took preliminary subjects, and then you got into the real meat of pharmacy when you were a junior. There’s a five-year program. So, I got out in ’68, and then the last three years were all pharmacy-related courses.

DePue: Can you walk me through kind of the cycle, the types of courses that you had to take at that time to become a pharmacist?

Watson: All kinds of science courses: organic chemistry, microbiology. I liked that course so well, I took it twice (both laugh), aced the lab the second time. After you take it once, well you know it… Like I said, biology, all the sciences.

You kind of decide at one point whether you want to get into retail. or maybe you want to go into… A lot of people went into detailing and the manufacturing, the industry. and Then there was the beginning of hospital pharmacy back then.

Now it’s altogether different. But most people went into retail, and that was the vast majority of us. Then you got into marketing classes and communication classes and things like that. I liked marketing; I liked that. That worked right into politics, was be able to sell yourself. As I said, in the last two years… Your last year, you’re really focused on that.

You had your practical too. You went into a drugstore in West Lafayette, Indiana, where Purdue is. You went into the store and actually worked. That was your practical experience that you got. Of course, I had it, coming from a drugstore already.

DePue: Did you have a chance to take any history or political science courses?

Watson: Oh, yeah. When you had electives, no political science, none, but I took a lot of history.

You know what I'd tell people? Today, I guess, I would still tell them. When people come to me, students, "I want to be like you, Frank. I want to be elected; I want to serve." They'd say, "I'm going into political science." I'd say, "Don't do it. Get into something that has a marketable degree that you could do if politics doesn't work out. It's not for everybody; it really isn't, so get a degree in… Get marketing or economics, or something that you can sell into the workforce, and then minor in political science, but don't major in it." I'd still tell people that today, if they'd ask.

DePue: Did history sound like more fun for you to study than political science?

Watson: Yes. Political science was statistics, and I was never big into that (both laugh). I was a handshaker. I was never much into the nuts and bolts of politics and getting elected. I could meet people well and did that and got along with people. That was not a problem, but…

DePue: So, I assume economics wasn't an interest for you either.

Watson: Economics wasn't a big interest (laughs), not at all.

DePue: Was there any type of history that especially appealed to you?

Watson: American. I could go back in American history today, and I'm not sure how much of that stuck. But really, I enjoyed it, yes.

DePue: How did you pay for school?

Watson: My parents. Everything was taken care of by my mom and dad. I was fortunate that way.

DePue: Was that true for your sister as well?

Watson: I assume so. She went to DePauw, over in Greencastle, Indiana.

DePue: Not DePaul but DePauw.

Watson: Yeah, Greencastle, Indiana, a smaller school. DePaul is, of course, in Chicago. This is in Greencastle. But I assume the same was for her.

DePue: Was she expected to follow into the family business as well?

Watson: I don't think so. I guess because women didn't go into pharmacy back then. It's a great profession now for women. It's name your hours. You could raise a family and have a family while you're working and work part-time, good conditions, good pay. But back then, I bet there wasn't 10 percent of my class was female.

DePue: Were you involved in extracurricular activities at Purdue?

Watson: I was, intramurals. I was in a fraternity, Phi Gamma Delta, a social fraternity, Phi-G as we call it.

DePue: Phi Gamma Delta.

Watson: Phi Gamma Delta.

DePue: What were they?

Watson: Just a social fraternity, like Sigma Chi would be; maybe that would be one you'd know.

DePue: For a lot of people, especially my generation, you think of fraternities, you start thinking about *Animal House*, especially the social fraternities (both laugh).[4]

Watson: That's one of my favorite movies of all time, not that we were an *Animal House.* But I could tell you, I could relate to that movie, my college days… Well, that's not a very good statement to make; is it? (both laugh) It's not quite that bad, but it was free living. You had to be disciplined to do your work, your schoolwork and all that, but the rest of the time you were on your own. You didn't have Mom and Dad there. You grew up pretty quick.

DePue: Did you live in the fraternity house then?

Watson: Um-hmm.

DePue: What year would you have gone through the initiation process.

Watson: The pledge.

DePue: The pledge week, the pledge period.

Watson: In '64. Well, I pledged right after the first semester of my freshman year. So, that would have been '64, the spring of '64.

DePue: Any memories about the pledging process?

Watson: Oh, yes. In fact (laughs), we had a great class. In fact, our class, thirty-three of us pledges, we have a guy named Jeff Cooke—he's still over in West Lafayette; he's a lawyer over there—keeps us all communicating. He communicates with everybody, email. I see a lot of my fraternity brothers from time to time. You develop a very close bond with those people, going through the initiation process. Then once you're in the fraternity, why, it's a great experience.

Today, you hear so much bad about… In fact, fraternities are losing favor in a lot of places, and it's too bad, because it doesn't have to be all that bad. It was a great experience for me.

DePue: What kind of things did you have to do during the pledge period?

Watson: You had to clean the house every week, and that was… I wasn't used to that (laughs). Working, you had pledge duties. Of course, your class met on a

4 National Lampoon's *Animal House* is a 1978 American comedy film about a trouble-making fraternity whose members challenge the authority of the dean of the fictional Faber College. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_House)

weekly basis, and you had things you had to memorize and all that. It was a great experience.

DePue: How about ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]? I know that's an ROTC school.

Watson: I was in ROTC, two years, Air Force. Everybody, "Are you a veteran, Frank?" "Oh, yeah, I was in ROTC; I was in the Air Force at Purdue" (both laugh).

DePue: Did you give them a wink after that?

Watson: Yeah. But you had to shine your shoes; we had drills. Either you were in the marching band, which was huge at Purdue. They gave scholarships to people to be in the marching band. Golden Girl and the Silver Twins [both featured twirler positions] and all that, that's still there. And like I said, they give scholarships for that. It's a big part of the university system, is the band. But if you weren't in the band, you had to be in ROTC, if you were a male.

DePue: Did you enjoy that?

Watson: I slept through all the movies. Our class was right after lunch; it was the worst time. The instructor would just turn on the movie camera, and everybody would watch a movie for the forty-five minutes or fifty minutes we were there. I remember sleeping through most of that.

DePue: At that time period in American history, '64, '65, '66, especially towards those later years, Vietnam is going on; the draft is very much part of the equation. Was that in the back of your mind at the time?

Watson: It wasn't in the back of my mind about going to college. There was a lot of kids that went to college for no other reason than to stay out of the draft. That was wrong, because many of them didn't make it. That was never an issue of mine, but sure, I had friends, high school friends, classmates at Purdue, who went on to Vietnam after they graduated.

When I got out, I went down to St. Louis and had a physical and failed it. Here I'd been involved in athletics and all this all my years. I always had a back issue. Growing up, I can remember sciatic nerve pain going down my leg. Somehow, I don't have any ligament that holds the backbone to the pelvic bone; only muscle is there to hold it together. They exempted me, 4F [not acceptable].

DePue: Were you expecting to be exempt when you went over?

Watson: No, no. I had no idea. Well, other than the fact that I was in the drugstore… My father had a stroke in 1967, September 30. Purdue was to play SMU that day in football. I remember that, getting a call, a Friday night, with my mom telling me, "You need to come home." Anyway, my mom ran the drugstore for a year and a half. She didn't run it; she hired pharmacists to be in there, but she kept it going for me. That was quite an ordeal for her. That wasn't easy, having

my dad to take care of, who had a stroke, who lived another eleven years, having a severe stroke. He was paralyzed, wheelchair bound, couldn't speak.

So, when I got out of school, I thought there might be an exemption for me because of the fact of needing to be in the store. I didn't have to go that route, but I always thought that maybe I wouldn't have to go into the service. I actually look back at that; if it hadn't had been for the situation that I was in at the time, with my mom running the drugstore, and my dad being as sick as he was, I really think I missed something by not being in the service. I think that would have been good for me.

I think that would be good for everybody, to go into the service, to do something for a couple years, especially right out of high school. Instead of going into college, let's send them out to somewhere to do some work for the country or do some work for the military or make some kind of a commitment, and then grow up in those two years, and then go to college. I think you'd see an entirely different…

DePue: So every kid should go out and bale hay in the summer (Watson laughs), and every kid should have the opportunity to be in the Army.

Watson: I just think the service does something for you, of course, the commitment and then the discipline you learn in the service. How many kids do you know that were problem kids, that went into the military and came out pretty good? The military kind of shapes them up, and I think that would have been good for me.

DePue: But it sounds like, when you were in college at least, it just wasn't on the radar screen for you, other than ROTC.

Watson: No. When you're talking about things that you remember, when I was a freshman was the assassination of [President John F.] Kennedy. I can remember exactly where I was when I heard about it. I was at Purdue, walking on campus, and a guy had a transistor radio in his ear.[5] I asked him… I can remember where I was. I was right by the standpipe, the big tower-like funnel, the smokestack at Purdue, and I asked him, "What's going on?" He said, "The president's been shot." That's the first I knew of it. Of course, that was traumatic to me; it really was. I can remember having dinner…

(pause in recording)

DePue: Is this a story you're going to be able to tell?

Watson: Yeah, I think so.

DePue: Go ahead.

5 A transistor radio is a small portable radio receiver that uses transistor-based circuitry, which revolutionized the field of consumer electronics by introducing small but powerful, convenient hand-held devices. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transistor_radio)

Watson: I can remember, at dinner, at Carey Hall, when I was a freshman; we were all in there, and there were people laughing. I got up and just raised Cain because the president's been shot. Everybody got quiet, and that was the end of that. Nobody was… But I can remember; it had a big effect on me.

DePue: Interesting, because the family had been Republican your whole life. You were firmly in that camp, as well.

Watson: Oh yeah. We were big Nixon people, but he's the president, you know. I don't know; it really did hit me pretty hard.

DePue: Do you remember anything similar in the political arena here? Do you remember much about that 1964 presidential campaign? We talked before about Phyllis Schlafly and the family being Goldwater Republicans.

Watson: Oh, yeah, [we] worked hard and devastated, obviously. Especially, that was the beginning, I think, of the ads on TV that maybe we'd see them today. It's ridiculous what's on TV and the way they've taken politics into the gutter. I think that was maybe the first time, that I can remember anyway… the bomb going off.[6] Do you remember that?

DePue: Did you see that ad?

Watson: Oh, yeah, I've seen it.

DePue: But did you see it that year?

Watson: I don't remember if I saw it, but we watched our share of television.

DePue: The ad, just to have a marker here… I'm sure you're referring to the ad of the little girl in this field, and she's got a flower. She's picking the pedals off the flowers, and then there's this nuclear explosion in the background.

Watson: Right, that's exactly, exactly. Maybe if I didn't see it then, I've certainly seen it plenty of times since. But I do believe that 1964, at least in my mind—I can't recall elections before that necessarily where TV was involved—but that was the beginning of the real negative politics that went on, that television prospered in.

DePue: Did you think, earlier in that campaign, that Goldwater had a decent chance to be elected?

Watson: No, probably not. No, he was, I think, even… Once again, the Republican Party divided, split, and people walked away from him. But I believe—and history has kind of proven him, maybe not necessarily on all views, but in most cases—I think he **was** right. I believe that.

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6 "Daisy", sometimes known as "Daisy Girl" or "Peace, Little Girl", was a controversial political advertisement aired on television during the 1964 United States presidential election by incumbent president Lyndon B. Johnson's campaign. It remains one of the most controversial political advertisements ever made. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daisy_(advertisement))

DePue: You mentioned already, your father having a stroke in 1967. What was the impact on your college plans when that occurred?

Watson: The idea was I would stay there and keep going, until I got done, because I didn't really… I couldn't do anything in the drugstore, because I wasn't a pharmacist, wasn't a registered pharmacist. You have to be, obviously, educated to do the work. I couldn't do that, so the goal was to get through.

DePue: Was that event a pretty big shock, something that shook you up personally?

Watson: He'd been sick. He'd had some tingling sensations, and they were trying to diagnose what it was. And he was older; he was sixty-three. He was the same age…

When I had my stroke, I was sixty-three, and I had it October 17, when I was sixty-three. He was sixty-three and had his stroke on September 30. So, within seventeen days, the same age, we had a stroke. That was one of the things that I thought about. I was concerned about what I was going to end up like, was him. I just didn't want that, because he still had a wonderful life after that, a great personality about him, disposition, everything was good. But being in a wheelchair and not being able to communicate, I just couldn't handle it. I wouldn't be able to handle that. So, that's what I was worried about when I had mine.

I guess it's genetic. I was a low risk. I didn't smoke. He smoked; oh man, he smoked. In fact, one reason I don't smoke today is because I come home, and I go out to the hospital here locally, and he's out there in a coma, laying on a bed. He takes his right hand and takes it to his mouth, like he's taking a cigarette to his mouth, and it goes back. That's it. I would never smoke after seeing that.

He smoked Pall Malls. I can remember him coming home for dinner, and he would go back up to the drugstore, worried about whether he put all his cigarettes out or not, didn't want a fire. We had a fire there in the late '20s, early '30s, so he was always worried about that. He was a big smoker; my mom was too. But I never smoked; [I've] got low cholesterol, low blood pressure, wasn't a high risk, but genetics.

DePue: I know you've mentioned this already, but your father's condition after the stroke, he was in a wheelchair for the rest of his life?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Was he able to speak at all after that?

Watson: No.

DePue: He never regained that?

Watson: No.

DePue: But you described, he had a good life after the stroke.

Watson: Oh, he laughed; he'd smile. My mom tried to keep him home as long as she could, and she did.

DePue: Was there any sense that he understood everything, that he was as sharp as before?

Watson: We thought he could, not everything. There was always something that bothered him about the drugstore, and I'd never know what it was, something in the back end of the drugstore.

DePue: The back end of the drugstore?

Watson: The drugstore used to have a prescription counter wall, and then behind it was where the pharmacists worked. That was when he was there. So back there, the back of the drugstore, was something that he wanted and was concerned about, but we never knew and never could…

DePue: How could you tell that he was concerned about something?

Watson: If we took him into the drugstore, he would always want to go back there. You couldn't get him around; you couldn't get him through there. It would just bother him so much that we just decided not to take him there at all.

DePue: You mean you physically couldn't get the wheelchair into the back area?

Watson: Right, yeah, yes.

DePue: Did you feel, once that happened, that you kind of had to step up and be the man of the family?

Watson: Well, I was still in high school, so I left. And shortly after that, I went back to school. After I got home, I felt that way, but not while I was in school necessarily.

DePue: This is the same time period we're talking about. You started school in '63, and you finished five years later, in '68. A lot was going on in the United States in those years, in '68 and beyond, especially. But what were your views about the Vietnam War?

Watson: I was very supportive of what we were doing. As I look back, and I see what some of the Afghanistan and maybe even Iraq to a certain level, maybe we don't have to be the policemen for everybody. But that was a decision that was made, and of course, it was communists at that time.

DePue: It wasn't about being the policemen; it was about stopping communism.

Watson: Right.

DePue: That's what the explanations were.

Watson: Right. They were the enemy, the communists. So I was supportive of us being involved.

DePue: What was going on, on the campus at Purdue?

Watson: Very conservative campus, as you would imagine. There was the engineering school, sciences, all that. There wasn't a lot of demonstrations or a lot of issues. It wasn't like you saw in the paper, saw on TV, with people demonstrating. We didn't have that.

DePue: What was your reaction when you saw that kind of stuff going on, kids your age, burning their draft cards in protest?

Watson: Upset. I didn't like it; I didn't like it. I thought we should be supportive. It seemed like the whole country was coming unraveled, and the young people were the primary ones that were causing that.

DePue: Let's pick up a couple, three of the events, especially in 1968, that I'm sure you were paying attention to. The first one, in April, Martin Luther King is assassinated. Do you remember that?

Watson: Yes, I do, yeah. Of course back then, once again, it was almost something like… In the south, it was still pretty prevalent, as far as racial problems and racial concerns and all that was still an issue in the South. It wasn't like we didn't expect it, because if it had happened in Chicago or happened in New York or somewhere else, it might have different, but not necessarily in the South. It was very concerning.

I wasn't necessarily supportive of all of Martin Luther King's views. I'm a state's rights guy; I always have been, even in the legislature. So that goes back to then. I felt like some of those states were within their rights to do what they wanted to do, how[ever] wrong it might have been. Today, you couldn't say that, but I'm putting myself back in 1968. I felt like they had some rights to be able to do what they were doing.

DePue: Can you be more specific, what kinds of things you thought that the states would have had been in their right to pursue?

Watson: Well, the universities.

DePue: The desegregation of universities?

Watson: Well, that. At that time and still today, there are African American universities, and there's the university system. I didn't necessarily think, at that point in time, that forcing it… That was kind of… And that's probably what had to be done, is doing what they did. But I didn't like the idea of it being forced down the throats. I would have rather just progression had done it, but that wouldn't have been quick enough for a lot of people, and they were probably right.

DePue: How about busing? With a family, would you have been in favor of a pretty aggressive busing system to desegregate?

Watson: Not at all. No, no. I don't even know if that worked. I don't think it worked at all. I still don't think it worked. The idea of taking people out of their environment and where they grew up, and putting them in some strange… I'm not sure that's good for the kids. The kids didn't have anything to say about it, but I'm not so sure it was good for them.

DePue: Putting the political views aside, what was your gut feeling when you heard that King had been assassinated?

Watson: Any time anybody takes that situation into their own hands—and James Earl Ray [King's assassin] did—yes, I was very upset about it. Couldn't do enough to… I felt the same way about Jack Ruby [Lee Harvey Oswald's assassin] and anybody that's involved in anything of that nature.

DePue: How about your gut reaction when you saw the rioting that occurred through much of the country after that?

Watson: I didn't like it. I think a book back then or maybe right after that, was *Black Like Me,* a good book, great movie. People have to live in that to appreciate what they went through. I didn't live in that. I lived in Greenville, Illinois. I had two African American classmates; one was a junior when I was a senior; one was a senior with me there.

DePue: In Greenville.

Watson: So. I didn't have that kind of… It had to be tough on them. So, living in their shoes, walking in their shoes, maybe that's what had to be done, but I wasn't very supportive of it.

DePue: It wasn't too much later, I think late June, after the California primary, that (doorbell rings) [democratic presidential candidate,]Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Should we take a break here?

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very quick break because the UPS [United Parcel Service] man showed up. But I had just asked you… We were talking about Martin Luther King and your reaction to his death and reaction to the riots that occurred right after that. Then this, another very traumatic event, happened just two months later, with Robert Kennedy's assassination after the California primary. Do you remember that one?

Watson: Oh, yeah. I was just kind of thinking, What is this country coming to, civil order? We seem to be going through a lot of civil disorder, and now we're taking it to another level with his assassination? Yeah, it was upsetting, very upsetting.

DePue: And you add another month and a half or so beyond that time period, and you get to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Did you pay much attention to that? That was about the time you would have been graduating.

Watson: I did. Of course, there was a lot of people from Chicago at school where I was, talking about it, about what went on. [Chicago Mayor,] Richard Daley, of course, took it into his own hands, to decide what was going to be best for Chicago, and no nonsense.[7]

I've talked to people who were there, went through that, and most of them are very supportive of Daley. But it was a very revolutionary time. The music was, the individuals, the riots on the streets, all this. Something had to be done, the way I look at it. Maybe that was a little over the top. Certainly it was, but some order had to be established.

DePue: That would have been your reaction to it then, that society seemed to be coming apart at the seams?

Watson: Right. That all that was going on, and of course, it was mostly all directed to Vietnam. But the disruptive society we lived in, just seemed like there was no control. To bring order back, somebody had to do it. Now, I'm not necessarily saying that this was the way to go about it, but I do think that order had to be established.

DePue: Would that have been the first presidential election you got to vote in?

Watson: Yes it was. Sixty-eight would have been, yeah.

DePue: Because the voting age was twenty-one at that time.

Watson: Yeah, that would have been the…

DePue: I'm assuming that you were a Nixon guy.

Watson: I was a Nixon guy. I think it was Nixon-Lodge… Nixon-Agnew.

DePue: Nixon-Agnew.

Watson: Nixon-Agnew, and then…

DePue: Humphrey. Hubert Humphrey would have been the democratic candidate.

Watson: When did Nixon run with Lodge?

DePue: Would that have been 1960?

Watson: Henry Cabot Lodge.

DePue: Who was his running mate in '60.

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7 On April 5, 1968, approximately 10,500 police were sent into Chicago, and by April 6, more than 6,700 Illinois National Guard troops had arrived in Chicago, with 5,000 soldiers ordered into the city by President Johnson. No one was allowed to have gatherings in the riot areas; the use of tear gas was authorized. Mayor Richard J. Daley gave police the authority to shoot to kill any arsonist or anyone with a Molotov cocktail in his hand and to shoot to maim or cripple anyone looting any stores in the city. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Chicago_riots#:~:text=of%20tear%20gas.-,Mayor%20Richard%20J.,any%20stores%20in%20our%20city.%22)

Watson: That could have been [Lodge]; that could have been.

DePue: Did his argument about the silent majority make sense to you then?

Watson: Nixon's? Yes. I felt like there was very much a silent majority, because all the vocal people were on the streets being disruptive, whereas the people who were being supportive or being within the order [that] society should be, were very silent. They weren't doing anything.

DePue: Could you identify with that silent majority?

Watson: Yes, very much so.

DePue: Now, this is a peculiar question. Your father had had the stroke just a year before that. Would he have had the opportunity to vote in that election?

Watson: He did; he did, and he was able to put that one X (both laugh).

DePue: His political views hadn't changed.

Watson: No, they hadn't.

DePue: So you're coming of age; you're getting out in the real world at a pretty interesting, traumatic time period for the United States. There was no secret of what you're going to do when you graduate. Were you comfortable with the notion of going back home and running the pharmacy?

Watson: Yes. I remember the first day, walking to work. I walked up College Avenue. We just lived down the street from the square, and I walked to work.

DePue: Had you already had your military physical?

Watson: No.

DePue: Was that in the back of your mind, that you might be going into the military?

Watson: I don't recall that it ever was. I just don't remember it being a real concern.

DePue: Were you thinking at that time, that you still wanted to pursue politics as a career?

Watson: I knew someday I would want to get into politics, but again, I didn't know what level. Timing is everything in politics, and my time was right. I always knew I wanted to get in and do something in politics, in government.

DePue: Going back to the [President John] Kennedy years and the Kennedy assassination, all of that, one of the things that people remember about Kennedy is that he inspired people of your generation to get involved, to be involved. Would that have been true in your case?

Watson: No. We were not Kennedy people (laughs).

DePue: We wouldn't give him any credit for it, huh?

Watson: We wore it on our sleeve (laughs). I would not, not at all. As I look back on John Kennedy, I think it's a shame, of course obviously, that he didn't get more time in office. I believe he would have been a good president, because he was more of a conservative Democrat. He would, I think, approach things differently than today's Democrat, and I think he would have been a good president for a longer period of time than he unfortunately was.

DePue: We've talked quite a bit that you were involved in a lot of activities in high school, a lot of extracurricular activities in college; you liked the fraternity; you liked the social life, but we haven't talked about your personal social life. Were you dating through the college years?

Watson: Very seldom at Purdue. I dated my wife. She was at Illinois State.

DePue: When did you meet her?

Watson: She went to Greenville High School. She was a freshman when I was a senior in high school.

DePue: Back in those days, you would have been robbing the cradle.

Watson: Yeah, exactly, robbing the cradle. She couldn't date anyway, until her sophomore year. But I knew her from her freshman year. Then, when I went to Purdue, I stayed in touch with her and really didn't get serious about anybody except her.

DePue: When did it get real serious then?

Watson: Once she graduated high school and went to Illinois State. She became a fifth at Colby, was what we always say. She lived on the fifth floor of Colby Hall, and they all had T-shirts with a bottle on it that said, "Fifth of Colby." She lived there for two years.

Then when I graduated from Purdue and came back to Greenville, she came to Greenville College and finished the last two years here and became an educator, got her education degree at Greenville College. Then we were serious, all during that time.

DePue: When did you get married?

Watson: Sixty-nine.

DePue: Nineteen sixty-nine. So she would have still been in college then, at Greenville?

Watson: Yes. We got married in an ice storm (laughs). I'm serious.

DePue: A winter wedding, huh?

Watson: Yeah, December 27. We tried to get to Mount Vernon on our first night, because we had reservations at the Ramada Inn at Mount Vernon. As far as we could get was a Hi-De-Ho Motel in Carlisle (both laughs). We stayed there

with the Rockford Auburn basketball team and cheerleaders, everybody, who were playing at Centralia at the holiday tournament. They were running around everywhere all night. But anyway…

DePue: The Hi-De-Ho Hotel.

Watson: Motel.

DePue: Motel.

Watson: Oh, yeah, motel in Carlisle, Illinois (laughs). It's no longer there.

DePue: It doesn't sound romantic at all.

Watson: It wasn't necessary.

DePue: But some great stories afterwards.

Watson: Then the next night we stayed at the James K. Polk Hotel in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. They closed the interstate down there, which I think was 24 [Interstate 24]. They closed the interstate, and we had to go into the only hotel. The guy, literally, who took us to our room… We went into an elevator, and he pulled ropes and we went up (laughs). I'm serious. We got in the room.

You had a bowl you had to take down to the community restroom, and that was your… You had to clean up in that thing. It was quite a place. We went to a movie, where the film literally disintegrated on the… It just melted right on the whole thing. The power went out; it was a mess. But we finally got down to Florida, and that's where we spent most of our honeymoon.

DePue: Why did you pick December to marry?

Watson: I really couldn't answer that.

DePue: Was that during the college break maybe, for her?

Watson: Yes, it would have been.

DePue: You didn't mention her name.

Watson: Susan. Susan Rasler was her name.

DePue: She'd grown up in Greenville as well.

Watson: Right. Her family, they had a business here, a plumbing business, her dad and three brothers.

DePue: So many of your generation—I'm assuming here—kids that came of age the same time you did in Greenville, would have been eager to get out of Greenville. Would that have been the case?

Watson: With me?

DePue: For other kids your age.

Watson: Not necessarily. No, Greenville was a good place to live, grow up, and raise a family. I don't necessarily think… Like today's generation, they're long gone. Very few stay around. There's no opportunities here, unless you're in farming, agriculture, and you stay on the family farm. Those are dwindling fast.

DePue: Did it appeal to you, though, that you got to stay close to the family roots in your growing up years?

Watson: Yes. I still do, actually.

DePue: That gets us into 1970, '71, '72, and the time period when you're early in business. Do you remember any challenges the first couple years you were actually running the business? You were still pretty young at that time.

Watson: Oh, yeah. We had a very aggressive opponent or competition. I give hats off to my mom for keeping the business going for all the years or the time that she did. Our competition was a modern store. We still had some of the same fixtures in that drugstore when I walked in, in 1968, that were there in 1881. We've still got them in the upstairs of the drugstore, cherry fixtures and cabinets.

DePue: So it would have been described as quaint perhaps, at the time?

Watson: Well, it was very outdated. It wasn't practical. It was service related, everything. You had to, "Can I help you?" Everybody that came into the drugstore had to be waited on. Where today, it's not that way. People go around and self-serve. Our opposition or our competition had that kind of store, very nice, modern store.

DePue: Who was the competition?

Watson: It was called Family Pharmacy.

DePue: Were they on the square as well?

Watson: Just off of it. They originally were on the square, on the corner, but then they moved back a half block, into a new building.

DePue: Did you have a lunch counter at that time?

Watson: No. We had the soda fountain, but no lunch counter. We never had a lunch counter, just drinks, ice cream.

DePue: Were there any decisions that you made when you came back in the next couple years, that you wanted to make some significant changes to the business?

Watson: Oh, yeah. In 1970, we just remodeled the store. We took the soda fountain out and put in modern fixtures. It was still a small store, not what it is today, but it was just one of the buildings—we have three buildings now—It was one of the buildings, but we remodeled it and opened up the pharmacy, did a lot of things that needed to be done.

DePue: Were you able to hold on to your clientele base?

Watson: Yes, I'd say so. A lot of people, obviously, went to the other store. It was just a nicer store. But the people of Greenville, friends of my parents, were very supportive. They kind of felt bad because my dad had been very active in the community, and all of a sudden, he's gone. He's not gone, gone, but he's not in the store anymore. My mom keeping it open. I think there was a certain amount of support that came from the community for that, and that kind of transferred to me when I got here.

DePue: What kind of hours were you working in those first few years?

Watson: Eight to 6;00, every day but Sunday, and then 8:00 to 8:00 on Fridays.

DePue: Those are long hours.

Watson: They were long hours.

DePue: Did you enjoy it?

Watson: I did, yeah. I liked it, but then again, ten years later I'm out. You've got to remember that; I'm going to run for office. In the back of my mind, I always wanted to do that, run for office. I didn't know if I was going to be able to stay in the store or not. But ultimately, I didn't.

I wanted to do more than just pharmacy, more than counting, what we call pour and count, and that kind of thing. The business aspect of it… I'd always had to have somebody else take care of the books and do all that. I was not good at that at all.

DePue: Had your mom been good at that?

Watson: No. We had another family that stayed with us; Judd Haas was his name. He started working with my mom, helping her with the books when dad got sick. Then his son, and his son later. We have four generations of Haas's, H-a-a-s, that have worked in our drugstore. They've got their signatures on the wall like everybody else does, in some places in the store. They helped us a lot.

DePue: It sounds like the loyalty and the dedication of both these families and to the community has been something that has endured for over a century for them.

Watson: I'd say so. Today, the independent drugstore or independent pharmacy is dwindling. The chains are taking over and have been for quite some time. But I still think there's a place for just the service aspect of, "How you doing today?" type of approach to business, where you meet people and glad to see them. I think there's still a place for that, and I think there will always be a place for an independent store, as long as they continue to maintain the service aspect of it.

Today, Watson's Drugstore is thriving. We've got an excellent man in there now, Bart Calderarro. He's carrying the tradition on, maybe to another

level. He's quite service oriented, to the point where he gives his cell phone out to anybody. You need something, any time day or night, he'll go up there and get it for you. That kind of approach to retail pharmacy, if that is maintained, there will be a place for independent drugstores.

DePue: It sounds like you're putting a lion's share of your time into the drug store, but were you able to get involved in any civic activities?

Watson: When I got back, I always got my haircut at the Elite Barber Shop.

DePue: The Delight?

Watson: No, Elite, Elite Barber Shop. A fellow by the name of Jack Oakley and his brother Jim, they ran the barber shop. Anyway, he was a Jaycee here locally and got me involved in the Jaycees, which at that point in time might have been the Junior Chamber of Commerce.[8] That's kind of what it was, but a young man's organization. That's who it was for. Once you turned thirty-five, you moved on to something else. I got involved in the Jaycees.

DePue: Was that something you liked?

Watson: Oh, yeah. That was what got me into politics eventually. Other than my family and the influence my dad and mom had on me, I would say the Jaycees probably got me more involved in politics, because I got to meet people; I learned how to organize. I became a president of our local chapter, and we really did well. We won the State Chapter of the Year, and a lot of good things happened to me during that time.

DePue: I understand you were Jaycee of the year in 1972.

Watson: Seventy-two or… It probably was '72, State Jaycee, and then National Jaycee of the Year.

DePue: You were a National Jaycee?

Watson: There was five National Jaycees, so it wasn't like I was the only one. There was five National Jaycees, and there was one per state.

DePue: It sounds like being part of the Jaycees got you out to meet lots of people in Greenville or Bond County. Were you able to interact with people from across the state?

Watson: Very much so. One thing, the Jaycees, they had a "Speak Up Program" they called it then. I don't know if they still do today or not, but it's an excellent program. I used to go to meetings late, because part of the "Speak Up Program" was you went around the room; everybody had to get up on their feet

8 The United States Junior Chamber, also known as the Jaycees, JCs or JCI USA, is a leadership training and civic organization for people between the ages of 18 and 40. It is a branch of Junior Chamber International. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Junior_Chamber)

and say something about what they did that day or whatever, had to learn to speak. I'd go late, so I didn't have to do that (laughs).

DePue: Now, wait a minute. You've been wanting to get into politics your whole life.

Watson: Well, I never was a good public speaker, no, never was. Once I got into Jaycees, then I got involved as an officer and more involved, then I had do more on my feet. I became more comfortable talking to people about what was going on or whatever, and that's what Jaycees did for me. It's a leadership organization, I think, more than… I always say it's a civic organization, doing for people in the community, trying to make a better place to live. That's what organizations like that are all about, the Lion's Club or Optimist or whatever. I just happened to pick the Jaycees.

DePue: In other words, it sounds like you were great and very comfortable when it was one on one interactions.

Watson: I was terrible on my feet, terrible. Speech class in college… That's something that people need to learn to be able to do, is talk on their feet. We worry about all these core curriculum and everything, but a lot of it, just practical class work, like speech, can do more for somebody.[9] Typing can do more for an individual than some of these other courses that we require. Anyway, that's off the subject, but I was not a good… But I did get really involved in Jaycees, to the point where…

DePue: Critique yourself. Did you take speech class in college?

Watson: I did.

DePue: Critique your abilities as a speaker. What was bad about your speaking abilities?

Watson: What I did is I tried to memorize the speech. You can't do that. That's what I tried to do. In my early years in politics, I did the same thing, tried to memorize it, have it written out. You've just got to be able to put a topic [out] and talk about what you think is important about that topic, and then outline a speech, not write it. I approached it from the wrong direction, because I didn't have any confidence in myself.

DePue: It sounds like you weren't a good reader or reciter of a speech then.

Watson: I was not, terrible, terrible. It's a wonder I ever got elected (both laugh). But I was good one on one, and that's how I ran my campaigns. It was almost like people would tell me; they'd say, "Man, Frank, it's like you're running for a

9 In a public school setting, a core curriculum is a set of educational goals, explicitly taught (and not taught), focused on making sure that all students involved learn certain material tied to a specific age or grade level. (https://www.handyhandouts.com/viewHandout.aspx?hh_number=384&nfp_title=What+is+the+Meaning+of+a+Core+Curriculum+vs.+Common+Core%3F#:~:text=In%20a%20public%20school%20setting,specific%20age%20or%20grade%20level.&text=There%20are%20many)

precinct committeeman in a district." You get to know people… I knew people all over and still do today.

I was good at names, real good at names. There's a trick to that. I would take a tape recorder with me, and I'd repeat names as I would be driving home, just keep them on that tape recorder, play it back. Then you see them again and call them by name; that's a big deal to the person that you've met.

I'd do the same thing when I'd go door to door. I'd send a letter to people saying, "Nice to meet you," and then I'd say something personal about the home or about themselves or something that they knew I was there. It wasn't like just a canned letter you sent back; it was a personal letter. I got the reputation of being a very personable candidate, who was very interested in you as an individual. That was a big plus, overcame my speech limitations.

DePue: Connecting one on one.

Watson: Yep.

DePue: Let's talk about how you made that leap from being a successful local businessman, being successful in the Jaycees, to taking that next step in something you had aspired to do for a couple decades or a decade or more.

Watson: When I got all these national awards for the Jaycee, I thought, Hey, everybody loves me. Hey, I'm something (both laugh). In 1974, a spot opened up on the… No, not necessarily, no, there wasn't a spot, but there were four elected representatives in every district, three. Four would run; three would get elected. That's changed now, but back in '74 and '78, when I did run again, got elected. In '74, there were four people that ran, two Democrats and two Republicans. Well, this district…

DePue: For each one of the senate districts?

Watson: In each senate district, there would be three house members.

DePue: This is something that people today can't begin to comprehend. It will take some explaining on your part, if you could do that, explain how the process worked.

Watson: Going back to 1974 though, and how I really got involved and what happened. In 1974, like I said, I got all these national awards and everything, in the Jaycees. That might have been in '73, and then the '74 election came around. I thought, Well, I'm going to run; I'm just going to run for office. And so I go to our county chairman here locally, and I ask him, I said, "I'd like to run for office."

DePue: What office at that time?

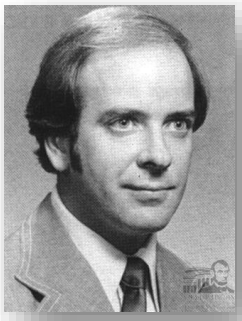
Watson: State representative, the same office that I ran for in '78. It was like, Well, you need to have a base of support," and that's your home county. If your home county doesn't support you, then you do something else. The county chairman

told me, "You really haven't been involved very much in politics. Your family was, your mom and dad, but you haven't done much. Why should we support you?" That was an eye-opener for me. Like I said, I thought everybody loved me, and they don't; they didn't.

So I thought, Okay, I'll do that. But it just so happened that he was the precinct committeeman for the precinct in which I lived, and I ran against him then for precinct committeeman.

DePue: In 1974?

Watson: In 1974, and got beat by eight votes. It was ninety-eight, ninety, I think, or ninety-seven, eight-nine. But we both said, both of us will stay involved in politics, regardless of who won. He won, and he still became county chairman.



Frank Watson's Blue Book photo from 1978 while he served in the Illinois House of Representatives.

He asked me then to become [Governor] Jim Thompson's coordinator. I was like, who's Jim Thompson? This was the '76 thing; Thompson runs for governor. I'm the coordinator for him, and I don't know who the guy is. He's got a national name, of course, from Chicago and did all these wonderful things, being U.S. attorney.

DePue: To include convicting Otto Kerner, who was the former governor of Illinois right before him, a couple of times.

Watson: Yeah.

DePue: Was this just for Bond County?

Watson: Yes, coordinator for Bond County. Anyway, I got involved in his campaign. He came down here, went back. Tonight's the parade at the Bond County Fair, tonight. Well, he came down when he was running and walked in that parade. We had several events for him; over at the country club, we did a fundraiser over there and raised some money for us locally to get signs and things like that for him. He came back again.

Then he won. He's running against Michael Howlett, one of the most popular Democratic office holders and secretary of state at the time. And Jim Thompson's this U.S. attorney that's a crime fighter, "Big Jim" from Cook County. People down here, they don't want to associate with Cook County much, but both of them were from there. But, anyway, he wins.

DePue: I want to back you up just a little bit because there might be a good story here; I don't know. He comes down to the Bond County Fair and the parade for the fair. He's still kind of green on being a politician, himself. Do you recall what he did in that fair?

Watson: Well, the thing about him was, he was a city guy. He was from the city, and that's okay, but he didn't know the ways of us down here (both laugh). I think today they get out more, of course. But he was just a U.S. attorney.

Well, he had a bandana; he wore jeans, and he looked like… He wanted to be part of the culture of Southern Illinois. So he had this red bandana that we all laughed about. We're not all that way (laughs). We are all in overalls. Anyway, he fit in good, and he was a great campaigner, probably the best, really. He was as good as it gets.

He wins, and then I get a lot of notoriety because of it, not necessarily notoriety. I'm just Thompson's coordinator. When people think they need something from Jim Thompson, they call Frank.

Then I got involved with township government, as a trustee, and then I became supervisor.

DePue: Was that an election that you had to win?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Were you selected by the public?

Watson: Somebody passed away. I can't remember who the trustee was that passed away, but anyway, I was selected to take his place. Then I ran for supervisor in the next election. Our supervisor retired, and I ran for supervisor. I was at that capacity when I ran for state representative in '78.

DePue: So you the won the township…

Watson: Supervisor's job.

DePue: In '76, '77 maybe?

Watson: Yeah, it's the off year. Yeah, '77.

DePue: What did your wife think about your early activities in politics? Obviously, she knew from the beginning you were interested in this.

Watson: She was always very supportive. I never had an issue with it. The thing that bothers me a little bit about what I did was that, you know, I was gone a lot. That's when the family was growing up. That still bothers me today.

DePue: When did the children come along?

Watson: Well, son in '70 and daughter in '72.

DePue: What's your son's name?

Watson: Chad.

DePue: And your daughter?

Watson: Katherine, but we call her Kami.

DePue: Catherine would suggest a C.

Watson: K-a-m-i. Then Chad was Charles. It was kind of Charles, Frank, Charles, Frank, Charles. If you follow the family history, that's kind of the way it went.

DePue: Did he continue that?

Watson: No, his two boys, no. One of them is Brennon. The other one's Carter, of all things. Great kids, grandkids.

DePue: You've accepted it even though they've broke the tradition? (both laugh)

Watson: Not a problem.

DePue: This is the same time period that Watergate was going on, '73 and then '74. Let me see if I can get the terminology right. He's not impeached; he steps down immediately before that time. I'm talking about Richard Nixon.

Watson: Right.

DePue: Aspiring to be a politician yourself, what was the impact of that, especially since he's a Republican?

Watson: It bothered me. Didn't like it at all. Can't think of the… Robert Baker? What was his name, William Baker? U.S. senator from Tennessee, married Dirksen's daughter?

DePue: Henry, is it Henry, Harry, Henry?

Watson: Henry Baker? I can't remember what it was.

DePue: We can get into the record. [U.S. senator from Tennessee, Howard Baker]

Watson: Anyway, he was Independent; he didn't take the party line, and I appreciated that guy. I was very disappointed in Nixon. Here the election was his; he didn't have to do all this stuff. Sometimes it's the people around you that create the problems for you, then you've got to deal with it. He didn't deal with it very well.

That had something to do with why I… I've always told people that, "Why did you get into politics?" I say, "My dad and Jaycees do all that." But then I say, "People like Richard Nixon." Even Mayor Daley, the first mayor, didn't appreciate some of his style of politics. I just thought there needed to be a change in what people thought about those that serve.

DePue: So this motivated you. It didn't deter you from being a politician, but it…

Watson: Motivated me, yep.

DePue: That gets us up to the first serious run at the state legislature, where you're going to have a good shot at it. I would like to have you describe the cumulative voting system. Is that something you can lay out for us, how that actually worked in Illinois? I think the State was rather unique in that respect.

Watson: Very unique. I don't know that any other state had it. We had a system by which, as I said before, there would be four individuals run, two Republicans, two Democrats, in each district except, of course, Chicago. They would have… Instead of Republicans, they had one guy who was an Independent, then served with the Democrats.

DePue: When you're saying district, each one of the senatorial districts?

Watson: Each senatorial district. Now they're single member districts. Back then, the senate district was the district. Then you had a senator, and you had three representatives who represented that district, two Republicans and one Democrat or two Democrats and one Republican. Four would run; three would get elected, and then they had accumulative voting; bullet voting they called it. What that was is, if you voted for just one of the four candidates, that candidate got all three votes. If you voted for two of the four candidates each candidate got a vote and a half. So, it was pretty cut-throat.

DePue: What would prevent, in a particular district that was strongly Democrat or strongly Republican, of having all three members from that district being from that single party?

Watson: Couldn't do it, unless… Somebody could run as an Independent. As I said, there was a gentleman in Chicago who was an Independent that ran in a district there that elected him, and he sat with Democrats. So virtually, they elected three Democrats in that district. But that was the only one that I remember that I served with.

DePue: You're saying that each one of the major parties could only field two candidates?

Watson: Everybody had a primary, just like we do now. And the primary would nominate two candidates to run for representatives in each district.

DePue: This would have been, what, the 55th District at the time?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: I'm looking at the page out of the *Blue Book* from 1979/1980, so I think the personalities would…[10]

Watson: That guy's got hair down there, doesn't he?

DePue: Yeah, we're looking at your picture. James Donewald would have been the senator?

Watson: Yes.

10 The *Illinois Blue Book* is one of the most comprehensive sources of state government information. It is a nationally recognized source for information about Illinois' executive, judicial and legislative branches of government. (http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/bb)

DePue: And he's a Democrat.

Watson: Correct. He's from Breeze.

DePue: So was this the 55th District at the time? I'm looking at the map here as well.

Watson: Yeah.

DePue: Republican or lean Democrat?

Watson: Oh, he was a Democrat. We elected two Republicans in that year. We hadn't done that before.

DePue: So it was traditionally a Democratic district?

Watson: Yes, for the ten years of the map.

DePue: And from what I understand, in the old cumulative voting days, oftentimes the critical race was the primary race.

Watson: Well, no, not necessarily. What you ended up doing… In those cumulative voting and multi member districts, what you ended up doing is running against someone in your own party. If there were two of you running, two Republicans, two Democrats, and traditionally you only elected one Republican, that meant that one of the Republicans was out. So you ran against, in some cases, the other Republican.

DePue: This would have been in the general election you're saying?

Watson: Yes. Yes.

DePue: Was there a significant primary race in '78 for you?

Watson: There was, yes.

DePue: How did you get onto the ballot in the first place?

Watson: Well, Ben Harbstrike and Dwight Friedrich… Ben Harbstrike had been a representative in the old district, and he'd been out for the eight years. He always ran in the primary, and then ran against Dwight Friedrich. Bennie Harbstrike was from Trenton, and Dwight Friedrich was from Centralia. The two Democrats that ran was Don Brummet—he was from Vandalia—and then Harold Byers; at that time, he was from Highland. Anyway, to make a long story short here or maybe try to explain more than I needed to, to get elected, a lot of people viewed this as a one Republican district.

My first step… Well, they had to beat Benny in the primary. And that primary, Bond County voted for me like nobody; it was just amazing. So that's how I got nominated. It just… overwhelmingly bullet vote. We pushed it.

DePue: In the primary?

Watson: In the primary. No, they didn't bullet vote in the primary. They did not have bullet vote,— I'm sorry—no bullet vote, just straight up vote. And I had a lot of support in Bond County. I had some in Fayette and Clinton; those were other counties. But Benny had Clinton; Dwight had Marion; Fayette was kind of up for grabs, and Madison and St. Clair were two other…

DePue: It's a big district.

Watson: It was a big district. Not all of Madison and St. Clair but a lot of the rural area. So I did alright. I mean, I did well in Bond County. Like I've always said, Bond County got me there, and then Madison did fairly well. But I beat Benny Harbstrike in that primary and became a candidate.

DePue: These were the days when you talk about Chicago politics… You mentioned Daley as well. He was running a pretty tight machine at that time, although he died, I think, in '76. But the system was that the party leaders would get together—they would call them slate maker—and they would pick the candidates. Is that how it worked in southern Republican politics?

Watson: No, no we didn't have that here. But when we ran for the regular election, the party organization, primarily, was behind Dwight Friedrich, because he'd been in there for… I don't know, eight years. I may be wrong about that. Anyway, he'd been a senator, and then he came back as a representative. He represented the area for a pretty good long time, so he had a lot of loyalty in the organization. He'd really taken care of it. He'd done a good job. So, naturally, they supported him. And when they think, Well, we're only going to elect one Republican. Who's it going to be, Frank Watson or Dwight Friedrich? They wanted Dwight Friedrich.

So, I went outside the organization and formed my own, of Jaycees primarily, who'd I met throughout my work in the Jaycees. They didn't care whether I was Republican or Democrat. They just… "Frank's a Jaycee, and he's okay." They helped me a long time after even when I got in, that Jaycee organization. I shouldn't say Jaycee organization, but individual members of Jaycees that really helped me.

DePue: Just to provide a little background here, my understanding of the way the cumulative process worked is this: A single voter had three votes, going into that voting booth, and that voter could vote for three separate individuals; you could vote for two people. Let's say you were a Democrat; so you voted for the two Democrats on there, and each one of those guys then would get…

Watson: One and a half votes.

DePue: …one and a half votes. Or you could, as you say, bullet vote and give all three votes to the same guy.

Having laid all that dynamic out, then, how did it work between you and Friedrich? I assume that people were bullet voting for him and you.

Watson: Not necessarily. I was a team guy (laughs)…quotes. Like I said, I had to form my own organization, and I got a lot of people involved in politics that had never been. In fact, some of those people went on to run for office themselves, so I felt good about that. But anyway, having formed my own organization, I did not promote the fact of bullet voting. I'd explained it and knew that Bond County would probably bullet vote, but I didn't think that would happen elsewhere and didn't expect to.

Well, the organization, being what they were, decided that Dwight is the candidate we need to support. And really, I can understand, because he'd been there and took care of their needs, and whatever they wanted, he tried to help. I'm a newcomer. Who's he? Frank Watson? In fact, we used that a lot, Frank who? We used that in ads.

The first election, why I came in third. The guy who came in second beat me out by about 300 votes, but the next election, in 1980, we learned from… We sent out fliers that showed how to "bullet" everywhere, all over the district, and we just crushed everybody in the 1980 election, not '78 when I first ran. I came in third in that race. In '80, I was the top vote getter.

DePue: But, correct me if I'm wrong, previously this had been a district that had had two Democrats and one Republican.

Watson: Oh well, then we had an interesting situation come up. I don't know if that's what you're referring to?

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: The Democrat candidate, who had been the top vote getter in the primary—he'd gotten a lot of support from all over the district; he was the circuit clerk of Marion County—he decides to expose himself to two girls walking by his home. He's inside his house; through a screen door, he exposes himself, end of campaign for him. But he, no… He stays on the ballot. In fact, Chuck challenges the constitutionality of the law. Because he was in his own home, he felt he had the right to do whatever he wanted, even though he exposed himself to two girls going by.

DePue: He didn't deny that he'd done that?

Watson: Probably, I don't remember that.

DePue: What's his name?

Watson: I don't know if I want… He's still alive. I don't know if I want to give you his name. Because he allegedly exposed himself; let's put it that way. Maybe that's the way it ought to be said. A friend of mine represented him, and they challenged it all the way, as far as they could. Of course, he lost the election, and I'm the benefactor of that, actually me and the guy who came in second. The other Democrat ended getting a lot of "bullet" votes from Democrats who didn't want this other fellow to be elected.

DePue: Was that Michael Slape?

Watson: Mike Slape, um-hum. He was from Bond County. He was from Pocahontas. He benefited, obviously, from… It's a matter of record; Mike Garrison was the fellow's name who was the fourth candidate. From all the problems that he had, Mike benefited, and I would say I did too, because there were probably people that voted for me that might have voted for Garrison.

DePue: That's how you got into the Illinois House of Representatives (both laugh).

Watson: Yes. The next thirty years… And I'm thinking I'm only going there for a short period of time. I don't plan to make a career out of it. I didn't know what I expected, really.

DePue: You said already that this was something that you had in your mind, that you wanted to do, all the way from high school, so why did you think this would just be a short period?

Watson: I guess maybe I'm a guy who lives for today and doesn't necessarily plan for tomorrow. I can't really say that I had a goal in mind when I ran for office in '78. I wanted to be elected, I guess, and wanted to serve and be a part of self-government, making it work.

DePue: I want to ask a couple more questions about that first campaign. What were the issues that you ran on? What were the hot topics at that time?

Watson: Well, ERA [Equal Rights Amendment] was one. In fact, my philosophy was conservative, but I didn't really know what ERA was. I didn't know much about it, but ERA was a huge issue. Well, all four candidates were against ERA. I went to my advisory committee, and I said, "You know, if I'd support ERA, I'd be elected." (both laugh)

I can remember this guy saying, "You'd be just another politician. That's what you're going to be. Just somebody that bends. When the wind starts blowing one way, you're going to bend this way and bend that way. Is that what you're going to be? Is that the way you are going to serve?" I remember that. Of course, that point of time…

He was a Democrat that told me that, a fellow. Bruce Unterbrink is the guy's name. He lives here locally, still alive, still here. I remember that. That was a good character builder right there, because I thought, Do I want to get elected, or do I want to do the right thing and stand on your beliefs and let the chips fall where they might. And that's what I decided to do, stand on conviction, because I was against it. If I was against it, why change, other than I could get elected. That would have been the only reason. wrong. Anybody running for office, that's not the way to do it. Get your beliefs and what you stand for, and that's what you are.

DePue: Any other issues that you can recall?

Watson: We were a big agriculture [ag] district, so the ag vote was huge and Farm Bureau support was big.[11] They didn't get involved in politics back then. They do now, which is a good thing, I think. I was big, trying to get the farmer vote. One thing we did, we targeted voters from a standpoint of… We had Nurses for Watson, actual nurses. We'd get the list of the nurses that lived in the district from the state, and we'd send letters to them, signed by registered nurses.

[It was the same for] Educators for Watson, Teachers for Watson, Democrats for Watson. We sent out letters signed by Democrats, written by Democrats [who] voted in the primary, some of them even office holders, and we sent it to Democratic voters. They'd say, "Here's why we think Frank would be good." That goes back to that whole personal part of politics.

We did the same thing with Farmers for Watson, and we had Laborers for Watson, Union Members for Watson, and all that. That paid off, I know it did. Somebody who doesn't necessarily participate in the election every year, that isn't on everybody's mailing list, gets a letter from a candidate or from friends of supporters of a candidate, who are in the same field that they are in. We had Pharmacists for Watson; we didn't have a lot of pharmacists in the district (both laugh).

DePue: But they were for Watson, huh?

Watson: Barbers, we had barbers, beauticians. It was just amazing, the number of licensed professions we have in Illinois. It used to be they made that list available to anybody.

DePue: It sounds like you're choosing professions that interact with lots of people.

Watson: Beauticians and barbers, oh yeah (both laugh). It was very effective, very, very effective, and we got a lot of compliments. We did that, up until… I didn't have any opponent in the last couple of elections I ran.

We always tried to do at least a Democrats for Watson. That was a big, big letter because people, even though they vote one way, you know, they vote in the primary Republican or Democrat, they don't necessarily vote that way in the general election. So, here again, you're getting a letter from an office holder, who's a Democrat, that says that Frank Watson's okay; they think differently about him. I did have a lot of broad support from Republicans and Democrats from all over the district.

DePue: How did you fund your campaign?

Watson: The first year we spent $23,000, and we had fundraiser, right here at the Greenville Country Club, raised about—I don't know—$7,000 or $8,000, I

11 Illinois Farm Bureau is a voluntary membership organization of citizens from all walks of life. Membership supports the work of the Farm Bureau in the county and at the state and national levels. (https://www.ilfb.org/)

think it was. We tried to raise more money. "Frank, we already gave." We thought it was going to be easy. But $23,000 to run for a rep race and win is just unheard of today. You spend hundreds of thousands of dollars today. But then, it was mostly local money. I didn't get much money outside of Bond County.

DePue: Did your wife help you on the campaign trail?

Watson: Oh yeah, parades, yes, things like that.

DePue: Speeches?

Watson: Oh no, not necessarily. She wasn't a big fan of it, but she did it. Like I said, very supportive all the years I was in there. We took the kids. Kids were always good to have because they always(laughs)…people made over them. I don't complain about the fact that I didn't have any support at home; that wasn't the case.

DePue: Were you comfortable in the role of a speaker by that time?

Watson: No, I was reading off index cards in '78, oh yeah. I could do the homecomings; I could do the picnics; I could do the parades, loved parades, loved them (laughs). We had clickers. It got so… Everybody had a homecoming; everybody had a picnic; everybody had a county fair, whatever, and they had a parade. It got so that second time, third time around, people started clicking these clickers when we came by, amazing. As a candidate, those are the things that you love (both laugh). You love seeing the yard sign; you love seeing a bumper sticker; you love hearing the clickers (both laugh). But I did like parades.

DePue: Were you the guy riding in the convertible?

Watson: Never ride, never ride, always walk.

DePue: Do you remember ever being in a parade with Jim Thompson?

Watson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: Because he was the master at it, wasn't he?

Watson: Oh, he was the best campaigner that the state's probably seen. I hate to say this, [former Illinois Governor Rod] Blagojevich was pretty good.

DePue: Any stories that you can recall about Jim Thompson on the campaign trail?

Watson: I remember him on the parade at Greenville, where he went up… We had a stand where you went by, in front of the grandstand. They had a tower there, where the people talked on the microphone. He just trotted right up there. Here's a parade going by, of which he's a part of, he just trots up these steps, gets up there, and grabs the microphone, starts talking to the people in the grandstand. That was spontaneous. That's what he was good at.

I remember when we had the fundraiser for him. He had a dog—I don't remember what the dog's name was—but everybody's going into the fundraiser. All of a sudden, "What are we going to do with the dog?" "Frank, can you take care of the dog?" (laughs) So I'm standing outside the country club here, with his dog, wondering, Now what am I going to do? (both laugh) But they got rid of him, and they dumped it off on me, and that was okay. That was my job.

DePue: Was it right kind of dog to be…?

Watson: Oh yeah, it was a good dog. It a smaller dog; it wasn't a big dog, necessarily. I can't remember what type it was. But Thompson, like we talked about, he was the best campaigner that… He could give a speech.

DePue: Were you watching Thompson saying, "I think I could learn a couple of things from this guy?"

Watson: Oh yeah. Well, anybody in politics watched him, because you learn from the master, and he was a master.

DePue: That was a peculiar year because Thompson had been governor for two years. He had been first elected in '76, and he's running again in '78. That's because of the new state constitution is adjusting the time frame for the gubernatorial election, so it's not held in a presidential election year.

Watson: That was a bad idea, by the way.

DePue: To change that?

Watson: For Republicans, because Republicans come out and vote for a presidential candidate; they vote big time. The benefactor of that are people down on the ballot, because we had straight party voting at that time. Then, when they switched that and made everybody run in the off year, Republicans, I think, took a hit for that.

DePue: Um-hum. Well it was a good year for Thompson. He beat Michael Bakalis, 59 percent against Bakalis' 40 percent. Were there some coattails in your respect in that year?

Watson: Oh, I'm sure there were, yes, very much so. Since I was a coordinator for him, he helped me. He came down for a fundraiser for me, actually, the one we had here at the country club. That was a big deal, having a governor come down…

DePue: So, people who show up for the governor might not have been there to show up for Frank Watson?

Watson: Well, I'm sure (both laugh). I'm sure that's the case, probably still today. Yeah, he was very supportive of me when I first ran.

DePue: Do you remember election night?

Watson: I do. And remember, there's a guy who allegedly exposed himself to two girls walking by his home, and we figured we weren't going to get elected. I would say 1980 was a bigger election night than'78. Although, they'll win for the first time, and all the people around you, and everybody's so happy. You never forget that. We got great pictures of that. Don't know if we still have them, the people had the Watson for Representative t-shirts on and helped us a great deal during the campaign, got more out of that, maybe, than I did.

DePue: I think 1980 might be a great way to start our next session.

Watson: Okay, all right.

DePue: But I do want to talk about your early memories of being in the Illinois House of Representatives for that first session. What's your first memory?

Frank Watson with his family during his House swearing in ceremony on the House floor in '79. Pictured are his son Chad, wife Susan, daughter Kami, and his mother Pauline.

Watson: The first memory is that George Ryan is Speaker, which he isn't. There was a mistake in some voting. We thought he got elected Speaker; he thought he was Speaker. But there was some election problems in Macoupin County and in a district just north of us.

The Democratic county had been… The vote had been doubled for the Republican in one county, by mistake. I think that's what it was. Anyway, the Democrat was thought to have lost. Well, it turned out he didn't. So we were in the minority by one vote, eighty-nine, eighty-eight. We thought we were in the majority, eighty-nine, eighty-eight, but we were definitely in the minority. I remember that vividly.

DePue: So, Ryan is your leader; he just doesn't get to be the Speaker that time around?

Watson: Right, he's the minority leader.

DePue: Was that also the year that you got there, and there was quite a dust up about the legislative pay increase?

Watson: Oh yes. That was a…

DePue: Tell us about that.

Watson: We were all there waiting for the swearing in ceremony. I think it was supposed to start around noon. The old session usually is in the morning; that's before the new group comes in and gets sworn in. The "Lame Duck" Session, as it's called, is in the morning.

DePue: Now it's called the Veto Session.

Watson: No, they're still Lame Duck Sessions. And the Veto Session could be Lame Duck, but…

DePue: Go ahead.

Watson: Oftentimes there's still a couple of days that they come in January. The Veto Session is traditionally in November or December. But anyway, there's a big brouhaha about a pay raise. The pay at that time had been $20,000 a year. Everybody recognized that that was what the salary was, and that's what you were going get. Well, they wanted to vote themselves an $8,000 a year pay raise, to go to $28,000 a year. Well, that was very contentious and went on for hours. So we were waiting…

In fact, some people even went home a long time before the swearing in ever got accomplished. I remember that. People that voted for that, a lot of them never did come back the next election, got beat, because an $8,000 pay raise in one year, that's unheard of, on a $20,000 salary! The public took it out on them, as well as Pat Quinn, the CUB [Citizens Utility Board]? No, what was it?

DePue: The Cut Back Amendment.

Watson: The Cut Back Amendment. What was his group called? Wasn't CUB [Citizens Utility Board], but it was that kind of group. He was involved then. After that election and after the fact that the legislature decided to increase their pay by $8,000, he did the Cut Back Amendment that reduced the number of legislators, not senators—there's fifty-nine senators—but we went from 177 legislators to 118. He reduced that many legislators by his constitutional amendment. Single member districts then came into being, and we no longer have cumulating voting.

DePue: So that election would have occurred in 1980?

Watson: Nineteen eighty.

DePue: Here's what I have heard. See if this…

Watson: No, that happened in '82, after the remap. Eighty was still two years…

DePue: Eighty was the time it got on the ballot, though.

Watson: Right, and then the election of '82, though, is when it took effect.

DePue: Right.

Watson: That's right.

DePue: See if this matches your memory of events, because I've heard this story, and I've repeated it enough that I think that it's fact. I want to make sure that it matches your memory of things. In 1978, Jim Thompson ran against a

legislative pay increase, because apparently that was out there; that it was being discussed among the legislators. And he wins the election, having run against the legislative pay increase.

The Legislature comes into session, and Jim Thompson is out of town. He's in Florida or someplace like that, and the legislature votes themselves the pay increase, which you remember very distinctly. Jim Thompson immediately vetoes it, and according to the legend, he vetoed it with his autopen.[12] He vetoes it so quickly that the legislature is still able to override the veto. That's the thing that everybody says, "This was being cooked up right from the beginning. Everybody's colluding on this thing." That's where Pat Quinn steps in and starts this initiative to do the Cut Back Amendment.

Watson: That could be fact. I don't remember that, necessarily, about Thompson doing the autopen. All of that happened. Autopen was nothing unusual.

DePue: But you don't recall that specific sequence of events?

Watson: No, I don't. But that would have explained why there was such a long period of time to get it done, because they had to override the veto then. If he vetoed it, they had to get enough votes to override it, and that probably was very problematic.

DePue: This is your first exposure to the Illinois House of Representatives.

Watson: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, a lot of people thought… I mean, with all of that, they thought I was involved in that. People don't understand the process, and they just see, "Well, the legislature gave themselves an $8,000 a year raise." And I had just gotten sworn in. "So, were you a part of that?" That's what questions that I kept getting asked. "No, of course, I wasn't." I wasn't in office yet, but sometimes the public just doesn't understand that particular day, where they have an old session and [then] a new session is in the afternoon.

DePue: I suspect that they weren't asking just out of curiosity.

Watson: Well, there was uproar over it. It wasn't a good thing to do, at all and certainly not in the public's mind, because they're working for $8,000 a year back then, and they get a pay raise with that amount…No.

DePue: Were you still considered, at that time, part-time legislators?[13]

Watson: Very much so. Although I had a fellow who came in and worked in the store, I worked with him a couple of days a week. And then I had my office up above

12 An autopen or signing machine is a device used for the automatic signing of a signature or autograph. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autopen)

13 Today ten American states have a full-time state legislature. A full-time state legislature is defined as a legislature that meets throughout the year. All other legislators are considered part-time because they only meet for a portion of the year. (https://ballotpedia.org/States_with_a_full-time_legislature)

the drugstore, so I could be in the office pretty quick. I was down in the store as much as I could.

I believed in the citizen legislator. I still do today. I think people need to provide for themselves, to have a job outside of government, learn to know how to make a payroll, or understand paying social security or what unemployment is all about. Not this, what we have today, this full-time legislators that that's all they do, and they don't really get a grasp of what the real world is out there, that people are having to provide for themselves.

DePue: When you said you had an office above the drugstore, the pharmacy, was that your political office?

Watson: That was my legislative office and political office for that matter. We had two apartments up there. The front apartment was the political, and the back was the legislative.

DePue: Do you recall, in that first session, any significant legislation that went through the legislature?

Watson: Well the ERA was always…but it didn't go through. That was the biggest issue.

DePue: What was your impression of the ERA battles by that time? It'd been going on for six or seven years by then.

Watson: I'm so glad that I didn't decide I was going to be for it. It was not the right thing to do, especially the way they handled it, up in Springfield; it was terrible.

As far as the issues, I was truly a minion up there. You go up there now, even with 118 members, and people don't know you. You could imagine what it would have been with 177. We had thirty-six freshmen legislators that year. Barbara Flynn Curry came in; John Cullerton came in; Gary Hannig came in. These are all people that are still serving today or in some capacity. [Long-time House Speaker, Michael] Madigan was already there. Most of those people… All the people are gone, but those.

The Democrats controlled the Senate at that time. No, Madigan controlled… The Senate was Republican when I first got elected. I believe so.

DePue: Nineteen seventy-nine, we're talking 1979 here?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Bill Redmond would have been the Speaker of the House, George Ryan, minority leader, Phil Rock was the Senate president.

Watson: Okay. So the Senate was controlled by Democrats. I never went over to the Senate; I was intimidated by it (DePue laughs). Of course, Jim Donnewald was

our senator from here, and he was a Democrat. I didn't go over to the Senate very often.

DePue: What was your impression of George Ryan? Had you known him before this?

Watson: Yeah, he came down here and helped me campaign. He was, of course, a pharmacist, owned a drugstore in Kankakee. His brother still ran it. He's a gruff guy, but he was like a teddy bear where that was concerned. He was hard to communicate with. You just didn't sit down and have a beer with a guy. I didn't; some people did obviously, but I wasn't at that level, and I didn't expect to be. I didn't really associate with him much.

But on the floor, of course, your vote was expected. Every now and then, he'd come around and tap you on the shoulder and ask you if you'd vote this or vote for that or vote against this. I usually went along, as long as I didn't compromise my principles to a great degree.

DePue: Were his lieutenants the kind of people who would put quite a bit of pressure on you to vote the right way?

Watson: No, I would say the people in his leadership, they were all good, stand-up people at that time, as I think back on the names of the people that I can remember. But he did surround himself with some people that maybe you'd rather he'd not. I think that's ultimately that's how he got himself in trouble.

DePue: Probably, a couple of sessions down the road, we'll get into that in a little bit more detail.

Watson: All right.

DePue: How about Bill Redmond, the speaker at the time, the Democratic leader of the House?

Watson: We said that he was there only in name, name only. We'd chant from the floor. A lot of silly things went on in Springfield when you have eighty-nine predominately men up there, boys in some cases (both laugh). When you have eighty-nine Republicans yelling, or eighty-eight of us, we always said, "Bring the real Speaker out." That was, of course, Mike Madigan. He's back in some office somewhere, where Redmond is up there running the business of the House.

DePue: Even that early in Madigan's career?

Watson: I believe that he [Redmond] was only there at the blessing of Mike Madigan. Mike Madigan was an incredible statistician of politics. He knew it; he knew how to play it. That's been his whole life, and he's done it well.

DePue: Class X crimes, was that a piece of legislation that went through in that time period?

Watson: Yeah. That was "Tough on Crime." Of course, Thompson, that's what he was all about, governor at that time. There was not much debate on that, not much. If you voted against Class X, I think that was a death… in downstate especially. Now in Chicago there probably was a lot people that voted against it, but their constituency is different than ours. Ours are…

DePue: What were the aspects of Class X, as you recall?

Watson: Just getting tough…

DePue: Mandatory sentences, mandatory minimums?

Watson: Mandatory sentences on home invasion, things like that.

DePue: Felonies, then?

Watson: Felonies.

DePue: When voted you for it, did you realize this probably is going to mean some prison construction in the state?

Watson: No, no.

DePue: Really?

Watson: Had no idea. We were just getting tough on crime. That didn't concern ourselves with the problems that were going to come, with building new prisons and staffing them, paying for them.

DePue: You mentioned already that ERA was a hot button topic and that it occurred every single year. You said you were opposed to it, why? What was it about ERA that you objected to?

Watson: The interpretation. Anybody and everybody can read and interpret that—I don't know how many words it was—but can interpret it differently. Look at our Supreme Court, five to four votes on things, where interpretation is different from one individual to another. I just didn't think…

We already had equal pay… Women's rights were making a movement, were making strides, big strides, maybe not as fast as they would have liked, some. But there was a lot of women who were against this. It wasn't a slam dunk for women to be supportive of this.

DePue: Where was your wife on the issue?

Watson: She was against it.

DePue: Did you not think that women should get equal treatment under the law?

Watson: No. That was not the case at all. I think they should have equal rights under the law. It just seemed like that could be so broadly interpreted, that we would get ourselves in problematic… This is the U.S. Constitution that we're amending, not… I just thought it wasn't necessary to do so.

DePue: Did you have a chance to meet Phyllis Schlafly?[14]

Watson: Oh, very much, yes, often (both laugh).

DePue: You say that in a way that suggests there were memorable occasions.

Watson: Oh, she was an amazing lady. People didn't like her because she was successful; she was articulate; she handled herself in a manner that sometimes women were intimidated by, didn't like her. But boy, you had to respect her for what she did and the way she handled that issue, single handedly, and probably had as much to do with defeating it as anybody.

DePue: I understand, from her perspective, that she would be arguing that, 1) It would open the door to women serving in the military, women being drafted. Was that something that connected with you?

Watson: I heard that, but I wasn't really concerned about that. That wasn't an issue for me. I do remember that; that was one of the reasons to vote "no." Abortion and all the women's rights' people, that were supportive of it, under the Equal Rights Amendment, were primarily supportive of abortion. That's a red flag for me.

DePue: So you are pro-life, not…

Watson: Pro-life.

DePue: The social issues did become more important, once you got to the point where you're running for office (both laugh).

Watson: Yeah, exactly. I guess so.

DePue: Do you remember any of the tactics that either the National Organization of Women or the Pro-ERA forces and the Stop ERA forces were using at the time, that stick with you? [15]

Watson: I think the Pro-ERA people did themselves an amazing disservice, and their issue a disservice, when they did a hunger strike; they threw [pig's] blood on the floor of the rotunda at the capitol. They just did all these silly things that meant nothing and really kind drove the opposition firmer.

DePue: The things that you just mentioned occurred in 1982, the last year that ERA would come up. Were there massive rallies and things at the Pro-ERA forces?

14 Phyllis Stewart Schlafly was an American attorney, conservative activist and author. She held traditional conservative social and political views, opposed feminism, gay rights and abortion, and successfully campaigned against ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phyllis_Schlafly)

15 The National Organization for Women (NOW) is the grassroots arm of the women's movement. Its purpose is to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls. (https://now.org/about/)

Watson: Oh yes. You'd see the light green; they were the Pro-ERA, and the red were the Stop-ERA. Yeah, you'd see a lot of that and a lot of people chanting in the rotunda. One group would be chanting one thing; one, another. It wasn't a pleasant time for us in the legislature, with all that. It never is when there's a real controversial issue like that, that brings out sometimes the worst in people.

DePue: Is it effective; did it sway legislators one or another?

Watson: I don't think so. I don't know that anybody was swayed by anything they did. I believe everybody's mind was made up. I don't know if anybody switched. I know I was asked to. The governor asked me to. Thompson, he called me in, asked me to support it. I couldn't do that. To me at least, once you affirmatively stand on an issue, one way or another, that's where you are. You start moving around, switching back and forth… You can't do that. That was never my way of operating in the state government.

DePue: The Pro-ERA forces—at least my understanding is—felt that Thompson wasn't nearly strong enough on the issue, that his support was merely lukewarm, merely for political reasons. Is that your impression?

Watson: No. I thought he was for it. Everybody knew he was for it. Like I said, he called me in, and I know he called other legislators in, asking for… It wasn't a picnic to go in and tell your governor, "No."

DePue: He called you in individually; he had individual meetings with them?

Watson: Yes, yes.

DePue: Did Mrs. Schlafly and her people come visit the office as well?

Watson: Of course, she's from near-by Alton, and there was a big Stop ERA organization in my district. Highland was a big time area of it. Yeah, they were very visible, both in Springfield and in my district.

DePue: They had tactics of their own that they used, as far as I understand, things like bringing baked goods…

Watson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: … and dressing up in nice dresses…

Watson: Kind of the homemaker kind of thing. I don't know that that was effective either. Anyway, we enjoyed their food (both laugh).

DePue: Any other comments about the ERA fight?

Watson: No, not really. As I think back on it, I think we pretty well covered what I can recall.

DePue: Were you glad that it was finally over after 1982?

Watson: Oh, yes. Well, you know, they tried to bring it back. It's been talked about and still today, of bringing it back. When does this go away? There ought to be a time limit on everything. You just can't hold those other states hostage that passed it. Maybe they want to rescind it. But, no, they can't rescind it; only us can pass it. So it's not an issue that's gone away, totally.

DePue: From what I understand, there's always two phases in each year's battle. The first phase was the issue of whether or not it had achieved a 60 percent vote, which is what the Illinois State Constitution says.

Watson: Right.

DePue: And then the second phase would be on the ERA vote itself. How did you vote on the first issue?

Watson: I voted with the Stop ERA people on both issues. That was one where everybody thought, If I going to swing… If I could swing, I'll always vote for the one which takes less votes to pass the constitutional amendment. Vote for us on that and then vote no. No, once again.

DePue: Why be opposed to changing the ruling about the 60 percent? Is that because that's what the Constitution says?

Watson: That's what it is. Yeah, if we're going to start doing that, why have a constitution?

DePue: We've been at this for over two hours. It's been a lot of fun. You might have talked more than you even thought you were going to do.

Watson: Yes, I have to say it was. I did.

DePue: But it's been a lot of fun, and I've learned a lot already. We've got an awfully lot more Illinois history to cover in the future.

Watson: Alright.

DePue: So, thank you very much Senator Watson.

Watson: My pleasure Mark. Thank you.

(end of transcript #1)

Interview with Frank Watson

ISL-A-L-2012-036
Interview # 02: October 14, 2014
Interviewer: Mark DePue

A Note to the Reader

This transcript is based on an interview recorded by the ALPL Oral History Program. Readers are reminded that the interview of record is the original video or audio file, and are encouraged to listen to portions of the original recording to get a better sense of the interviewee's personality and state of mind. The interview has been transcribed in near-verbatim format, then edited for clarity and readability, and reviewed by the interviewee. For many interviews, the ALPL Oral History Program retains substantial files with further information about the interviewee and the interview itself. Please contact us for information about accessing these materials.

DePue: Today is Tuesday, August 14, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. We're in the library today, and I'm sitting across the table from Senator Frank Watson. Good morning, sir.

Watson: Mark, good morning, nice to be here.

DePue: It's nice to have you here; that means I didn't have to travel to Greenville. But it was a pleasant drive last time. I really appreciate your making the trip up here. I know you've got things to do early this afternoon, so we'll try to get this done fairly quickly today. But we certainly don't want to rush your conversations and memories about Illinois history. I hope to get done with most of the 1980s today. That's kind of where we left off last time, right at the cusp of 1980.

Since you finished last time by talking about your first couple years in the Illinois House, I wanted to ask you what it was like in that first year, from the standpoint of your lifestyle and driving back and forth and living in Springfield?

Watson: It was a change, being a pharmacist and working in a retail drugstore for my career to that point. I drove back and forth to Springfield my first year. I didn't stay up here. That was a grind, and I obviously didn't do it from then on.

DePue: Why did you do it that first year?

Watson: I just thought it was important. It was an hour and a half drive, so it wasn't that far. But I realized quickly that a lot of things that go on in Springfield are later, not necessarily later, but like receptions and things like that, that you need to

see constituents. That's a big part of what Springfield is all about is the meetings and what goes on here with the organizations that are available to us. They make receptions and parties and things that I should attend because I've got people from my district there. I realized that quickly, after my first year.

I then ended up buying a place up here, actually. That was one of the smarter things I ever did, because it turned out to be a pretty good investment. Anyway, I just stayed up here, after that first year.

DePue: You mentioned a lot of things happened outside the actual Capitol Building. Were there gathering places for the Republicans and gathering places for the Democrats?

Watson: There is now, but back then there was a place that was called Sorry Charlie's, I believe it is, and Play It Again Sam's, Mr. B's. It was right across the street from the Stratton Office Building, just north. In the basement area there, there's a bar, a restaurant, and everybody kind of gathered there after session, for at least the late afternoon.

DePue: Everybody, as in both Republicans and Democrats?

Watson: Yeah, it was a good way to get to know the people on the other side, and we did. It changed, though. After that place closed, DH Brown's became the so-called Republican bar, and Norb Andy's was sort of the Democrat bar. That's the way it was for the last—oh, I don't know—ten, fifteen years. Of course, Norb Andy's closed. Dave Brown's still doing well at DH Brown's.

DePue: Were you the kind of person who enjoyed that intermixing and sharing a few drinks and things?

Watson: Oh, yeah. Well, you got to get to know people, and it was a great opportunity to do that.

DePue: How much of the real decision making was going on in those places, versus the halls of the legislature?

Watson: You could get a lot done. You could get an awful lot done over a cocktail or a beer or even a dinner. That was an important part of the process.

DePue: How about the business back home? Who was running that for you when you were in session?

Watson: A guy by the name of Algren Anderson, originally from Denmark, or his family was. His family moved to Belleville eventually, Belleville, Illinois. When I decided to run for office, I needed to have somebody in that store, and he was available and made himself available. It was a very good decision for me in two ways. I'm getting into politics and then getting him into the drugstore. He did a wonderful job for me.

DePue: What was your wife's feeling, now that you're spending a lot more time in Springfield, even though you're making the effort to be driving back and forth?

Watson: Well, we had a young family. We had two kids, and they were six, seven years old. That was tough on her. She had to keep things going at home, while I was away.

DePue: Was she working as well?

Watson: She was going to school some. She got her master's degree—of course that was a little bit later—in early childhood. She ran a clothing store. We had a clothing store, a children's clothing store, kind of around the kids. We used those kids in our ads, both of our children. She ran that, and of course, helped out in the drugstore. She was busy with a lot, while I was doing what I was doing.

DePue: That first session, you were coming down to Springfield, at least the first year, you're driving back and forth. What was the calendar year like, the time frames that you were in Springfield, versus the times you were back in Greenville?

Watson: Oh, it was much more time in Springfield back then. Adjournment day was actually June 30. In fact, I was a big part of changing that, from June 30 to May 31. I actually wanted to go to April 30, but we kind of compromised with May 31. But it was June 30. It seemed like we were here an awful lot of time, and we were in late at night.

The rules were different when you debated amendments. You discussed second reading a lot more than they do today. So the timing here was extensive, too much.

DePue: So, from the beginning of January, all the way to the end of June?

Watson: Yeah, but not full-time. It started out like you'd be in two days a week or something, just to file legislation. Then you had deadlines in which to get bills filed and get them into the committee and through the process, but it did take a little bit of time, initially, just a few days a week. Then, as the calendar progressed, we'd go in more and more.

DePue: It sounds like, in early months of the session, you'd be at home more than you would be in Springfield?

Watson: Very much, yes, and that wasn't too bad, because June is a great month; kids are out of school. We were up here five days, sometimes even over the weekend. The last two weeks of session were brutal. We were just on the floor constantly, especially in the House. One hundred seventy-seven members… Remember, that's different than it is now, 118. We were constantly debating something, discussing something, in caucus. It just took us away from our families a lot more than it should have.

DePue: After you got done with the session, were there any other demands, expectations, requiring you to come back? I know the Veto Session; that occurred in November of each year. Was there anything else?

Watson: No, not necessarily. We had special sessions and, of course, we would go overtime sometimes, the old stop the clock, that image of you stop a clock at ten until twelve, or whatever, at midnight, and do legislation, do things under the time frame of before July 1. That was when everything had to get done. So there was some people who said that maybe we might have gone past midnight, June 30, into July 1, before we said we were finished (laughs).

DePue: Wouldn't it be to the advantage of those in the minority to have it go over these deadlines, because there was a different threshold for what it took to pass legislation?

Watson: That's correct. It took three-fifths votes to pass legislation. Oftentimes, that's when the minority would gain power. They'd have to be consulted with anything that went on. But during those early years, with Thompson being governor… Usually the Republicans were consulted anyway, because it wasn't like a one party rule, as it is today.

DePue: So it wasn't a problem from either side of the bench?

Watson: Well, we always… Being in the minority those first two years, and then being in the minority in the Senate for ten years, I'd say we felt enabled after midnight, June 30 or May 31, because that did get us into the decision making process. We had to be consulted, and they had to deal with us. So we had input.

Not to say that we didn't have input before, but it was limited. Today, at least... For a period of time there, when Blagojevich was governor, we had very little input.

DePue: And very much frustration?

Watson: Very much frustration (both laugh).

DePue: Let's get into the 1980 election, your election that year. Is there anything in particular that you remember about that election year?

Watson: In 1980, there was four of us running again, for the House of Representatives, and three get elected. That was the last year of that. Harold Byers, who had been a representative but ran for the senate in the Democrat Party and got beat, decided to run again for the House. In many people's eyes, there were four incumbents running for three seats. He, not really being an incumbent, but had served, and then the three of us that had been in before: Dwight Friedrich, myself, Mike Slape and then Harold Byers, being the two Democrats, Slape and Byers. Frederick and I were the Republicans.

It was a different kind of election. The first election was a grueling experience, a learning experience. I'd say I learned pretty well from that, and we did extremely well in the election in 1980.

DePue: You said, when we talked last time, that this was a Democratic district and only because of one of the candidate's decision to expose himself, did you end

up in the legislature. So, is there a tendency to want to go back to a two Democrats and one Republican district?

Watson: Oh, yes. It was a thought that we were only going to elect one Republican again, because it had been such a tradition that that district elected two Democrats and one Republican.

DePue: Doesn't that make the most important race the one between you and the other Republican, which I assume at that time was Dwight Friedrich?

Watson: That's right; that's exactly what it was. In 1978, when we had the issue with the democratic candidate shucking the constitutionality of what he can do in his own home, we didn't work together, but we weren't at odds. In the 1980 election it was a lot different, because Harold Byers [was] pro-ERA. So we figured he would do well by getting a bullet vote from the ERA supporters.

DePue: He would be on the Republican side?

Watson: Harold Byers was a Democrat, along with Mike Slape. Then Dwight Friedrich and I were the Republicans.

DePue: What was the strategy you had, going in?

Watson: Well, blow everybody out of the water (laughs).

DePue: Bullet voting?

Watson: Bullet voting. I was from a small county, Bond County; Mike Slape was from the same county. So our base, so to speak, would be divided. You had to really go out and get support from the other counties. Well, the bullet voting, accumulated voting, which was a very unique process—I think only in Illinois… I learned from the first election to really go after that bullet vote. I encouraged people to support me with just one vote, and that meant I would get…

The process was, there was four of us running, and you had three votes to give, the voter did. They'd go in and vote for three, and each one would get one vote. If you only voted for two, each one got a vote and a half. If you voted for just one, which we called bullet voting, that individual candidate got three votes. So it's significant, hence the name accumulative voting. I just pushed for that, big time, in the district, and it went well.

DePue: Did Friedrich get reelected as well?

Watson: Yes. Byers was the odd man out.

DePue: He was the one who didn't get elected.

Watson: Right. The three incumbents all got elected; Byers did not.

DePue: See, if you thought that the Republicans controlled two seats, I would think perhaps the strategy might be that you and Friedrich would get together and

say, “Let’s encourage both of our groups to vote twice, for the two Republicans.” But it sounds like that did not occur.

Watson: It did not, in the ’78 election, on Dwight Friedrich’s part. He did it well. He understood, and he had the organization’s support because he’d been in for so long. I don’t disregard that, and I don’t fault him for having the organization support. I had to go out and form our own organization, so I did. Through the Jaycees and my community service activities that I’d been involved in, I had my own organization.

Then the second time around, it was the same deal. Dwight had most of the party organization support. But I had worked into that because, after two years, a lot of people felt comfortable with me and felt I was worthy of support. We sent out mailers and sample ballots, with a big arrow on them, pointing right down to Frank, and “Vote three votes for Frank.” We were very successful then.

DePue: It strikes me that, with that whole cumulative voting process, it required a lot more strategy in running these races. That was an aspect that you didn’t have in the regular elections we have today.

Watson: One thing that it did, it would bring in some different kind of legislators from all over the state. The fact that you had minority representation, whether it was a Republican or a Democrat, you had at least one individual from each party, except for the party in Chicago, that I talked about, where the Independent was represented in the general assembly. That was some different kind of people at that time; I’d say very diverse, and it was good for debate. I thought it was a healthy situation to have that kind of representation.

DePue: Do you remember what the issues were at that time for that race? You mentioned last time that ERA was certainly one of the issues. I’m wondering if Harold Byers came out for ERA, and maybe that hurt him a little bit in the district.

Watson: It might have, but when he’s the only one for ERA, and the other three are not, and he gets the bullet vote, the cumulative vote for those people voting that would support ERA, that can have a big impact. It didn’t.

DePue: So you don’t know how he was on the ERA issue.

Watson: No, he was for it.

DePue: He was for it.

Watson: He already voted for it.

DePue: How about Slape?

Watson: He was against it. Friedrich was against it, and I was against it. All three of us were against it, except for Harold Byers.

DePue: Any other issues that you think might have been in play that year? It was tough economic times.

Watson: I know Harold was considered to be much more liberal than the rest of us. In that district, even the Democrats were conservative Democrats. Downstate Democrats generally are.

DePue: That's the year that, of course, that Ronald Reagan won the presidential election in a landslide. Would you say that, even at that level, he had some coattails?

Watson: Very much so. Ronald Reagan… I forgot about this; that's a very good point. Ronald Reagan came to Greenville. I couldn't believe it. That was a big thing for me. He came when he was doing his bus tour. He stopped in Greenville, and it was primarily for me. The Reagan people made that happen, and that was huge. I'd forgot about all that. There was over 10,000 people there; that's a big crowd for Greenville. He was late, but it was quite an event.

DePue: What time frame was that? What time in the election cycle?

Watson: I'd say probably in October. We have a plaque in Greenville, in the square; it tells exactly the date, but I'm not sure when it was.

DePue: I hope you don't take this wrong, but why would a presidential candidate bother with an Illinois House of Representative member?

Watson: Well, it was not all about me necessarily, him doing that for me. It was about his campaign, but the organizers from Illinois were sympathetic with me. I had some good support from people in the… I was a big supporter of Reagan, even when he ran against Gerald Ford, I supported Reagan. So, those people helped me a lot, and they kind of saw where things could happen here, in this district, that might eliminate me, so why not? He was on the way anyway, coming through.

Jim Brady, who was his press secretary, of course—who later was shot—Reagan's press secretary, was from Centralia, which, of course, that's where Dwight Friedrich was from.[16] But I had some sympathetic ears with those people, and they decided to make the… It was just a short stop. It wasn't like… He stopped and spoke on the square.

DePue: That also suggests that you had some people at the state level in the Republican Party who were supporting you, who were backing you, as well?

Watson: I would say more the Reagan people, not necessarily the state party, because they had to support us both, and they did. It wasn't like I was exempt from that support. I got the support from them, and Dwight Friedrich did too.

16 In 1981, James Brady, an assistant to the U.S. president and the seventeenth White House press secretary, became permanently disabled from a gunshot wound during the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Brady)

DePue: Which one of the two Republicans pulled the most in the 1980 election, you or Friedrich?

Watson: The top pull here? I was. That's why I say, I learned well from 1978 (DePue laughs). In '78, I can remember, it was just the last three weeks before the election. All this came out about bullet voting and how the emphasis was going to be on Friedrich. I'd worked hard to try to maintain an even keel with the organization so that they would be supporting us both. But some counties that I really was counting on went the other way, at least the organization [did]. After two years… Well, no; that was the first year.

But I did campaign hard. I was at every picnic, every parade. Every little town in my district has a Catholic church, and they all have a picnic of some kind, or they'll have the homecoming parade, the town will. It was a big deal back then, and I was participating in all that. And I got a lot of support because of it.

DePue: Did you bring your wife and family to a lot of those events as well?

Watson: I did.

DePue: Did they like it?

Watson: The kids was almost too small. I think if they had been a little older, why, it would have been better. They liked some of it, but it got to be too much.

DePue: Yeah, it's not like staying at home and hitting the swimming pool or riding your bike around town or hanging out with your friends (Watson laughs).

Watson: Right.

DePue: This is also the year that the Cutback Amendment is on the ballot. Was that an issue in the campaign?

Watson: It was. It was an issue, I guess statewide, more than it was in the district. I supported it. I was the only guy in the metro east area that supported it. I'm a less government guy, and I thought, Cut back the size of the general assembly would save money. I was wrong. That was an issue that maybe, if I had to reevaluate it again, I would think differently about it. But back then I supported it.

I can remember that Pat Quinn was very much involved in it, and a guy by the name of Larry Stuffle, from over in Danville, was involved. I helped with it as much as I could. But I was more interested in my election than I was about that.

DePue: And you say, now that it's gone the other direction, your views have changed. Why have they changed on the Cutback Amendment?

Watson: I would say that happened almost immediate. When you saw the size of the general assembly cut down and who they lost, there was some really quality

people there that were eliminated because they were a minority party. In a district of which elected three, now there was only two, and there's no longer minority representation.

I believe the general assembly became a body that didn't debate as much. There was more coalitions back then. With the three member district, there were more coalitions that might even cross aisles, than necessarily what there is today. It's much more partisan today, and I'm not sure it was back then.

DePue: The last two years you're in the House, 1981 and the 1982 legislative years, do you remember anything significant that occurred? Eighty-two would have been the last year that ERA would have been debated in the Illinois Legislature. And as I recall, the fight in '82 was especially brutal, but it seemed to focus more on the Senate than the House that year.

Watson: I don't remember. I just remember the ERA seemed like it was around forever and never went away. There was always some way of trying to reduce the number of votes that was necessary to pass it. There was some way they were trying to end run the whole process. But, in the end, it didn't prevail. I can't remember the time frame of that.

DePue: These two years would have been also very difficult years, economically, for the United States. Was there any legislation moving through the House or the Senate at that time that addressed that issue?

Watson: Well, we had Build Illinois.

DePue: I think that happened later.

Watson: That happened later. Was that when I was in the Senate?

DePue: Yep. Let me ask you about this question. Redistricting would have happened in the 1980s. Probably '81 is when it really started to build up steam. How did redistricting change things for you? Now you're smiling (Watson laughs).

Watson: It changed it a great deal. We lost the draw in the re-map process. In the redistricting, they established a commission of eight members, and if the eight members can't get it worked out, then the secretary of state draws a name out of a hat, or some way they determined the ninth member. The ninth member was a Democrat—I think Sam Shapiro actually. That broke the tie, and the Democrats drew the map for the next ten years. That was everything.

Of course, in 1982, they drew a line right through Bond County. They protected Mike Slape, who lived in Pocahontas, in Burgess Township. The map was drawn to protect him, and they drew a line through Bond County. I lived now in Vince Demuzio's senate district, in a different legislative district entirely, my home.[17] So, if I was going to stay in politics, I either had to run for

17 A champion of Downstate Illinois, Senator Vincent Demuzio was elected to the Illinois Senate in 1974, served as chairman of the state Democratic Party from 1986 to 1990 and was serving as Majority Leader of

representative in a whole new district or run for the Senate, against Vince Demuzio, or run for the Senate, against Jim Donnewald, who was one of the chairmen of the re-map committee.

I was not happy with Jim Donnewald at that time, because I felt like it was very personal, aimed at me. So I decided to run for the Senate against him. Well, to my benefit, he didn't run for the Senate that year; he ran for state treasurer. I really do believe I would have beat him, because I had a lot of support going in, and it was all about "Poor Frank, they're out to get him." We used that; we shamelessly used that (laughs).

DePue: Going for the pity vote, huh?

Watson: That's right. It was "Frank who?" for so long, and then it was "Poor old Frank, they're out to get him again." So we used that and, of course, then I won. I beat a guy from Trenton, Illinois, by the name of Herb Schlemmer, who was involved in the Jaycees with me, back when I was real active in the Jaycees.

Then I moved into the district, moved into Dudleyville, Illinois, which is in the south part of Bond County. We built a house and moved there. My wife did all the design and everything on the house, did a wonderful job, a beautiful home. So, I stayed in for another ten years.

I really didn't think I was going to be involved in politics for thirty-some years, for sure. I thought I would be in for eight or ten years and then go back in the drugstore. But I did enjoy it. There's a lot of fulfillment out of public service. When you can help somebody, and they come to you and thank you, a lot of self-satisfaction. I really enjoyed public service.

DePue: I want to make sure I heard you right; maybe I wasn't listening closely enough. You said Donnewald had a lot to do with drawing the lines in your district area?

Watson: Um-hmm. He was the state senator who was on the commission, the Re-map Commission, for the Democrats. He was appointed by Rock, Phil Rock, the President of the Senate. So he had a lot to do with it, yes. And it was all to try to protect Mike Slape. Had Mike Slape not been in the legislature at the time, they probably would have eliminated Bond County out of it altogether, and I would have been back in the drugstore. It was that simple.

Then I drew a two-year term in my first senate. My intention would have been, had I drawn a four-year term… Now, that's going to be confusing to listeners out there when we talk about this. But in the Illinois Senate, you have two four-year terms and one two-year term, between the censuses. That's a total of ten years; two four-year terms and one two-year term. They have a

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the Illinois Senate at the time of his death in 2004. (https://siusystem.edu/demuzio-internship-program/index.shtml)

drawing as to when that two-year term will take place, either the first or in the middle or the end of your ten years.

DePue: "They" being at the Illinois Legislature, or where does that occur?

Watson: That takes place in the legislature.

DePue: At the beginning of the next session after the election?

Watson: It's after the election, but I don't know that it's… Usually, it's the beginning of the session.

Gov. Thompson visited rural Bond County in Watson's district during a drought. Pictured are John Block, Gov. Jim Thompson, Larry Werriess (Director of Ag), Hod McCosland, Vince Demuzio and Frank Watson.

I drew a two-year term at the front end of my ten-year cycle. Had I drawn a four-year term, I probably would have stayed right there on Elm Street in Greenville and served my four years and been gone. But I got mad. I thought, They're not going to do this to me. I'm not going to let them do this. I'm going to show them (laughs). Well, I moved, and then, of course, I stay there another twenty-six years.

DePue: But your wife's a Greenville girl as well. She had to…

Watson: We stayed in the Greenville School District. Moving to Dudleyville is just… Bond County was only about five miles out of town. My front yard was in Vince Demuzio's senate district. My home, where I slept, was in my senate district (DePue laughs). That is how close we were to the line.

DePue: That's the old story about, "Yeah, they can divide the district right between the bed."

Watson: Oh, yeah, it's brutal, but that's the way it is in Illinois. Anyway, I decided… we decided, I should say. We just decided I'm going to run again.

DePue: I'm always struck by how little the public pays attention to or cares about redistricting, but to political junkies it's everything.

Watson: It's everything. Right now, we're going into the next ten years. This election coming up in 2012 is the first election of the next ten-year cycle, and that will determine who controls the legislature. That's everything.

DePue: You ran in '82. You knew you were going to have to run in '84 again, and the next election would be '88?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: And the next election after that would be 1992.

Watson: Ninety-two.

DePue: And then it starts all over again. You're going to pull your name out of the hat?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: We'll get to what happens in 1991…

Watson: Al Jordan—I'll never forget it—Al Jordan's name was drawn out of the hat by our secretary of state (both laugh), and that was the ninth member. In that ten-year decade, the Republicans drew the map.

DePue: We'll get back to that one, because there's a lot that happened for your career personally, as well, in that time frame. We have already talked about your run for Senate. The gubernatorial election in 1982, is that worth some discussion as well? Adlai Stevenson III, running for the first time…

Watson: Was that LaRouche's?

DePue: No, that would have been '86.

Watson: Oh, okay.

DePue: The '82 election was extremely tight, and there was some thought, at least from my understanding, that Jim Thompson wasn't going to be able to win that race.

Watson: Well, Adlai Stevenson would be considered a downstate Democrat, and usually downstate Democrats in Illinois do well. They carry Chicago big time, with a massive plurality, and then they do kind of breakeven downstate, lose the suburbs. That's the way it used to be. Of course, Adlai Stevenson was a downstate Democrat, so I would say that he probably did well. In fact, about 200,000 votes… No, it was closer than that; it was a recount.

DePue: It went to the court.

Watson: Was that the recount election?

DePue: It went to the courts.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: It was 1/7 of 1 percent [.14 percent] vote, that the victory went to Thompson. And it took a long time to figure that out.

How would you describe Stevenson as a campaigner?

Watson: I didn't really see much of him. I don't remember him as a candidate at all. I've always thought of him as a very boring individual (laughs), even when he was in the U.S. Senate. He was the treasurer, I think, of Illinois. Then he was in our U.S. Senate for a while, for six or twelve years or whatever.

DePue: I think about eleven or twelve years, yeah.

Watson: And I just thought of him as kind of...somebody that didn't have a lot of fire. That's surprising how well he would do in that election against Thompson, because, as I've said, Thompson, to me, was the best campaigner we've had. After all those terms he's had, I don't know what his problem was back then, other than the economy maybe?

DePue: How would you describe Illinois in the early '80s, politically? Now it's a solidly blue state.[18]

Watson: I'm not so sure about that, that it's a solidly blue state today. But Reagan, of course, was from Illinois, and he beat [incumbent President] Jimmy Carter in that election. That was huge. Talk about boring, that would be Jimmy Carter, a lot of malaise. That really had an impact on the ballot. As I think back now—maybe then I wasn't as much of a historian, worrying about what was happening—how in the world Thompson just barely beat Adlai Stevenson, having Reagan… No, this was '82.

DePue: Eighty-two.

Watson: I'm sorry; I'm sorry.

DePue: These are the first two years of the Reagan Administration, where the economy was really bearing down. It was very tough economically.

Watson: Okay, that was a result of the Carter years (both laugh). Don't we hear a lot about that now? "Blame everything on [President George W.] Bush." So, that was probably everybody—top of the ticket, all the way down—have problems, from a Republican point of view during that election, because people vote their pocketbook.

I anticipate them voting their pocketbook again this fall. They traditionally do. If they don't have work or things are bad, they can only lash out at certain people, and they're generally politicians on the ballot. And they readily do that.

DePue: After the election—and Thompson barely squeaks through—the veto session in late November of 1982, the legislature gives Thompson the authority to cut 2 percent from the current year's appropriations. Do you remember that as an issue?

Watson: I remember we had given him the authority to do that, yes.

DePue: Was that primarily because the economy was so bad, the revenues just weren't coming in?

18 Since around the 2000 United States presidential election, red states and blue states have referred to states of the United States whose voters predominantly choose either the Republican Party or Democratic Party presidential and senatorial candidates. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_states_and_blue_states)

Watson: We were having problems in our own state, yes, and something had to be done. A 2 percent reduction is kind of minimal when you look at it agency by agency, but then when you talk about it as a whole, it's a big number.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-three legislative year, now you're in the Senate versus the House. How was that different for you?

Watson: It was a lot different. Of course, in the senate they're older (laughs), and I was a young guy; I was relatively young. I think I was probably thirty-eight. I got appointed to… Let's see, what committee was I head of? Local Government, I think it was. Anyway, it was a good experience. See, I was kind of lost in the House. When you figure 177 members, people say now, they have trouble with 118; think back what it was like with 177. You just were a vote; you weren't an individual, and you didn't have a personality; you were just there, until you got some authority and power of just seniority. And I didn't have it.

But coming into the Senate, your vote counted, and that was significant. I appreciated our leadership then. That was Pate Philip; he was our leader.[19] He was a pretty strong, top down leader, although he took a lot of interest in his members and what they were all about and what their needs were in their district. He asked for a lot of input from members, which I always appreciated. When I became leader, I kind of emulated that, that I wanted input from members, where some leaders don't do that; they're just total top down.

DePue: What do you mean by top down?

Watson: You make the decision as leader, and you expect your members to follow. I don't think that's right. I think it should be a cooperative agreement between all and everybody have input.

DePue: You started by saying that Pate Philip, his style of leadership was top down leadership. Then you kind of reversed, and said that he took a lot of input.

Watson: Let's just say he was a strong leader. That doesn't necessarily mean his decisions were his only; he asked for input from us. But he was a strong type leader that people respected.

DePue: How else would you describe his personality?

Watson: Sometimes combative (laughs). He could be intimidating to some people—a teddy bear to most of us—anybody that didn't know him, he could be very intimidating.

DePue: Did he play to that? Did he want to be intimidating?

Frank Watson with Senate Minority Leader James "'Pate" Philip on the Senate Floor in the early '80s.

19 The oral history of James "Pate" Philip is available on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library website. (https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/oral-history/collections/philip-senator-james-pate/interview-detail/)

Watson: I think so. I think people (unintelligible) because that way they can control the process, by being intimidating. I think you have to be, in some instances. But I think most people appreciated his candor. The guy was almost candid to a fault. On some things that he'd say and do, people would maybe shake their head. But to a lot of us, that was kind of refreshing.

DePue: When you say that most people appreciated his candor, his reputation is that he's about as politically incorrect as you could get.

Watson: That's candor (laughs). He's just saying what he thinks.

DePue: So the people on the other side of the aisle didn't appreciate that necessarily, did they?

Watson: I said some people appreciated it (both laugh), some didn't, a lot. I'm sure that he stepped on toes, and there was things that you always wondered maybe should have been left unsaid. But that was his style. He comes from a generation that that's the way it was.

Everything is changing and evolving as we grow, including myself; I've changed a lot over the years. I think that has to do a lot with my experience and what I've been through. Same way with him. I think he probably thinks differently now than he did back then.

DePue: Do you remember any stories that would illustrate Pate Philip, especially in those early years, who he was and how he operated?

Watson: One particular one, he was on the Senate Floor. I can't remember what the legislation was about, but we had some problems with basketball officials, and his closing remark was that, every now and then, maybe they need to be popped once in a while. Some guy came out of the stands, I think, and hit an official, so that became a felony or something.

I don't know what it was, that was the legislation. And then he got up and said that; the place came apart, as you would imagine. But to him, that was just him being himself and he was… We've all gone through moments like that, when you say something that you say, and really it just comes out much different than you intended. That's what I think most people appreciated about him.

DePue: Was he the kind who was able to enforce some party discipline? Did he have the mechanism to do that?

Watson: Oh, yes. He was a strong county chairman in DuPage County. He was very much involved in the party organization, a highly respected individual, active in that.

DePue: Does that mean that occasionally he'd call you in and say, "Hey, you need to get right on this particular vote?"

Watson: Sometimes. I can't say a lot. He'd let you vote your district. That's something I believed in too is let people vote their district. Every district is different, and if there's some wiggle room, if you can help us on this particular issue, we'd appreciate it. But if your constituency is solid, then I can understand why people vote the way they do. He was that way.

DePue: He came from DuPage County. At that time, it was one of the strongest Republican strongholds in the entire United States.

Watson: I was going to say, "Were you going to say Illinois?" I was going to say, "No." I was going to say, "In the United States, yes."

DePue: There was a county or two maybe, in California, at the time.

Watson: Orange County (both laugh).

DePue: Exactly. Certainly, the collar counties and the suburbs of Chicago had their interests, and I would think downstate Republicans had theirs. How did that sort itself out?

Watson: To pass any legislation in Illinois, you had to have two of the three geographic areas supporting it. You had the city, Chicago, and then you had the suburbs, which would be Cook County still, and then collar counties; that was another faction. Then the rest of us, from Rockford to Cairo. That's downstate, and that's the third faction. You had to put two of those three together to get anything done. Sometimes that created problems for leaders, who would maybe be from a suburban area, where education funding was all local.

We, being Chicago, depended on the State, and downstate depended on State funding a lot for schools. So a lot of times, the coalition of Chicago downstate would be for school funding. Then the suburban people, like I said, all property tax generated mostly little support from the State; they were maybe the odd man out on that one.

DePue: I wanted to hit a couple of specifics for 1983. One issue that year was the income tax increase, a temporary income tax increase—I think it was for eighteen months—that Thompson was trying to push through. This would have been about the time frame when the economy was starting to turn in the upward direction. Do you recall any discussions about that temporary income tax increase?

Watson: I was opposed to it.

DePue: Even though you had an $800 million budget deficit, from what I can discover?

Watson: Yeah. I'd say this is how I differ today than in the past. I would expect cuts. If I'm going to support an increase of some sort of any kind of tax, I would expect similar cuts.

Now, we're not seeing that. It's all just increase, increase, increase, not much cut. They're having to do a little bit now. Back then, I just was opposed to it because that was probably the politically correct thing to do for my district.

DePue: Being opposed to the increase?

Watson: Yeah, the temporary increase.

DePue: Would you have been supportive of cuts? Were you talking about looking for places to cut? We had just had a cut a few months before, of 2 percent across the board, for the State government.

Watson: I don't know. I wasn't involved in the Appropriations Committee, so I don't recall discussing that. But that's what you'd say. Somebody who's against an increase is always for cuts, but it's tough to identify those cuts. It's tough today; it was back then. While we say, "Take the fat out of government," back then even, was pretty thin.

DePue: This is something… I don't mean to put you on the spot here, but I'm always confused.

Watson: Why is that? You've been doing it for about five hours here (laughs).

DePue: Oh, boy. What was your perception, sitting in the legislature, of what the Illinois State Constitution said about the requirement of having a budget and a balanced budget? Was that a constitutional mandate?

Watson: It was a constitutional mandate, and it is today, which I think is not lived up to by the general assembly or the governor. It hasn't been for the last decade.

DePue: Was there a sense at that time though, boy we've got to figure out how to balance this thing, because we're required by the constitution to do so?

Watson: Well, we'd given the authority for Thompson to do the cuts the previous year. A lot of times, budgets are balanced on the backs of providers; you just extend the payment cycle for paying hospitals and doctors, pharmacies, nursing homes or Medicaid. Of course Medicaid wasn't as big an issue back then as it is now, but still it was an issue. That's what you do to balance a budget; you just extend payments.

DePue: Do you recall in that time frame, were pensions for state employees an issue or a concern, how to make sure we're doing the payments?

Watson: I can remember…

DePue: Even in the early '80s.

Watson: … in the early '80s, on the House floor, I can remember just all of these increases for educators and State employees and proposals, different proposals. I always wondered, Why? Where's the money going to come from to pay for this? You just can't keep doing all this. But in most cases, probably, I

supported a lot of them, because that was the politically correct thing to do. All these constituencies were crying for all these increases. So, who was against it? Not many people were, and I probably supported some of those. I regret that, because that was a mistake.

DePue: I would think that you had your fair share of teachers, which would have been in the State system at that time. But as far as other State employees are concerned, I would think your district didn't have a lot.

Watson: We had the Vandalia Correctional Center; we had Murray [Developmental] Center in Centralia. We didn't have the prison in Centralia yet, although it was being proposed. But there were many, more than you'd think.

DePue: Enough to be of concern for you?

Watson: Yes. It was mostly (unintelligible - talking at the same time)

DePue: Any mental health institutes?

Watson: The Murray Center in Centralia. Most of it was teachers, but I was never supported by the teachers, until the later years. The IEA [Illinois Education Association] and IFT [Illinois Federation of Teachers] was never supportive of me because I had never agreed with the concept of collective bargaining being done in Springfield.

I always thought that the issues, a lot of times, that were brought to Springfield, should be bargained locally because not everybody's impacted the same by the legislation that was passed. I voted against a lot of it. I was a local control guy. I didn't believe in unfunded mandates, and I didn't like the idea of us dictating policy to local units of government, including schools. So I voted against a lot of that, and the teachers took exception to it and, as a result, didn't support me, until mid-1990s or maybe even later than that.

DePue: You say the teachers didn't support you. Do you mean the teachers' unions?

Watson: That's a good point. Teachers supported me. In fact, in the district, a lot of people, "Why aren't you…?" because I did support the funding aspects of it. That was big to me because I saw a lot of inequities in funding and how we were being treated downstate. I supported that.

It was these collective bargaining issues that I didn't [support], and that's where I had always gotten in trouble. So I shouldn't say teachers, I should say the unions, the IFT and the IEA leadership.

DePue: Was there enough of an industrial presence in the district to have to worry about other unions, or was it primarily public sector unions you were dealing with?

Watson: No, a considerable number of private sector. I remember I supported a bill—in fact introduced a bill in the House—that said that you could use electronic signs out on the highway instead of a flagman (laughs). That flagman, of

course, that's a job for somebody. Well, I thought that an electronic sign, an arrow or whatever, could have more impact than some guy waving a flag, that it might be too late by the time it got to him.

I was wrong about that one. Let's say, I was politically wrong because the district—I had the laborers and most of the unions—were vehemently opposed to that legislation. I learned a lot from that. I would go into labor halls and explain what I was doing. A lot of times I would walk out of there with people saying, "At least the guy came in to see us and talk to us about it." I gathered a lot of… not support necessarily, but respect, because I was willing to do that kind of thing. That was a good educational process in the political scheme of things, for me to be able to go into those labor halls and talk one on one with the laborers, the guys that do the work.

DePue: It makes it sound like, even when you're not in session, you're still an Illinois State Legislator and still doing lots of events.

Watson: I'm a big believer in a citizen legislature, people holding a job outside of having it in Springfield, being an elected official. You should do something else. You should provide for your family with some other means besides the legislature. But the demands in the district are considerable, and you're gone a lot, and you're in the office a lot, and you have people wanting to see you, talk to you, whatever.

Even when I was in the drugstore, I was a target. I'd be back in the prescription counter and, "Hey, Frank, I've been wanting to talk to you" (both laugh). I had a little office in the drugstore, where I'd go. I spent a lot of time in there, and people knew that they could always get me in the drugstore. That changed over the years, as my responsibilities grew in the legislature, that I didn't work in the drugstore as much as I did in the beginning.

But there are a lot of demands, so the citizen legislator is a vanishing thing. It's too bad because people need to know what it is to make a living outside of government.

DePue: We're still in 1983 and this budget crunch that was going at the time. I understand, July 1, there was a gas tax increase. Do you recall if you would have been in favor of that?

Watson: The gas tax increase, was that Build Illinois?

DePue: No. This was again, 1983, we're still talking about. There was a total of $1.9 billion, an increase in funds for the state.

Watson: I supported most gas tax increases because, one, I thought it was a user tax. People that used the highways pay for it. Of course, the gas tax goes into the motor fuel tax fund and in many cases is matched by some bonding that is done. It increases work on the highways, building and maintaining our roads, so I always felt that a use tax was a proper vote to cast.

The motor fuel tax, many times I thought… Now, I did eliminate it during the Ryan years. I was a sponsor of the bill that eliminated the tax on fuel for about a six month period, because it had spiked so high. It is wrong. We have sales tax on it. Motor fuel tax is one thing, but to have a sales tax on top of that, it's kind of a double taxation, a double whammy to the motoring public.

I always felt that the sales tax was totally unfair because as taxes went up or the gasoline went up, so did the tax.

DePue: Probably at this time, gas prices are stabilizing. They really started to zoom up in the late 1970s.

Watson: Yeah, right.

DePue: But this is also a time of high inflation for the country. Was that a factor in your willingness to support a gas tax increase?

Watson: I just don't remember if that's the tax that I supported or not; I'm sorry. But as I said, I generally supported motor fuel taxes because of the roads and conditions.

DePue: It's unfair of me to try to pin you down for anything, because you spent thirty years in the legislature, and to try to sort of one decision compared to another…

Watson: It does kind of run together. I'm glad you understand that because, if I had spent the time and gone back and reviewed—I don't know—my years in the legislature, maybe I'd become more versed in what I did. But I haven't done that.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-three, I think, in the Veto Session, there was a Regional Transit Authority bill. In other words, taking Chicago Transit Authority and taking in some of the suburbs as well. Do you recall that legislation at all?

Watson: I think that was earlier than '83, wasn't it?

DePue: You could be right; that's what I have. Would you have been supportive of that?

Watson: No, probably not. That was the Bob Blair years, when he was speaker of the house, when they expanded the RTA [Regional Transit Authority] into the suburbs. Bob Blair was the speaker, a Republican from, I think, Kankakee County, and he got beat in the next election because he did expand the RTA. I don't know what year that would have been; that was before me, but I don't think '83. I'm not sure what the issue would have been in '83 you're referring to.

DePue: What I've got is veto session and the passage of Regional Transit Authority bill. It might have been a minor restructuring. We'll have to go back and check on that. I apologize for that.

Let's ask about one other person that you would have had dealings with. That would have been the senate president at the time, Phil Rock. What was your impression of him?

Watson: Another strong leader. I'll tell you, you talk about a diverse caucus; the senate Democrats under his tenure, when I was in there, I don't know he held it together. I've got to give him a lot of credit for that, because they were very diverse people, and a lot of them going in different directions. He was able to, most times, on the key votes, he was able to pull it all together. You would respect him, because he was very much a strong politician; he was a strong senate president.

DePue: Nineteen eighty-four is another election year for you because you drew the short straw (Watson laughs). Tell me about that election.

Watson: Eighty-four. Was that David Vaught?

DePue: Is he Dan Walker's son-in-law?

Watson: Dan Walker's son-in-law, an attorney from Fairview Heights (laughs).

DePue: David Vaught?

Watson: David Vaught. Today he's in administration. He was a budget director, but he's in a high level post in the administration. He was from Fairview Heights, and he was an attorney, and he was an activist. He was a Pat Quinn guy. There was a coalition of people that supported Pat Quinn and his thinking back then. David was a part of that.

DePue: Now Quinn, at that time, would not have had any kind of official office or position in the government?

Watson: No, he did not. He was kind of a gadfly, people called him, but he was effective in his own way. He had a following and a significant following. They supported the cutback, as we've talked about, and a Citizens Utility Board [CUB], the formation of that. David was all a part of that one.

DePue: You may remember him because of him being Dan Walker's son-in-law. We should mention that this is prior to the time that Walker himself got in trouble with the law and got convicted.[20] So, he is still just the son-in-law of a former Illinois governor.

Watson: In my district. Harold Byers was an advocate. He was another Pat Quinn… not as strong, but he was a Pat Quinn guy. He was a Dan Walker guy too. That didn't help him when he ran in the House in 1980, against the other three of us.

20 Dan Walker, a maverick corporation lawyer who walked the length of the state to become governor of Illinois, in 1987 pleaded guilty to federal charges that he improperly received nearly $1.4 million in loans, some of them from a savings and loan association he owned. (https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1987-08-06-8702270503-story.html)

Dan Walker was not viewed upon as a very good governor. So when I campaigned, I didn't have to say anything. You know you never mention your opponent's name; that's the first thing. Never say your opponent's name when you're campaigning. So I'd get up, and I'd say, "I'm running against Dan Walker's son-in-law!" (DePue laughs) And oh, my gosh… And then there was, "an attorney;" that was always a negative. And he was from Fairview Heights, which was the very western part of my district. It was an urban area, where most of my district was rural, so people really didn't have an association or affiliation much with Fairview Heights. So, in three things, I didn't have to say a negative thing about David Vaught. I said three negative things about him, (both laugh) without saying anything negative, if you follow me.

Anyway, we had a good race. I can remember, we went down and discussed mandatory automobile insurance at the Caseyville VFW. In fact, it was a Democrat club, organization, of Caseyville. I was not a supporter of mandated automobile insurance, and he was. I got up and gave my reasons why.

Once again, when I do those kinds of things—I think people running for office need to do more of it—go right into the woodshed; go right into the enemy; go at them. And just state your case. In many cases, sometimes, people agree with you. So what do you have to lose? If anything else, I gained a lot of respect from those people in the Caseyville Township for just showing up and hanging around, drinking a beer with them or whatever.

I've always said, running for office, one thing you need to do is learn to roll in the mud with them. You're not any better than anybody else; don't put yourself on some kind of pedestal or anything. You just get down there, and roll in the mud with them, and be with them, and be like them, and you'll be okay. That was a philosophy I've had, running for office since the beginning, and that was an example.

DePue: By this time, this would have been what, your fourth race that you had run in?

Watson: Yes, the fourth race in eight years.

DePue: Did you have much of a campaign team that supported you? Can you tell me about that?

Watson: I had a great campaign team. In '80, when I ran for the House, this same family that I've talked about before, the Haas family, that helped us in the drugstore when my dad got sick, and he was our accountant, Chet Haas, his son, Bill, ran my campaign in '80 and I think '82. I believe he did it for two years. He also worked in the drugstore for us.

That family has meant a lot to me over the years. There have been generations and generations that work in our drugstore, all the way down to Clayton; he's probably in his late thirties or mid-thirties. And our county chairman now in Bond County is Curt, Curt Haas; he worked in the drugstore,

and his dad, Dick, worked in the drugstore, and Lyle worked in the drugstore, Bill, and then their dad, Chet.

DePue: By 1984, when you were running, do you recall how many people you would have had in paid positions on your campaign staff?

Watson: I don't think I had much of a… They were mostly volunteer. I don't…

DePue: Even Haas himself? Was there anybody that would have been paid?

Watson: I don't believe so. If they were paid, they were paid by the Senate Campaign Committee, which… We didn't spend a lot of money on our races. I think I told you, I spent like twenty-three in the first race, 20,000. Then like twenty-six in my second race, and then when I ran for the senate, it was like sixty-some. So we didn't spend a lot. It was mostly just handshaking, and eyeball to eyeball, and meeting people and just working. But we had a lot of people that helped.

Oh, yeah, I had a lot of Jaycee friends that helped, and people did my radio advertising. The mayor of Greenville, Alan Gaffner, did my radio advertising for me. And [there was] Joel Curtis, who worked for Pet Milk, and George Hertz, another who worked for Pet Milk in Greenville, Jaycee friends that just helped me all the way through. I just can't say enough about those people.

DePue: This is another presidential year. Were you involved at all? I think you mentioned that you had certainly been a strong supporter of Ronald Reagan. He would have been running for reelection that year. Did you go to things like the national conventions? Were you involved at that level?

Watson: I don't believe that I did. I started going later. No, I didn't. The first convention I went to was not George Bush, Senior, because I supported Jack Kemp. It was the next one, when Bush was running for reelection. That was the first national convention I went to.

DePue: Yeah. The one where [independent candidate] Ross Perot was in the mix that year [1992] as well.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Let's go to '85 and '86. This is the time frame that I think Jim Thompson is really pushing hard on the Build Illinois initiative.[21] What were your views about that?

[21] In what may have been the most comprehensive construction program in Illinois since President Roosevelt's Depression-era "New Deal," Build Illinois was an all-encompassing attempt to deal with the state's crumbling infrastructure, disappearing jobs, and shrinking tax base. (https://www.lib.niu.edu/1986/ii860115.html)

Watson: I thought it was a good thing. I thought investing in the infrastructure of Illinois is generally always a good thing. Highways and construction, maintenance. It was a big thing, and it put a lot of people to work.

DePue: But you have to figure out how to finance it.

Watson: You always do. All these projects and all these pieces of legislation that people support are wonderful, generally, but how do you pay for them? So, on to the next question (laughs).

DePue: I know that there's a $2 billion bonding authority to support Build Illinois, at least that was in the initial one. But how do bonding authorities work differently from the general revenue stream?

Watson: It's borrowing; bonding is borrowing. Then you have a revenue stream to pay it off, a dedicated revenue stream. I think it was a soda pop tax; that was part of it, I think. That's what bonding is. You just sell bonds. Your bond rating determines what your interest rate is going to be, and then you have to dedicate a revenue stream of some sort to pay that off. It can't be just out of a general revenue fund.

DePue: Was there discussion in the Republican caucus in the senate in terms of, "We've got this Build Illinois project; what things would you like to see supported in your district?"

Watson: I don't remember Build Illinois so much as I remember Illinois First, that that was the case.[22]

DePue: With George Ryan, many years later.

Watson: There was some of that, but I don't remember Build Illinois being that way.

DePue: Again, that's quite a long time ago. But generally, you were supportive of Build Illinois.

Watson: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Some of the specific things—I don't know if they're all tied directly to Build Illinois—the Thompson Center in Chicago, having a governmental building, office building, right downtown Chicago.

Watson: Well, we had the LaSalle Street Building then. I can't remember what the name of it was, but the address was located on LaSalle. That was a State of

[22] One of George Ryan's pet projects as governor was an extensive repair of the Illinois Highway System called "Illinois FIRST". FIRST was an acronym for "Fund for Infrastructure, Roads, Schools, and Transit". Signed into law in May 1999, the law created a $6.3 billion package for use in school and transportation projects. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Ryan#:~:text=One%20of%20Ryan's%20pet%20projects,in%20school%20and%20transportation%20projects.)

Illinois building at that time. This was a new structure, and a big part of it was construction, building.

DePue: Was there funding that was supporting schools and roads in your district as well?

Watson: Roads. I don't remember schools so much; that came a little bit later. In fact, I was a sponsor of a bill that created some school financing for building schools in Illinois, a bonding program once again.

DePue: Let's go to the '86 election, another gubernatorial primary election. You had alluded to that last time. That was the year that the LaRouchies got in.[23]

Watson: Who would have believed it? I mean really (laughs). I guess they had bad ballot names or something. There was a guy named Fairchild. wasn't there…?

DePue: I'll lay down some specifics and let you reflect on it a little bit more. The primary election, obviously in the spring of the election year, Mark Fairchild wins the Democratic primary for lieutenant governor, against George Sangmeister of Mokena, Illinois. Fairchild, sounds like a good old American name.

Watson: I guess. Maybe that's…

DePue: He was a LaRouche candidate. In the other race, the secretary of state race, Janice Hart wins against Aurelia Puchini. Am I pronouncing that right, Puchini?

Watson: No.

DePue: Pucinski.

Watson: Pucinski, yes. I didn't remember that she was the candidate.

DePue: So you've got Mark Fairchild and Janice Hart, both LaRouche candidates. I'm sure the electorate goes in; this sounds like a nice, all American names, and they voted for them.

Watson: Well, that's some of the problem with these offices down the ballot; they don't get to focus that a congressman or a governor or senator, U.S. senator, higher offices get. They don't get the… People don't know who they are.

That was like the U of I trustees, when that was on the ballot. People went in and just voted party most of the time. But in a primary, for the Democrats to nominate two LaRouche candidates, I thought, was just incredible. Every county organization in the state had to be supportive of the regular Democrat; they had to be. For them not to be able to pull that through

[23] The LaRouche movement is a political and cultural network promoting the late Lyndon LaRouche and his ideas. The movement originated within the radical leftist student politics of the 1960s. In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of candidates ran as Democrats in the United States on the LaRouche platform. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LaRouche_movement)

and get the regular Democrats through is a calamity. I don't know how it could happen.

DePue: In the old days, with the Chicago Democratic Party machine…

Watson: Even more so.

DePue: Yeah, and that was all about getting out the vote and voting for the right candidates.

Watson: Yeah. They had the machine. It had to be name ID. George Sangmeister was a highly respected state senator. People liked him; I liked him. He was a downstater from Will County, I think it was. It's hard for me to understand how that could happen. That really just set up an unbelievable fight then, of course, between the Democrats, and we loved it. We just sat on the sideline and, "Yeah, go for it!" (laughs)

DePue: Here's Stevenson, who lost by the narrowest of margins in '82, and he's thinking, Okay, I've got Thompson now. The Illinois public has got to be getting tired of this guy, and now he's got this scenario in front of him. Here's what his comment was, after that primary defeat for a couple of his candidates. He won the primary as governor…

Watson: Right.

DePue: … for the Democratic Party. "I am exploring every legal remedy to purge these extremists from the Democratic ticket. The one thing I want to make absolutely clear, I will never serve on a ticket with candidates who espouse the hatefully folly of Lyndon LaRouche and the U.S. Labor Party." So, he felt like he had no alternative but to create his own party, and he ran on the Solidarity ticket.

Watson: That's right.

DePue: And I think Michael Howlett ran as lieutenant governor and Jane Spirgel as the secretary of state, along with him, in the Solidarity Party. But it obviously didn't go well for them, and Thompson won reelection once again.

Watson: How can you overcome that? I would assume all the local people were running as Democrats. Then you have to go to the Solidarity Party, which is further down the ballot. They took their names off the ballot, so Fairchild and Hart were still on the ballot as Democratic candidates, but the others were gone.

DePue: Stevenson didn't even appear on the ballot as a Democrat.

Watson: No. How can you overcome that? And there was three party balloting then, so the traditional punch ten, like Cook County used to have… You go in. "Well, we don't mean it this year." You're going to have to go in and vote for Democrats down here, but you've got to vote for your Solidarity Party. People were confused, I'm sure.

DePue: So Thompson wins 52.7 percent against Stevenson's 40 percent. I guess that means that Fairchild got some votes as well, in the mix. (Watson laughs) Any other comments for that year?

Watson: No.

DePue: That gets us into the 1987 spring session. Some of this is, I know, things that were occurring in the House and I assume in the senate as well. Was the Comprehensive Health Insurance bill going through at about that time? Do you remember anything about that?

Watson: Comprehensive Health Insurance. No, I don't.

DePue: This next one is very much more of an issue for the 1990s, but a Welfare Reform Bill in the mid-'80s, 1987?

Watson: I was probably the sponsor of that. I was the sponsor of a bill—and it passed in the senate—that said that if you are on welfare, if you are receiving Medicaid… There's confusion sometimes, Medicaid/Medicare. It's Medicaid, the state run health system for the unfortunate. If you have a child while you're on Medicaid, they become enrolled in the Medicaid system. If you have another child, they no longer do.

That was a very controversial bill. I just said, "One child is enough. We shouldn't be supporting generation after generation of welfare." That's what we've created in this country, unfortunately, and it's going on still today.

Anyway, in the late '80s, I was the sponsor of a bill that would… Well, it got a heated debate, and I was called a lot of things on the Senate Floor, because they thought it was targeting a certain population. It was a problem for everybody, not just minorities, necessarily. The Caucasian had it too. Fayette County had an unbelievable number of births on Medicaid. It's got to the point where the majority of the births in this state are to Medicaid recipients. We have to somehow curtail that. If you can't afford a child, you shouldn't be having them.

Like I said, it passed the Senate with some Democrat support, went to the House and never… But it returned in 1994, and I was the sponsor of again, of welfare reform. If that's what you're referring to.

DePue: Were you called things like a racist?

Watson: Oh, yeah, yeah.

DePue: On the Senate Floor?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember some of the people who were leveling those charges against you?

Watson: I do; I can see him. Bill Shaw, I think it was. I know he didn't mean it maliciously to me, necessarily, but the legislation, I think he thought it was racially motivated.

DePue: So he didn't call you personally a racist?

Watson: Well, I don't recall. I felt like it was. I felt like he did. And that happened more than once. I made some slips in my time (laughs), on the Senate Floor. I didn't know what "your people" meant. I didn't realize the racial connotation of that statement. I used that one time on the Senate Floor, and you [would have] thought an alarm went off (laughs). I had no idea that that was like a racial statement. I had no idea.

DePue: That what was a racial statement?

Watson: "Your people." I really got it for that one. Then I said, "the black hole of East St. Louis" one time, "We're pouring money down a black hole in East St. Louis." Well, I didn't think of it as a racial statement (laughs).

DePue: It was a cosmic term in your mind, huh?

Watson: Certain people took offense to that, and I can understand why they did. They came over and talked to me after it was all over and understood that I meant nothing by it, nothing racially by it. I just… I say some things… On the floor, I can get pretty worked up and say things that maybe were not necessarily the best thing to say.

DePue: So you regretted them, or were you…?

Watson: Oh, yeah. I regretted saying it in the manner in which they took it, for sure. It just so happened that one piece of legislation, the St. Louis School Board was sitting in the gallery. And I just said, "Your people here," referring to the St. Louis School Board, not referring to anything that somebody would take as a racial statement. That's not me anyway. Anybody that knows me, that's the case.

DePue: Were you frustrated though, that oftentimes the discussions end up being about how you phrase things, more than the issues themselves?

Watson: It can be, sure, because it wasn't what I meant. But I said it, so I had to live by my words and ate them (both laugh).

DePue: In this case, here's my guess; you would have been in good company because Pate Philip was known to do those kinds of things and say those kinds of things.

Watson: I would hate to be… I'm not Pate Philip, and I had an issue with Emil Jones over that. Emil Jones, when I became leader, took it out on me because I think Pate Philip ran roughshod over him for all the years that Pate was president and he was minority leader, Emil. So now that Emil's president, he's going to take it out on the minority leader of the Republicans, and that happened to be me. I kept telling him, "I'm not Pate Philip." I don't have those same feelings, sometimes, that Pate might have had.

Todd Seiban, Emil Jones and Frank Watson at Wrigley Field during the '80s. They played the city counsel of Chicago in softball.

DePue: What do you mean by taking it out? How would he take it out on you?

Watson: Oh, just very little input from us, as a caucus, little respect, very little. Of course, now we're talking about 2003, but yeah, those were kind of tough times for us.

DePue: Let's go back to the 1987 time frame. This has happened three or more times in the Thompson years, where he's trying to get an increase in taxes. In 1987, he tries to increase the income tax, I believe it is, a $1.6 billion additional taxes. It's another temporary kind of a proposal, and I know that most of the Republican caucus was not with him on that one.

Watson: No. No, we weren't. I don't think it passed either.

DePue: No, it didn't pass. The surprise that year was that Mike Madigan, in the Illinois House, decided not to back it either. That was the death knell for it. But here you have a Republican governor who's working with the Republicans in the senate. I assume that he thought he had some support from the Democrats in the senate, and he just needed a few votes from the Republicans? Is that how it worked?

Watson: That would be how it worked, and sometimes it did. But there again, Pate Philip's philosophy prevailed. He [Pate Philip] was a no tax, anti-big government legislator and he… Although [he] supported some of the tax increases that Thompson had, in most cases he did it reluctantly. I can tell you that.

DePue: And you would have been right on the same…

Watson: I don't think I supported that at all. The early ones I did not support. I supported making it permanent. That was when Edgar was governor.

DePue: That would have been '91.

Watson: Ninety-one, I supported that one, to make it permanent.

DePue: Again, this is 1987. Thompson's doing this because there are some severe strains on the Illinois budget. If you don't pass it, then you're looking at probably having to make cuts or going into a deficit or not paying some of these providers for even a longer period of time. Would you have been in favor of more cuts?

Watson: Well, yes, I would have been. Thompson was an expansionist, in my mind. He expanded government a great deal, some good maybe, some not necessarily. I didn't support a lot of what he...some of his initiatives.

DePue: When he didn't get that, I understand that he cut another 4 percent spending, a line item veto of $363 million in the budget that year, to get to a place where he had a budget that was close to being balanced.

Watson: I can't recall at all that; that's a pretty significant number. To cut that out of the budget, I would assume we all voted to sustain his veto, because he couldn't have done it with Democrats. He had to have a few, but I…

DePue: That gets us into another presidential year in 1988. You would have been up for reelection that year as well, correct?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember anything about that election?

Watson: I think that was the Wilma Pidgeon year.

DePue: Pardon me?

Watson: That was the Wilma Pidgeon year.

DePue: That was her name?

Watson: That's it, Wilma Pidgeon. She was from Collinsville. I think she might even have been a write-in candidate. By that time, I'd gathered enough support that the Democrats kind of left me alone. They figured they can't beat me, so they don't make a major effort, so Wilma Pidgeon enters the race (laughs). I can't remember too much about her. I remember her son was with her. He was a nice kid.

Those are the kind of elections you dream about. If you don't have anybody on the ballot, which is the only way to run, unopposed (both laugh). But you want to have a token candidate. It helps you raise money; it keeps your organization together. You need to have some way of generating support, financially and personally, from people. Having somebody on the ballot does it every time, regardless of who they are.

DePue: Did you do much active campaigning that year?

Watson: Oh, I'm sure I did. I enjoyed campaigning. [That] was a big part of why I was in this. I liked it, and I loved parades, still do. I just walked in the Bond County

Parade just the other night. I just love the interaction with people. Campaigning was a big part of my success.

DePue: That was a good year for the Republicans at the national level as well. [George H.W.] Bush wins. It's a little bit tighter race, but he wins, 50.7 percent, against Dukakis at 48.6 percent, and the economy is going strong.

Let's get into 1989, a time when I'm sure that Thompson is at least thinking about bowing out of the political scene. I'm going to talk about the income tax increase again. That would have happened early in 1989. I think he declared he wasn't going to run for reelection in about the middle of 1989. Do you recall the discussions that time around, for the income tax increase, a temporary income tax increase?

Watson: I do remember that… and I voted against it. But like I said earlier, I voted for making it permanent. That would have been when Edgar became governor.

DePue: It's going from 2.5 to 3 percent in the personal income tax, and from 4 to 4.8 percent for the corporate tax. Half the tax would go to the state and half to education and local communities. I think that last part was put in there to convince more fiscal conservatives to vote for it or support it. That would be my guess.

Watson: Anything that went to local governments generally increased support, whether education or your county boards or wherever. That, of course, got support from the local community, townships. There's a lot of roadwork that's done by counties and townships that were struggling and still are. [That] needed some sort of support. So a lot of that went to those units of government and helped them in that regard, and that generated support from the county boards and your townships.

DePue: But you were opposed to the increases.

Watson: I was opposed.

DePue: Can you explain why the corporate income tax was always higher for the State of Illinois than the personal income tax?

Watson: That's part of our constitution. It says that the corporate income tax has to be, I think it's five-three, or five-two; I'm not sure. It designates what it is. So any time you raise the individual, you raise corporate.

DePue: Philosophically, was that something that you could buy into or support?

Watson: Well, it's just the same today as it was then. It's just tough to increase taxes, especially when you're competing with other states, whether it's corporate or individual.

DePue: Do you think that, if Illinois raises both of them, it impacts the economic climate of the state?

Watson: Definitely.

DePue: The surprise that year was that Madigan switched from what he had done in ’87 and came out in support of it.

Watson: Then it passes.

DePue: Then it passes, and at this time, the Democrats controlled both the House and the Senate?

Watson: I believe they did, yes, and they had for the ten years.

DePue: One of the things that was putting so much…

Watson: And to Thompson’s defense a little bit, is that he had to deal with Mike Madigan and Phil Rock. He wasn’t dealing with Pate Philip and whoever the house Republican leader might have been. He had to deal with those people. To get anything done, in many cases, Thompson had to bow to their wishes.

DePue: When something like this would come up, how would the math work out when it goes to the vote? Let’s say this income tax increase, which is going to be a temporary income tax increase of two years, that Thompson is advocating, would he get any votes in the Illinois Senate for it?

Watson: I’m sure he did. I don’t recall who or how many, but I would think he did.

DePue: And would he lose some Democrat votes?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Downstate Democrats?

Watson: Downstate Democrats or maybe even some suburban. If there’s some elected in that area, they would have the tendency not to vote for it.

DePue: A couple of things that are really putting pressures on the Illinois budget by that time were things going on in DCFS [Department of Children and Family Services]. I think, ’88 or around then, there had been an ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] lawsuit that said the case workload in DCFS was much, much too high, that the State had to do something to reconcile that[24]

Watson: What was that called? What was the case?

DePue: I don’t know the specific name of the case.

Watson: Well, there was a case that we did have to spend a lot of money to comply with the court’s decision, and that, of course, creates major problems. Once again,

24 In 1988, children in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services of Illinois filed a class action lawsuit, BH v DCFS/Civil Rights Litigation. The plaintiffs alleged that while children were in DCFS custody (because of abuse or neglect by their custodians), DCFS failed to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, health care, protection from harm, and education to the children. (https://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=323)

some non-elective body is determining what you have to do. I don't necessarily agree with that. The courts, to me, have too much power—I always felt that way—because they can make decisions, or one judge can make a decision that has a huge impact on very many people.

That goes back to my unfunded mandates attitude. I've always been resistant to passing on laws that affect local units of government that didn't have the funding for them to implement that law.

DePue: I think this is probably about the same time frame, there was federal legislation that was going to change the requirements for Medicaid as well, so that once you get into the early '90s, Medicaid really starts to skyrocket at the same time.

Watson: That's a big part of the problem now. It always has been, but it's a growing problem; a growing part of our budget is Medicaid. Medicaid isn't always necessarily what's going to the poor and disadvantaged. It's also going to hospitals that pay for Medicaid use, each of the hospitals, and nursing homes, doctors, drugstores. It goes to providers, but those providers provide a service to the less fortunate.

DePue: Let's talk about the 1990 election, kind of wrap things up today on that subject. This is not a presidential year, but it is a gubernatorial year. Finally, Jim Thompson is bowing out, after fourteen years in the governor's mansion. Any reflections on his tenure, before we turn to Jim Edgar?

Watson: Like I said, there was some things that I didn't necessarily agree with him, and I know we've had those discussions, he and I have, over the years and while he was in office. Overall, I think he was pretty well scandal free, if you think about it, fourteen years. The man did a good job, with high regard. He was highly regarded on the national scene. I think he did a lot for Illinois and accomplished a great deal. As politics goes in Illinois, to be scandal free is significant. So, hats off to him.

DePue: How well did you know Jim Edgar at that time?

Watson: I knew him pretty well.

DePue: He'd been secretary of state for ten years, practically.

Watson: That's right. When I was elected in '78, he was a member of the House. He then was selected by Thompson to be the legislative liaison from the governor's office to the legislature, and he left the house. But I knew him from Charleston and me being from Greenville, not that far away. We had a lot of similar interests, basketball, tennis, sports again.

DePue: How about political philosophy? Would you say that he was your kind of Republican?

Watson: He was a little more liberal maybe than I would consider myself, although I really appreciated him as governor. He was "Governor No," He had to do it.

All the spending that had gone on and increases that happened in spending in the Thompson years, Edgar had to pay somehow. And of course, he had the temporary income tax that was going to go away; therefore, he was even in worse shape. I had a lot of respect for Jim Edgar as governor and the fact that he was willing to say, "no" and make the tough decisions.

DePue: You remind me of the primary issue that year. His opponent was Neil Hartigan, who had been attorney general in the same time frame that Edgar was secretary of state. Edgar is the one who is standing there as a Republican, a fiscal conservative Republican, saying, "We need to make this income tax increase permanent." And Neil Hartigan is saying, "No we don't." I think he was saying, "Two percent." Was it a 2 percent cut, and that would do it?

Watson: Probably.

DePue: You did not have to run that year. Do you remember reflecting anything about the gubernatorial race that year?

Watson: Of course, Jim Edgar, he was our kind of guy, as far as I'm concerned. Other than I had some differences philosophically with him, I appreciated Jim and Brenda Edgar. They came as a team, and he, I thought, was an excellent administrator as the secretary of state and had proven himself. [He was] a fellow downstater. It's easy to run against Chicago downstate, and we did. Neil Hartigan… It was close, if I remember right.

DePue: It was very close.

Watson: But I think the right thing happened. Probably Neil Hartigan would have raised the taxes anyway (both laugh). At least you've got to give Edgar respect for saying what needed to be done—and that was to make it permanent—during a campaign. That's significant.

DePue: You mentioned philosophical differences. I would guess that one of them would have been on the abortion issue because he was pro-choice.

Watson: Yes, he was pro-choice, and I was pro-life.

DePue: Would you have had any discussions with him or others about that? Were you surprised by that position?

Watson: Of course he was that way all through the legislature too, so it wasn't anything we didn't know. I wasn't necessarily… There were downstaters that were pro-choice, and him being one was of no significance to me.

DePue: You don't think that would have hurt his position with some of your constituents?

Watson: Probably. I don't remember who ran against him in the primary. Was that when…

DePue: Yeah, I should know that name. It was a very strong fiscal and social conservative.

Watson: Was it Brauer?

DePue: Yeah, it could have been, Rich Brauer. No. I'm thinking.

Watson: No. But anyway, that would have been in the primary, where that issue would have made the difference. I think in the general election, most Republicans who might have been pro-life that were maybe uneasy with Jim Edgar's position on that would have supported him.

DePue: Let's finish with this. Nineteen ninety is also a year that you've got redistricting, because it's a census year. You mentioned this early in our discussions today. How did the redistricting work out in 1991 for the Republicans?

Watson: Much better (both laugh).

DePue: Were you…

Watson: Yes. I was selected by Pate Philip, to be on the re-map committee, along with Walter Dudyez, who is from Chicago. He did the Chicago and suburban area map, and I did the downstate map.

DePue: When you say you did the downstate map, you're the guy drawing these lines on the map?

Watson: Well, I had some influence in it, but we had, of course, staff and people who were experts in this. You just don't draw lines. You've got to have a certain amount of people; you have to have a cluster of "mutual interest," they call it. There were some constitutional questions that we had to answer when we drew the map. I left that up to the experts. I was just more, "What do you need?" talking to a fellow senator about, "What can I do for you? As a member of the commission, what kind of district do you want?"

Well, everybody wanted one that was 60 percent Republican district. You can't do that. That's not even political expedient, because you want to spread the Republicans out as much as you can to get more people elected, so you stay the majority for a long period of time. So, [I was] working with fellow senators and even House members. They had their own appointees, but we worked with the House, tried to get one that was mutually agreed to, a map.

DePue: Going into that process, the Republicans were in the minority in both in the House and the Senate. Which one did you think was going to be the tougher challenge, to create a new map after redistricting that would help Republicans control the Senate or help Republicans control the House?

Watson: I was, of course, interested in the Senate. But with that, you've got members on the other side, your own members in your district, that you want to protect or help. I just remember going to that drawing—it was on the house floor—

when George Ryan—he was secretary of state—drew out Al Jordan's name, who was the county chairman of McHenry County, I believe. He became the ninth member of the commission.

I can remember us; we all said, "Don't show a lot of emotion." (both laugh) Bob Churchill was there—he was a house appointee—and Walter and I. I can't remember who the other House… Anyway, we're all sitting there, and when Al Jordan's name is read by George Ryan—in fact even George Ryan got a smile on his face, so you knew he had an idea that it was Al Jordan—we jumped up, and we were yelling and jumping around. It was bad; we shouldn't have done that.

Anyway, for all the years that we'd been in the minority and been beaten down by Democrats in the Senate… not necessarily beaten down, but the power is in the majority, so when that happened that was significant, obviously. That meant the next ten years it was going to be a Republican map, we hoped, because we knew it was going to pass the commission. It just had to pass the courts and all the other challenges that were going to come. But anyway, we tried to be fair. We didn't try to be personal with it.

We tried to work with Democrats, even. I can remember talking to some Democrats about it, as to what can we do to really not… We didn't want to put two people in one district, and maybe it happened. In fact, we put two Republicans in one district, in one part of the state. It happens that way just because of the numbers of people you have to put into a district and to make up that region of the state.

DePue: Would the redistricting have been applied both at the federal congressional districts and at the state level?

Watson: We did them both, although we didn't do the congressional map. We didn't necessarily draw it. It was more or less drawn by our congressional delegation, I believe. I don't quite remember that.

DePue: Going into the discussions, let's see if I get the sequence right. Both the Republicans and the Democrats draw a map. They can't achieve any kind of agreement between the two parties, which forces the draw out of the hat. Then they go back. Now the Republicans, once they've won, the process can tinker with the map that they already had?

Watson: Yeah, we draw a map that will pass the commission with Republican support, five members now, because Al Jordan became the ninth member.

DePue: But you don't have to change the map dramatically from what you had before, I would think.

Watson: No. We had a proposed map, as did the Democrats. I've never understood why it can't get worked out at that level, but everybody just takes their chances of going to the draw. Twice I lose during my term, my thirty years, and once I win.

DePue: And it's not by accident that the time you won is the time when the Republicans were able to control the Senate.

Watson: That's right and for the next ten years. What we did back then, our attitude was, we're not drawing them necessarily for individuals; we're drawing it for a majority. So, when we drew districts, we kept that in mind, of what would maintain a majority for ten years, not what's going to elect Frank Watson for ten years, but what's going to elect a Republican from that district to keep a Senate majority for ten years. I think that's a little different from the House.

DePue: I know that for ten years the Senate was controlled by Republicans, but only two of those years was the house controlled by Republicans. So what was different?

Watson: I think that was the difference. I think the house was member driven. It was driven by protection of individual members versus protection of a majority. Now, I shouldn't say that for everywhere in the state, but I think overall, they had that in mind when they drew the map; [it] was the individual members.

DePue: You're saying the Republicans were in part at fault for this, in drawing the House districts.

Watson: I think so, back then, yes.

DePue: How much of that would have been determined by Mike Madigan just being better at the business of counting votes and running elections?

Watson: Of course, once you get the map drawn, you've got to run in those districts. And once an incumbent is gone, it's up for grabs. If you drew a map for an individual, versus a majority, enter Mike Madigan. He is as good a statistician as there is. He knows where to put money and get good candidates. So I think that had an impact.

DePue: I think that's probably a good place for us to finish up today. Any final comments for today?

Watson: No, not necessarily.

DePue: Now we get to talk about the fun stuff, when the Republicans are in control, huh?

Watson: When good things happen for Illinois (both laugh).

DePue: Thank you, Senator Watson.

Watson: Thank you.

(end of transcript #2)

Interview with Frank Watson

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, August 30, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm in the library today with Senator Frank Watson. Good morning, sir.

Watson: Mark, good morning, good to be here.

DePue: It's nice having you here. It saves me a little bit of a drive, and I understand you've got a speech to make at the Sangamo Club this morning.

Watson: I do, Sangamon County… a Republican organization of some kind. I am not sure what it is, but anyway, I was asked by Sam McCann, a new senator from here, to participate in the speech. So I'm going to do that at noon.

DePue: Is that a fundraiser?

Watson: No, it's just an organization, a Republican club of some sort, and they're just having a monthly meeting, and they usually have a speaker. This is the first time I've done this, since I left the office, so this will be a little challenging.

DePue: Can I ask what the theme will be today?

Watson: Pensions (both laugh).

DePue: Pensions?

Watson: Oh, yeah. The U.S. Standard & Poor dropped our credit rating yesterday for the second time. Nothing is being done. I mean, there's no urgency at all by anyone, it seems as though, to do anything. For the life of me, I don't

understand it. But this is totally on the Democrats' field. This is their responsibility. Sure, we can… and we have… I know that several senate Republicans have offered up solutions, and nothing's been done. They don't even sit down with them and talk about it. This is a political shortcoming of the Democrat Party, has been, on pensions.

DePue: As I recall, obviously Governor Quinn just had everybody called in for a special session. Part of the blame, as he was saying, was that [Illinois House Minority Leader, Tom] Cross and the House Republicans were reluctant to compromise on the issue of passing off the pension payments to the local governments, instead of having the State pick it up.

Watson: That is totally irresponsible. For the Democrats to suggest that… Their solution to the pension problem is to pass it off to the units of local government, who can't afford it anyway. The universities, they get their money from the State, primarily, and tuition, which has gone up since we haven't funded it at the level that we should. Community colleges get theirs from local taxpayers. Then, of course, elementary and secondary school districts, they have no ability necessarily, to raise taxes constantly, down there at their local level, to make the payments to the pension. So that's the answer to the Democrats.

Of course, the benefits would all be still decided by the General Assembly, not the costs, just the benefits. That's a direction for disaster. It's irresponsible, and of course, Chicago is exempt. Suburban schools, downstate schools, everybody is expected to pay into this pension system, but not Chicago.

DePue: I understand that Chicago is exempt because they've been picking up the bill for their pension expenses for a long time.

Watson: If you look in the budget, every year there is a significant—usually around $50-60 million—of contributions that comes from the State that goes to Chicago Teachers' Retirement System [Chicago Teachers' Pension Fund]. They say that; they'll blow that whistle all the time, and it's not a fact.

DePue: Still passionate about these issues (both laugh). Here's a question for you then. Is it more or less frustrating as you watch what goes on or maybe what doesn't go on in the Illinois Legislature, now that you're out of office?

Watson: Much less frustrating, but still frustrating because just to see nothing being done and all the problems of this state… We literally are, not a laughingstock, but people point to Illinois as to how to not run a state government. Being a part of that for thirty years… People always say, "Frank, what did you do while you were there?" Well, we were the vocal minority since when Blagojevich came in. We towed the line with him and went toe-to-toe with him. You can only do so much.

But there's just nothing being done, and that, to me, is the frustrating part of all of it. Of course when I was in, Governor Blagojevich was in also, as governor, as I was the leader of the Senate Republicans. That was a very frustrating time for me.

I walked out of some meetings and didn't participate in the first process of the budget, 2003. We participated up to a point, but it was just obvious, they were going in a whole different direction than what we would have done, or we thought we would have done.

In fact, when I got sworn in as a leader of the Republican caucus in the Senate in 2003, got sworn in, Governor Blagojevich and I were in the holding room down in the convention center, the swearing in day. I can remember a conversation I had with him. I told him that I know he's inheriting some problems—things weren't necessarily great when he took office—and I said, "I'll be glad to work with you in any way we can to try to correct the solution. Let's right the ship; let's get things going in the right direction." That was the last time we ever really… He went one way… My thoughts were one way; his were another, more spending, more…

The things that they did in that first…in 2003, it was just inexcusable, irresponsible, much of what we stopped, but still, that set us on the path of where we are today.

DePue: We've got a little bit of terrain to cover before we get to that, but I'm looking forward to that discussion. We've got this meeting today, right in the middle of the National Republican Party Convention down in Tampa. Have you been watching any of that?

Watson: I did. I watched the night before, Ann Romney [wife of Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney]. Then last night, of course, [Speaker of the House and Republican vice presidential candidate], Paul Ryan, which… Quite honestly, I was a little skeptical when Ryan was picked as the vice presidential candidate, because I always thought you pick your vice president based on "What do they bring to the table?" Sarah Palin, what did she bring, three votes in Alaska which we got anyway?[25] That was four years ago. This year with Wisconsin [Ryan's home state]—traditionally a blue state—are you going to bring Wisconsin? What did he really bring?

I thought, Somebody from Florida, somebody from Ohio, somebody from Virginia, somebody from those states would be a political advantage to

25 As part of the [John] McCain presidential campaign, Sarah Palin, then the incumbent Governor of Alaska, was officially nominated by acclamation at the 2008 Republican National Convention on September 3, 2008. The McCain–Palin ticket lost the 2008 presidential election on November 4 to the Barack Obama–Joe Biden ticket. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vice_presidential_candidacy_of_Sarah_Palin#:~:text=As%20part%20of%20the%20McCain,Barack%20Obama%E2%80%93Joe%20Biden%20ticket.)

getting electoral votes. Paul Ryan was not that, necessarily, but his speech last night…

But I did; I appreciated his whole tenure as the budget negotiator for the House and what he did. They actually passed budgets in the House. They never did in the Senate; Democrats couldn't pass a budget. So the House was passing budgets, and Ryan was fiscally responsible. They were doing the things that had to be done. People maybe didn't like it.

But anyway, his speech last night, I thought was phenomenal; I really did. I was very impressed with him, and I think the crowd was too.

DePue: So it sold you that he was the right choice as the vice presidential candidate?

Watson: Well, that will remain… He's got to bring Wisconsin, at least into play, because he isn't going to bring anything else, other than… If he gets the exposure during the election that I hope he does, then he could do a lot. But I'm afraid it will be all focused on Romney and all focused on Obama. Biden and Ryan will just have a few skirmishes, I'm sure, the debates, and then that will be it. Usually that's the case. They can put him front and center, I think would be a good thing for the Republican Party and their chances to get elected.

DePue: The pundits think that, if he's front and center, then the issues that he brings with him are front and center.

Watson: Well, that's the problem… That is a problem. They did pass his budget, and there were some things in there, of course, that people aren't going to like. But when we're talking the debt we have and the things that need to be done for the future of our kids and grandkids, he's at least doing something, making some waves in that regard.

But you're right; it's all about what his record is, versus what the [Obama] administration's record is. And he pointed that out last night. He's not afraid to take them on, but the administration's record is just dismal at best (laughs).

DePue: To bring it from the national to the state level, two of the issues that are very much in play right now are Medicare and Medicaid. Certainly, when we get into the discussions of the 1990s and the Edgar Administration, Medicaid especially is going to be one of the issues that you all are going to have to wrestle with.

So, let's get back to the state level. We're going to go back to the earlier parts of your career, because I discovered that there might be a couple of interesting stories to talk about, and I wanted to ask you about your first piece of legislation.

Watson: The first bill I ever had (laughs) was to allow for open season on coyotes in Illinois. There was a season, a hunting season for them, and they were creating havoc in the agriculture community, from livestock to the grain farmer, it didn't matter. They aren't really a pleasant animal necessarily to have around. It wasn't like we were trying to take out Bambi.

It was the open season on coyotes. I was in the House at that time, and of course, they still do this. I've never been a big fan of this, this kind of thing that goes on, but people, during the debate, bring up all kinds of silly things for your first bill. Like I said, I never participated in it, but I was a recipient of it, of course, when I legalized…

DePue: This is part of your initiation?

Watson: This is initiation. This is the hazing part of the General Assembly. Anyway, I can remember there was several people that commented about the coyotes of Las Vegas, and how is that going to be impacted by my legislation? It was all fun. But anyway, it was a serious problem, and it was an issue that needed to be addressed. It's still a law, so there must [have been] be a problem. We made a solution, and they haven't repealed it. So I think we did the right thing.

DePue: How about a POW [Prisoner of War] license plate bill? Were you a sponsor of that bill early in your career, as well?

Watson: We had a really active POW organization out of primarily Clinton County, St. Clair County. Those people were kind of lost in the whole process of veterans. The POWs have served in prisoners of war camp; that's what they are. We had a young man from Greenville who was MIA [Missing in Action], so it was kind of prisoners of war or MIA kind of went together, missing in action. His name was Art Bollinger. He was a year ahead of me in class. When I was a Jaycee, we started the Art Bollinger Award for the best athlete, best student, best leader, because that's what he was in high school and in college. He was just an outstanding young man. Him being missing in action, over in Laos during Vietnam. He was a pilot.

So this organization, I was just attracted to them, the POW group out of Clinton County. I've never met a more appreciative group of people in my life than those people. What we did was we just established a license plate for prisoners of war. They had their own logo on it and, of course, numbers one through whatever. That was done, and that was, I think, worthy of veterans and people that have served and really kind of paid maybe an extra sacrifice. Of course, not the ultimate, like some, like Art Bollinger did. They did find his remains finally, about ten, twelve years later, which was terrible for his family to wait that long to know what really might have happened.

Jim Thompson signs the first bill Frank Watson sponsored in 1979, establishing a POW license plate. Sen. Robert Mitchler stands on the right and Rep. Larry DiPrima stands behind Watson's left shoulder. The others are POWs from Watson's district.

Veterans groups are always very appreciative of things you do for them, and that was a strong constituency of mine—especially Clinton County—and I was glad to do it.

DePue: When did you become involved in the Education Committee? Was that one of your earliest assignments?

Watson: In the Senate it was. I wasn't on the Education Committee in the House, but when I came over to the Senate, I got on the Education Committee.

DePue: Was that one of the committees that you were wanting to get on?

Watson: Oh, yeah. My wife is in education. She was an early childhood teacher. I had an interest in education through her, of course, and then through just general… being from a rural district, and education is important in our area, and funding was important. So, I wanted to be involved in that.

DePue: We've already discussed your career in the 1980s, but I wanted to go back and see if you remember anything about the 1985 Educational Reform Act. The reason I mention that is Phil Pogue, who is a good friend of yours and was the superintendent of schools down in the Greenville area, was telling me all about this.

Watson: That's right, yes.

DePue: Do you remember that piece of legislation?

Watson: Is that when Edgar was governor?

DePue: No. This is 1985, and it included 160 pieces of legislation, little pieces that all went into this omnibus bill, I guess, on educational reform.

Watson: No, I don't. Anything that triggers it? Who was the governor then?

DePue: It was Thompson, State testing and learning goals and math science academy, alternative education for dropouts, pre-kindergarten, teacher and principal evaluation, Casmir Pulaski Day.

Watson: Now that you bring that up, I can certainly talk to you about a few of those. I wasn't necessarily for the math science academy. I just felt, let's take care of the mainstream education kids, and that was going to be an expense that could have gone into elementary and secondary education. So, I wasn't necessarily in favor of that. Maybe in time it's proven to be a good thing; I really don't know.

DePue: But as I understand, there's only one of these, and it's up in the Chicago suburbs.

Watson: It's in Aurora. I'm sure the kids that go there could get a great education, but at what cost, and could that be better spread over all of education?

Casmir Pulaski Day, I was a strong opponent to that. It's just like… I know we have the second largest Polish population in the Chicago area, outside of Warsaw, Poland. That's fine, and that's great, but we don't need to be establishing days for everybody that thinks they have…especially in this day, because this was going to be a holiday.

This wasn't a commemorative holiday; this was a holiday, where they got off of school. I just thought, Let's… March third, I think it was. In fact, I was just out in Delaware on a vacation. We were in Delaware. We drive up to the Brandywine Creek area in Pennsylvania, and here is a sign that says, "Casimir Pulaski." I should have stopped and just seen what it was all about. I guess he was a Revolutionary War hero, of course, from Poland. That's fine, but once again, those kids need to be in school. They didn't know who Casimir Pulaski was, or cared. I was against that, and we repealed that later.

DePue: But you weren't successful, were you?

Watson: Well, it became a commemorative holiday. Now, they go to school on it. But they have to teach something about Casimir Pulaski that day. That's fine, if it's being done; I don't know.

DePue: Let me take an opportunity to ask you about this particular school educational reform topic. That's the continued move away from small, rural schools to consolidated schools. Oftentimes, if you're in the midst of that yourself, it's your school. That's a very contentious issue, I understand. Your view on that. Is that a healthy trend, to make larger schools and to consolidate?

Watson: Well, larger isn't necessarily better, but there are some schools, probably in Illinois, that ought to be consolidated. I can remember a meeting that I attended in Madison County. It was the regional superintendents plus school boards.

Some guy got up—in fact the superintendent from Livingston—he got up and said, "What about us? We've got a school of eighty-some," or whatever it was, and "What are we supposed to do?" I just said, "Consolidate with Staunton." Well, you'd have thought I threw a grenade into the room, (both laugh) especially the school board.

After the meeting was over, they just came up on a dash to talk to me about my position about consolidation. Now, I'm not an advocate of county schools or whatever. I think there's a place for all different size of schools. But if they were having problems… [If] they weren't necessarily offering the classes that the kids should have to give them a quality education, to advance into higher education. Then maybe they should look to consolidate.

But it's the old thing. I was an Eagle; I played basketball there, and my son is going to play basketball there. That's the way a lot of these districts are. That's okay; I understand that completely, but it's the kids you've got to consider. Are they getting the best education they can to compete at the higher education level?

There are some districts that needed to consolidate, but in actuality, I always said the last bill I sponsored, in the last session I would be in, would be some sort of consolidation bill, because that's political death for anybody that suggests that you close a school. In many communities, that's the basis of the whole economic well-being of their community, is a school.

DePue: Or their identity?

Watson: Or their identity. You eliminate that, and that's a major crisis. Still, you've got to think about the kids and what's best for them. I think in some cases, consolidation would be a good thing.

DePue: A couple other issues came up in the 1980s, that I would think captured your attention. One was DUI [Driving While Intoxicated] legislation. Early in the '80s, I believe, Secretary of State Edgar, was pushing to close some of the loopholes and tighten things up. Then, towards the end of the decade, a movement began to change the [blood alcohol content] limit from 1.0 to .08 [percent], I think.

Watson: My position on that has always been… In fact, I voted to keep the drinking age nineteen, not a good vote in my area, necessarily, in my home county. We didn't allow alcohol in the area for a long time. But I felt that, at nineteen years old, usually you're a high school graduate, and you can be in the military; you were voting; you've got a lot of responsibilities, and alcohol consumption should be a responsible thing also. So I just voted to keep it nineteen. Well, of course, it went to twenty-one; that all changed, and probably, maybe it should have. But at the time, I just felt like that age group should be more responsible and be able to handle the alcohol situation, even on lowering of blood alcohol.

I didn't want social drinkers or people that just stopped by and had a couple of beers or whatever, after work, to become considered alcoholics, and that's what happens. When you get a DUI, there's all kinds of things that are triggered, that you've got to do. I'm not for advocating that we have people driving drunk on the highway, but I felt that .1 was adequate, and that was fine. It was working towards zero tolerance almost, which I don't think would be good at all.

DePue: Was that the kind of issue that you'd hear from certain elements of your constituency?

Watson: Oh, yeah, I heard a lot from them.

DePue: The bar owners?

Watson: Bar owners, true, they're under the gun on this thing somewhat, because they don't know oftentimes, where somebody has been before they come into their place, and if they consume too much and leave, that the bar owner is somewhat responsible. Anyway, I just thought that .1 was adequate. That was fine. But it had been working toward zero tolerance almost, which I don't think would be good at all.

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Watson: Bar owners, true. They were under the gun on this thing somewhat because they don't know, oftentimes, where somebody's been before they come into their place. If they've consumed too much and leave, somewhat responsible is the bar owner. Anyway, I just thought that .1 was adequate. So I was against lowering the blood alcohol level.

DePue: One other piece of legislation that occurred, I think, towards the end of the 1980s, right at the end, was mandatory auto insurance.

Watson: I was against that too. It seems like I'm against everything (both laugh). In fact, when I was in the Senate, there was three of us, and they called us the "red light district." (both laugh) It was Ray Hudson, myself, and Cal Schuneman, three senators that sat in a row, right on the aisle.

DePue: Cal?

Watson: Cal Schuneman, he's a friend of mine, and Ray Hudson, who passed away just lately; he's from DuPage County. But they called us the red light district

because we were always voting no on everything. I don't necessarily mean to think that I'm against everything.

But mandatory automobile insurance, I just didn't think it was going to work. I've yet to see a study that shows that it is working. You have insurance; I have insurance; we would have had it anyway. Has it raised rates? The fact that you've got now, we have all the people in the pool that may be… Well, they have special pools for different types of drivers. Accident-free drivers are over here, and then people that have more accidents or more violations, they're in another pool.

Anyway, I just thought that mandatory… I never felt comfortable with anything being dictated from Springfield or Washington, to the local people. I never felt good about that. I didn't care for seatbelts; I was always opposed to that, and I was at mandatory automobile insurance.

DePue: I think this one is out of cycle here. I'm not sure when this occurred, but could you tell me about the cycle of the legislative year and the change of when you went into the—What's the term that I'm looking for?—the extraordinary session, where you needed a different percentage of the vote to be able to pass anything. You changed the legislative year. When did that occur?

Watson: That occurred when we took control. I was a big advocate of that. In fact, I introduced a constitutional amendment.

DePue: So this would have occurred in 1995?

Watson: Ninety-five or maybe even '90. It could have been earlier. The Democrats, I think, were onboard on this. There was pretty much bipartisan support for it, because June 30 had always been our deadline date, and then the fiscal year started July 1. That was for everybody; I mean that was school districts.

A lot of people didn't know what to expect out of state government. Sometimes, when we went after July 1 and went into the next fiscal year, they didn't know what kind of revenue they were going to get for the next year. More importantly, June was always a good family month. That was a month that kids were out of school, usually a beautiful month; it's not quite hot like it would be in July and August. We were here in Springfield, so my thought was, let's just take the adjournment date from June 30, and take it back to April 30.

DePue: April 30?

Watson: That was my proposal, April 30, because I thought, You can't do it May 31 because Memorial Day's in there, and that would be all fouled up. Let's just go back. Let's get it done, in other words. Let's go into session the second week in January, on Wednesday, get sworn in, do all the things we have to do, and get busy and get it done. There's no reason we couldn't get it done quicker than what we do. Then we'd have all that family time in May and June and in

the summer months, instead of being here, because we were here a lot. We were here after July 1 many times.

So, I introduced a constitutional amendment. Well, that was not acceptable, April 30. So May 31 was decided to be the deadline. Okay, that's fine with me. Anything was better than June 30. So I agreed to that, and that's what we had, and that's how it changed.

DePue: I've been told that your wife even had a role in this change.

Watson: (laughs) She did actually. She organized the spouses of senators, and she wrote letters and yeah. We had two small kids at home, and it was tough on them. Sometimes they came up here with us. They'd be up here after school in the early years, but then it got to the point, as they got older, they weren't necessarily interested in coming to Springfield. So they were at home, and I was here. That was a problem; that was an issue for me, for them, for my wife. So yeah, she got involved and wrote letters to different legislators or spouses and really was pretty effective (both laugh).

DePue: Got the home front backing you, huh?

Watson: Yeah, and that was good, and I know it was effective. I think we're better off for the May 31 deadline.

DePue: Specifically, what happens after May 31?

Watson: They get three-fifths vote required to pass anything, with immediate effective date. So that's a budget.

DePue: Which, in most years in this state, means that the minority party gets to have a voice in what the legislation is going to end up being.

Watson: That's right. A three-fifths vote usually means the minority party is required to be a participant in whatever passes. That can be a plus and a minus, but most times it's a plus because you want to be involved. You don't want to just sit on the sidelines and let everybody do their thing, the majority party. You wanted to have a say in what's happening, and that oftentimes happened after the amendment. With it came a lot of headaches, because you now had to be part of the majority.

DePue: You mentioned that this was an amendment?

Watson: A constitutional amendment.

DePue: To the Illinois State Constitution?

Watson: That's right. And it was voted on by the people.

DePue: Let's get into the early part of the Edgar Administration. He was elected in 1990, in a squeaker election. We finished off last time with that. He's inaugurated January 14. At that time, I would think most of the country was riveted to what's going on in Iraq and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. January 17, in fact, is the beginning of Operation Desert Storm.[26] Do you remember that much, or was your perspective pretty well focused on state issues?

Watson: I wouldn't have been able to tell you what you just said, no. Actually, Desert Storm, it was just a little wind, really, unless you were there, of course. But to talk about it as a real war… We just walked right through that place, and maybe we should have kept going. That's one of the issues that I'm sure George W. Bush would say; we should have kept going and doing some more things than what we did, just freeing up Kuwait. But that's what was done, and we got it done with minimal casualties.

DePue: Were you surprised at all by the reaction of the public, once the units started to return back home?

Watson: In what way?

DePue: Well, you had the Vietnam War, and individual soldiers, sailors, Marines, came back and were not treated well by the public. And suddenly, after the Gulf Wars, there were parades in most communities, and…

Watson: Yeah, and I felt bad for the Vietnam War veterans. I can remember giving speeches about that, Veteran's Day speeches and Memorial Day speeches or Fourth of July, whatever it was. I can remember talking about the fact that we, somehow, for some reason, didn't recognize the Vietnam Veterans as well as we have others.

Then when I did that, the Korean veterans came forth and said, "Well, you know, we weren't really recognized either." I guess it's all based on what happens. Of course, it was such a controversial war, the Vietnam War, that people wanted to forget about it.

DePue: Before I get too far into the '90s, we did talk last time about redistricting, and you had a role in that. But when we got into the '80s… You always have to start with figuring out what election years you're going to run as an Illinois senator. What were the years you were going to have to run?

Watson: Well, I ran, of course, in a district I didn't live in. In 1980 the map was drawn in such a way that my home was in Vince Demuzio's district, in district, I think, forty-nine.

26 On January 16, 1991, President George H. W. Bush announced the start of what would be called Operation Desert Storm, a military operation to expel occupying Iraqi forces from Kuwait, which Iraq had invaded and annexed months earlier. (https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2016/01/operation-desert-storm-25-years-since-the-first-gulf-war/424191/)

DePue: But the 1990 districts, I would assume , worked more to your advantage, in part because you had a role to play in it.

Watson: Oh, yeah.

DePue: So what years in the '90s were you going to be up for reelection?

Watson: In the '90s? I drew a four-year term and a two-year term and then a four-year. I believe that's what it was.

DePue: So, '94, '96, 2000?

Watson: I ran in '92 against Craig Virgin, of course. Craig Virgin was this Olympian from the University of Illinois, held records in the 5000 meter, 10,000 meter, a local hero. Everybody thought I was finished. That was in '92. I think, I drew a four-year and then a two-year and then a four-year. The first, in 1980… Maybe you're talking about the 1980s, when I had to move?

DePue: I guess I'm a little bit confused about how your senatorial terms are determined in the first place. I thought, when you had explained it the last time, that after each redistricting, you had to figure out two-year, four-year, four-year, how that mix was going to work?

Watson: That's correct. There was a drawing or some kind of lottery to determine what cycle you were in. You either went four-four-two, four-two-four, or two-four-four, during that ten year period, between the census. That was always determined usually… Well, [it was] never really a matter of fact, but it was always done by the majority party.

DePue: So if you ran in 1992, that would suggest you had a two-four-four cycle.

Watson: Is that right? Did I run again in '94?

DePue: I don't know. I'm asking.

Watson: I'm not sure.

DePue: It sounds like you weren't much worried about reelection after that.

Watson: In '92, when I ran against Craig Virgin, I'm serious, people thought that I was going to get beat. There were polls that were taken that showed that I was in a real big trouble. But I worked hard, had a great organization, good people, really involved. We used the old, "They're after Frank again." We used that. It was, "Frank who?" for a long time, and then we used owls. It was "Frank Whoo?" Then it was always, "Poor old Frank; they're out to get him again in the remaps." But this was a map that we drew. Anyway, we used that a lot.

Craig Virgin was a good candidate. He was a former Republican. In fact, he even talked about running as a County Board member, as a Republican. I can recall being in his kitchen when we tried to recruit him to run for County Board. He told me at that time… Ron Stephens and I were sitting there—I was a state rep—we were sitting there, and Craig Virgin says, "No, I don't think so. I don't think I'm interested in the County Board. I think I'm going to run against you, Frank, for the State Senate." (laughs) In fact, we were maybe even talking about him possibly running for congress against Jerry Costello. Anyway, I said, "This meeting is over."

We walked out, and that was that. He, of course, filed and did run. That was a pretty expensive election, but we beat him by over 10,000 votes and put a lot of the political experts…kind of threw water on their interest in getting me out of the General Assembly.

DePue: It sounds like, after that election, you had smoother sailing.

Watson: I did. The next election was a lady by the name of Wilma Pidgeon. I believe that was it. Well, I'm not positive; I'm not sure about that. She might have been in the '80s. Anyway, yes, things did go smoother after that for me, not knowing what years I ran.

DePue: That's indicative of something.

Watson: Yeah. I may not have even had an opponent (laughs).

DePue: We're now at the point where we need to talk about 1991 and, by extension, 1992. Let me set it up this way. The country is in a recession, and in the early part of Edgar's years, it only gets worse for the first year and a half or so. It makes balancing a budget much more difficult. To make matters worse for the Edgar Administration, he comes in with a $1 billion deficit that he inherited from the Thompson Administration. So his first take on the budget is, "I've got to fill a billion dollar hole." It made for, what I understand, was a pretty long and contentious budget battle that first year.

Watson: Yes, very contentious, yes

DePue: Early on, he was making recommendations for budget cuts. He got the nickname, "Governor No," and "Edgar Scissorhands," if you remember that one.[27]

Watson: Yes, I do remember that…after the movie.

27 Edgar Scissorhands was a nickname some gave to Illinois Governor James Edgar based on *Edward Scissorhands,* a 1990 American fantasy romance film about an artificial humanoid named *Edward,* an unfinished creation who has scissor blades instead of hands. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Scissorhands)

DePue: Part of what he had run on in the election was that he was going to… The income tax surcharge was scheduled to go out, and he was talking about extending that, which meant that, personal income taxes—It had been at 2.5 percent, until ’89, when it was raised to 3 percent—would be kept at 3 percent. For corporate taxes, which were 4 percent in ’89 and raised to 4.8 percent, he was advocating locking in both of those. Once you got into this budget crisis, what was your position on extending those rates?

Watson: Oh, I supported the governor. I thought it was the right thing to do.

DePue: Had you run on that position?

Watson: Not necessarily. No, I don’t recall that ever being an issue, other than in ’91, of course, when the whole thing blew up. He ran in ’90. I didn’t run in ’90. But I thought it was a prudent thing to do. The budget needed some support.

Now, he deserved the Governor No thing, because he was the most fiscal responsible governor that I served under. He had to cut, and he did. He wasn’t the most popular governor at the time. But I think, as time goes on, history has proven that he probably was as effective or doing the right thing, let’s say, as much as anyone else.

DePue: So, as a proud member of the Red Light District (Watson laughs), you were proud of him being Governor No, huh?

Watson: Right, right. Well, he had to make some cuts, and very unpopular as they were, they had to be done. That’s so much different from what today is, where nobody seems to take any responsibility. He did, and I think our state is better off for him being governor. It’s too bad he had his heart condition, as he did, because he would have been maybe a good U.S. Senator or [for] who knows how long, serving as governor. I appreciated him as governor, not necessarily in 1991, when we were still there. When was that, July 19? That’s what the shirt said, “I survived Budget Storm, July 1 to July…” I think it said 19; I need my glasses.

DePue: Well, it says 19 here. I thought that the budget was finally passed on July 19.

Watson: Well, it could have been at midnight.

DePue: It probably was.

Watson: It probably was. They wear you down. That’s the whole idea of keeping you in session, is wear you down until you finally get into something. The idea was, of course back then, that the budget had to be cut. Unpopular a decision as it was, it had to be done, and I was willing to be a part of that.

DePue: You mentioned earlier that the fiscal year for the state starts July 1. So, going into July 18, July 19, there were payrolls.

Watson: Payrolls, sure. There was payrolls, Medicaid, and there was a lot of people out there that didn't know if they were going to get paid or not. Now, I think we actually did make an extension. We passed something that enabled us to make that payroll, I believe. But, yeah, that's part of the whole problem with the constitutional deadline of June 30, because July 1 starts the next year.

If you do these kind of things, where it goes over into late July, then it creates a big issue for state government and all levels. Think of how costly that would have to be, having to go through all that we went through; all the state agencies are trying to adjust to no budget.

Senator Watson, while in retirement in August 2012, wears a t-shirt originally worn after an overtime session in the summer of 1991 due to Governor Edgar's efforts to balance the state's budget. Edgar and the Republicans counted the results as a victory.

DePue: We're looking at a picture of you in this t-shirt, "I Survived Budget Storm, July 1 - July 19, 1991." Was that something that was on the Republican side or the Democrat side?

Watson: No, I think it came from Joel Brunsvold, I think, I believe. He did one of those shirts. Joel Brunsvold was a Democrat House member, and he was a highly respected and highly regarded alderman that became director of conservation. That's not conservation anymore, director of natural resources.

DePue: Department of Natural Resources.

Watson: Department of Natural Resources, and the building at the fairgrounds is named after him. But I think he was the one that put those together, but it was a very popular item, obviously.

DePue: On both sides?

Watson: Oh, yeah, just the fact that you were there.

DePue: What was your attitude at that time? Were you proud that the governor and the Republicans held out long enough to basically win the budget fight?

Watson: Oh, yeah, I think so, yes, because something had to be done. You can only look to Washington, to Springfield today, and see that nothing is getting done. We're out of control on our debt, both at the state level and at the Washington level, and nothing's being done. At least Jim Edgar, Governor Edgar, had the wherewithal to stand up for some principles and do what had to be done. And I was, like I said, pleased to support him.

DePue: We started this session today, talking about your speech you had to give at the Sangamo Club.

Watson: You're getting me all wound up (laughs).

DePue: The issue there is going to be pensions. Do you recall how pensions figured into the budget that year?

Watson: I recall that we passed a bill under Jim Edgar that sent the pension system… The under-funded liability of the pension systems, we start a progression through the years, to pay that off. We were doing very well with that, thank you, until Rod Blagojevich.

DePue: I don't think that was this year. That was later, right?

Watson: No, that was not '91. I don't remember if any pension contributions were forgotten or forgiven during that time period; I don't know. It was not really a hot issue at that time. It only became a hot issue under Blagojevich, because he was just skipping payments every year, advocating it, blatantly. Two thousand three was when that all started. I can remember 2004—We were a part of that process then—and him wanting to do that.

DePue: Another initiative in that time frame—this would be one that I think your leadership especially, Pate Philip, would be pushing for strongly—is a property tax cap for the collar counties, DuPage, Kane, Lake, Will, McHenry Counties—Those are, in Illinois, what we call the collar counties of Cook, obviously—that it couldn't raise any more than a max rate of 5 percent or the rate of inflation. What were your feelings about that?

Watson: I supported that. Wasn't that where you had to put an ad in the paper if you were going to go over?

DePue: I'm not sure. I wasn't aware of that.

Watson: You had to have some sort of special meeting to advocate, for people to come in and discuss, debate whether the taxes should be raised over a certain amount. But yes, tax caps were a big item for Pate Philip.

DePue: But that has no impact on you, down in Bond County.

Watson: Not necessarily, with the… What do they call it, Tax Freedom or Taxation Amendment? Maybe we're talking about two different things.

DePue: I know later on they extended it to the entire state, but I don't think that occurred in this time frame.

Watson: Okay. Well, I did support a suburban tax cap. As I look back on that, of course, I'm not sure that was the thing, because what happened is that money became more available to those school districts who have a very local strong tax base. That's the reason they're having such a problem with taxes up there.

At that time, most of the school funding came from property taxes: industrial, commercial, residential, and very little from the state. Some would

say that wasn't necessarily fair, but they did have a high tax assessed valuation in their local school districts, and that enabled them to raise most of their money locally. But the taxes were out of hand and raising rapidly, and this was a way to try to put a limit on it.

DePue: January of 1992, the economy isn't doing much better at all. In fact, it's probably gotten worse. Revenues haven't been coming in at nearly the [necessary] level, and Edgar is looking at needing to slash another $300 million from the fiscal year '92 budget. He's just on the threshold of beginning the '93 discussions. But you've got to start the year 1992, looking at how to make more cuts in that particular year's budget. Do you recall that fight?

Watson: I do. I remember that there was two years of… We were in session a long time both years, all about the budget. I can remember talking to Speaker Mike Madigan on one occasion, particularly, where I was an advocate for reducing some taxes. He told me, he said, "Frank, Democrats are not about reducing taxes. We're about spending." That was pretty telling, and that's really what the difference is between the two parties. Anyway, that was my experience, and that was one of the first times I ever talked with Mike Madigan (laughs), was that particular point.

Then, of course, Mike Madigan, being Speaker of the House, would have made it tough to get anything. In fact, both chambers were in Democratic control in '92. We didn't take control of the Senate until '93. So it was tough for him [Gov. Edgar] to have to deal with Phil Rock, who was the president of the Senate, and Mike Madigan, Speaker of the House. When the Speaker of the House says, "We're not about tax reduction. We're about spending," that was an issue Edgar had to deal with.

DePue: Does this discussion in January of '92 lead right into the same nature of discussion you got about the fiscal year '93 budget?

Watson: As it was in '91?

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: Yeah. I can't remember how many days we went over, but we did go over a few days.

DePue: You went into early July, and I know the state did not miss a payroll that time around. When I talked to Governor Edgar about this same thing, he felt like he was a winner coming out of the '91 budget fight.[28] He felt like he probably didn't win the '92 budget fight for the fiscal year '93 budget.

28 Governor Edgar's Oral History is available on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library website at https://www2.illinois.gov/ALPLM/LIBRARY/COLLECTIONS/ORALHISTORY/ILLINOISSTATECRAFT/EDGAR/Pages/default.aspx

Watson: I wouldn't necessarily agree with him on that. Like I said, he had to deal with the majority of Democrats in both the House and the Senate. They were in the majority. So, for him not to get everything he wanted, maybe that's what he's looking at. But I think, when the history books close on the Edgar Administration—and they are getting close to the final chapter I would assume—that he will be thought of as a good, fiscal responsible governor. I wouldn't say he lost that battle at all.

DePue: One of the things I do know is that, once the budget reached his desk, he trimmed another $30 million from the legislators' fiscal year '93 budget, a line item veto. That kind of leads to another question. In the State of Illinois, the governor—maybe that's a discussion, we ought to wait for Blagojevich, the amendatory veto discussion. Maybe we ought to wait for Blagojevich to get into that (Watson laughs).

Watson: That was a big issue with him (both laugh).

DePue: I'll turn it a different direction here. Do you remember April 7, 1992, and suddenly downtown Chicago is flooded?[29] They punched a hole in the basement someplace, and the Chicago River was flooding downtown.

Watson: The Chicago River went downtown. I do recall that, and of course, that was a real problem for them. That disrupted commerce up there considerably, and of course, the Chicago River, I think they actually had to close the Chicago River to traffic, I think, is what they did. So that had a major impact on the City of Chicago.

DePue: Let's get into the 1992 election cycle. You talked about your own election that year. Any reflections on what was going on at the national level, where you have the Democrats with Bill Clinton. George [H. W.]Bush is running for reelection, but you've got Ross Perot running as well, on that ticket.

Watson: I thought George Bush was a cinch, to be honest with you. Of course, Ross Perot had a major impact. He took off enough votes; I'm sure that. Ross Perot's message was good. He was a fiscally responsible candidate, so he took votes, I'm sure, away from George Bush.

We all remember the, "Read my lips," and how that became the issue.[30] And Bill Clinton wins. Things didn't go well for Republicans that particular year. The next election cycle was different.

29 The Chicago flood occurred on April 13, 1992, when repair work on a bridge spanning the Chicago River damaged the wall of an abandoned and disused utility tunnel beneath the river. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_flood)

30 In his 1988 acceptance address at the 1988 Republican National Convention, George H.W. Bush pledged, "Read my lips: no new taxes." Bush, however, did raise taxes, and his words were used against him in an attack ad during the 1992 presidential campaign. (http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1859513_1859526_1859516,00.html)

DePue: Yeah, in ’94. We’ll get to that one as well, because it’s important for the State of Illinois, especially.

I might have this one out of sequence as well, but I wanted to ask you, since we’re talking about elections, “Punch 10,” what that was and when that practice ended. Do you recall?

Watson: It ended when we took control of both the House and the Senate, and Edgar was still governor. Punch 10 was Cook County’s effort to encourage straight party voting in Cook County. Punch 10 was the Democrat… You went into a ballot; you look for a number ten; you punched that. That was a straight party ticket. It was very effective. I’ve never felt that straight party balloting is a good thing; I never have. I felt it was abused at that time. Anyway, when we took control, we eliminated straight party balloting in Illinois.

DePue: That gets us into 1993. Budget battles aren’t quite as gruesome that year because the economy is improving a little bit by that time. But this is an important year, in your case and for the Illinois Senate, because the Republicans now take the majority in the Senate.

Watson: We elect, I think, thirty-three Republicans in the ’92 election cycle. It was a map that we, of course, were participants in drawing. The only time during my thirty-some years [that] the Republicans actually drew the map was that year. And I was a part of that. So it was good that we took advantage of what we had. Our process in drawing that map… Maybe we talked about this last time; we were kind of majority driven, versus the candidate.

DePue: Right.

Watson: We talked about that. We had a good majority, and we elected Pate Philip as president of the senate. I remember going in to talk with Pate Philip and Stan Weaver. Stan Weaver was his right-hand man; he was majority leader, from Champaign, a well-respected member. Pate called us all in, just to tell us what he’d like for us to do for the coming session. Of course, I’d been involved in the map, and I was hoping to go into leadership. A friend of mine, Walter Dudycz from Chicago, he and I were both map participants, and we both thought we deserved our shot at a leader.

Anyway, I go into him, and Pate says, “We’d like for you to be in leadership, Frank, and be an assistant majority leader.” Of course, I was very happy with that, and I was glad to do it. Then he said, “We have another request for you. We’d like for you to be chairman of the Education Committee.”

That was kind of unheard of, that people who were in leadership at that time were chairmen of committees. Usually that was just the members who were outside of leadership. They were chairmen or minority spokesmen on a committee; leaders were not involved. I thought, This is a digression from

what we normally had done. He said, "We want you to be chairman of the Education Committee; we want John Maitland to be chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and we want Aldo DeAngelis to be revenue chairman." All three of us were in leadership.

So that's what happened, and it was kind of a new direction. We had a lot of new members at that time, so the idea being that we'll put some more experienced members in as committee chair and then let the other members kind of get experience before they started out.

There had been so much expansion now in committees, because of the stipend you get as a committee chairman. You get an $8,000 a year stipend to be chairman of a committee. Now they've got committees for anything and everything, so everybody's a chairman or a spokesman, so everybody gets a stipend. But anyway, back then it wasn't that way.

DePue: That's just the kind of thing that the general public gets a little bit perturbed about.

Watson: Oh, yeah, and they should be.

DePue: Were you given the chairmanship and getting a little extra money as a bone for being a good member, or were there some things that he expected to happen in the Education Committee?

Watson: What happened in the '92 election was—and people in my district never understood this—the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, of course, are the unions. Teachers in my district, who are members of those associations, knew that I was, what they felt, a friend of teachers, a friend of education.

Now, I didn't necessarily support all the collective bargaining issues that came before the General Assembly when I was a member. I've always felt that collective bargaining should be done locally. Sometimes you bring an issue to the state, and it's not the same for every district as it would be for the one you're trying to impact. Let those issues be bargained locally, not necessarily do all this at the state level.

I wasn't supportive of all their mandates they wanted to do on the local school districts, so the unions were always against me. They were never for me, until finally they knew they couldn't beat me. In '92, they got very active in Craig Virgin's campaign against me and spent a lot of money. They brought down personnel into the district.

Pate knew that if I was going to be chairman of the Education Committee, I was not necessarily going to be friendly to the IEA, the unions of the state. Teachers, one thing; unions, not necessarily. That's why he put me in there (laughs), truth be known.

DePue: Is there a difference, philosophically, between the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers?

Watson: Very much so, I always felt so. I felt like the IFT was more of a union's union. Then the IEA changed a lot, I think, since the early '90s. They got more into the fiscal issues of schools, versus all this bargaining stuff that I was talking about, all these issues of dealing with personnel and all that, class size and minimum salaries and that kind of thing that I've always felt should be bargained locally. They kind of got away from that. I felt that the IEA was more of a professional organization, where the IFT was more of a union.

DePue: What does that mean, more of a union?

Watson: More stringent. They were tougher to deal with.

DePue: More interested in protecting teachers, even if there were questions about their competence?

Watson: I think both associations were guilty of that. I always felt that there are bad teachers, and there are bad politicians. Let's get rid of them; let's get them out. But associations like the IEA and IFT take exception to that. They've got to protect them all. I always felt that that was a mistake on both their parts.

Maybe it was because the IEA had more representation in my area, that I had more interaction with them locally, because I did have a lot of support from teachers, the individual teachers, who knew what I was about and were willing to help me. I had a couple of individuals who really helped me a great deal with the IEA, that were from my district, from my hometown, who kind of set up meetings for them to understand where Frank's coming from.

Instead of this old, anti-education guy, he's not necessarily that way. He's somebody who you can work with. That's what I became, and they, ultimately, like I said, supported me in the end.

DePue: When you're selected to be part of the leadership team in the Senate, whom did you say the majority leader was?

Watson: Stan Weaver from Champaign.

DePue: What was your role going to be in the leadership?

Watson: Assistant majority leader. That was the title. I guess there was probably, I'd say, five assistant majority leaders, the caucus chairman and then the majority leader.

DePue: Is there any difference in the duties that all these assistant majority leaders have?

Watson: Not necessarily. We were assigned members to communicate with, with what leadership thought we should be doing, on the direction, and get input from the members. I was a big advocate of that, whenever I was leader, was just… Communication was key.

That was one of Pate Philip's strengths, that he had a lot of caucuses. He was always very open with us and candid with us, to a fault sometimes. He was almost… That was refreshing to us, to have him as leader, because you always knew where he stood. I think the assistant leaders were more or less there to communicate the leader's position to the members and get the members input back.

DePue: How important was party discipline to Senator Philip?

Watson: It was pretty important.

DePue: Were you expected to toe the line, once he determined what his position was?

Watson: Well, we all talked about it, in either leadership or in a caucus. We'd talk about what our position should be, and usually we came out united, not always, but usually.

DePue: Was he any good at listening or basically dictating?

Watson: Well, his philosophy, everybody knew what that was, so there wasn't much… People didn't have to worry where he stood; you knew where he stood. So, you go into a caucus, and I think that oftentimes people would respect that. Also, they knew he could be intimidating too. He was very vocal in his wishes, and there's nothing wrong with that. That's a good, strong leader. That's what you want from a leader. That's why you elect them to be leaders in the first place, and he was.

DePue: Did you have a sense that if you differed from his position that he'd hear you out?

Watson: No. No, he wouldn't; he wouldn't… I've only had a couple occasions where he asked me to come in, and we talked about our differences. He probably was right on one occasion, maybe not necessarily right on the other. I can appreciate that.

We come from different parts of the state too. He's a suburban, DuPage County Republican, where I'm a downstate, way downstate, Republican from Bond County. So we had different views on some things, on education funding, being one. That was one we had fought battles, about who should fund education.

DePue: His perception of his own leadership style… A rough quote of what he said was that the Senate Republicans probably had the most democratic, small D, democratic caucus.

Watson: I was going to say, where are we going with this? Democratic, yes, because he had a lot of caucuses. He kept us informed. The people had input. You could always speak your mind, if you wanted to speak your mind on something, and many people did, in caucuses. I'll have to say, though, in the end, I think most people agreed [on] what needed to be done, because he was always an advocate of "do the right thing."

DePue: Is that because, among the caucus members, you would talk things out until you did achieve that consensus?

Watson: In many cases, some cases, yes. I would agree with him that we were the most democratic caucus of the four, because we did have a lot of input. He would go to meetings and say… He'd go to the governor's meeting with the other leaders, the "Four Tops" and the governor being the fifth, and he'd say, "I've got to take this to my caucus." That's, again, a sign of a strong leader.

DePue: You mentioned the Four Tops. Oftentimes observers of Illinois politics are critical because it seems like so much of the legislative power rests on those four caucus leaders: the two leaders in the House, the two leaders in the Senate, and then you've got the governor. It's often the Four Tops who go talk to the governor, when it really gets down to the crunch time on the budget, for example. They sort things out. What's your opinion of the amount of centralized control that the leaders had?

Watson: I had no problem with that. Being a leader myself, I can recognize that you've got to have some sort of control. It would be chaotic to try to be dealing with... We did this on some occasions, trying to deal with multiple caucuses and trying to get decisions made. You're better off making decisions by the leaders, and then they take it back to their caucus. Sometimes the caucus wouldn't agree. There were times that they had to go back. That, to me, is a form of the government structure that I think has been effective.

I can understand why people would say, "Yeah…" I think a lot of that comes from the political side of it, because they control a lot of the money that's raised and goes to candidates. That to me, is more what the criticism about how leaders have been, more on the political side than on the governmental side. You have to have some structure.

DePue: Did you have a good relationship with Pate's staff?

Watson: Oh, yeah. The senate staff in the capitol, it was recognized—and still is—as the best staff in the building. The Democrats and other members would refer to our staff many times, because we were experienced; we had good people that

were there for a long period of time, and they were very knowledgeable and very professional. That's still the case. Our staff is second to none.

DePue: Any names that stand out to you on that staff?

Watson: Well, Carter Hendren, at that time he was chief of staff. Keith Snyder, he was our education staff member. He's now mayor of Lincoln; he was very effective. Tom Taylor was assistant to Carter Hendren. Pate put a lot of responsibility with the staff—I'll have to say that—maybe more than I would have. We had competent people, so why not?

DePue: Did being in a position of leadership give you more insight into how the legislature worked, how legislation got crafted?

Watson: Oh, very much so, yeah. I became more involved. When you're in the majority, you sponsor legislation. When you're in the minority, you cosponsor, very seldom do you sponsor anything significant. In fact, when I became leader, that was one thing I wanted to do, because I was always a constituent-oriented legislator; take care of people. That was part of my success in my campaigning and election. But as I became leader, I wanted to be more of the legislative, emphasize on that part of the role of state government. And I did.

DePue: Much of what I wanted to talk about next, you've already expressed your views on. I'm going to give you a chance to, at this point in your career, basically talk about where you're at on a political spectrum, your political philosophy, if you will, just kind of go through some of the major areas of concern. This one you've talked about quite a bit, budgetary issues and financial issues. How would you describe yourself at that time?

Watson: Fiscally responsible. That's what I've... not as a pat on my back, but you can't spend money you don't have. There were many occasions where you'd vote against something that was probably a popular thing, but you voted against it because you knew the money wasn't going to be there to fund the program, the project, whatever it might be. I think that was one of Pate Philip's strengths; he was very fiscally responsible.

DePue: If you looked through the budget, what are the things about which you'd say, "This is something that government has to do. We can't afford to be fudging on it?"

Watson: I always felt education and transportation were priorities. Transportation being roads, bridges and highways throughout Illinois, and of course, education being… Higher education always used to get $1.00 for every $2.00 that went into elementary and secondary education. That was because, primarily, we had Stan Weaver, who represented the University of Illinois, and John Maitland was from Bloomington, and he was an Illinois State [University representative]. They were strong advocates of higher education. We've gotten away from that, way, way away from that. Now kids wonder why tuition is so

high. It's that the State is not putting in their fair share. They're not contributing as they had. And I think that's been a big problem for higher education.

DePue: Certainly education is one of the major portions of the budget, but at that time, also there was a growing need in Medicaid expenses, welfare, social services, child and family services, those things.

Watson: I understand the need for that. It's a safety net; it's a helping hand; it's a hand up, that kind of thing. But [it's] gotten to be a handout. It's gotten to be an entitlement. We tried to end this in '95, I guess it was, when we passed the Welfare Reform Bill.

DePue: It was '95.

Watson: The generation after generation after generation just stuck in the quagmire of poverty. Education, of course, is the answer to all that, but still, you somehow have to kick a few people and get them to understand, "You've got to take care of yourself. You've got to be personally responsible. You can't depend on someone else all the time." I'm worried that that's a direction this whole country is taking, is one of more dependence.

So, taking things away from people that maybe they were accustomed to, but getting them to understand that they do need to provide for themselves, is something I'm a strong believer in. I did that as a township supervisor, back when I first got into politics. We had a general assistance program, and I was pretty tight with that because I wanted people to understand, "You just don't get free money all the time, whenever you need it. You've got to get out and provide for yourself." Maybe that becomes hardened, but that's kind of the philosophy I've always had and still do.

Part of Medicaid, a **big** part of Medicaid, isn't necessarily what goes to those people in need. It goes to the providers: hospitals, nursing homes, doctors, pharmacies, all those providers out there who provide the service for the less fortunate. Those people, if they aren't getting at the level they need, who pays the difference? To me, it was a hidden tax. They would shift the burden onto the insurance companies, onto the individuals who were paying. Of course, now it's all insurance. But providers are a big part of the Medicaid issue.

DePue: The other half of this discussion about budget issues is taxes. You've expressed your views on that, but can you expand on it a little bit? Are there any kind of taxes that are preferred, if you do have to find new revenue sources?

Watson: The use tax, what I call use tax. The gas tax is a good example. We have, I think it's nineteen cents, I think, per gallon—used to be—on a gallon of gasoline. Gas tax is a user tax. People that use the highways, therefore, pay for

it. I was always an advocate, whenever there was a road program, that some of that revenue come from the sale of gasoline. I would say that would be a use tax, even to the point where people going into campgrounds, that there ought to be some sort of self-perpetuating costs that come through that to make it work, that make it not necessarily profitable, but just be able to pay for itself.

Any kind of use tax, I always looked at more favorably than I would of a general tax increase, whether it's sales or income. Those type of taxes, I was not necessarily for.

DePue: Income tax increases. Were you opposed to those?

Watson: Yes. Income tax, sales tax, generally I was opposed to those. I did vote to keep that one tax permanent.

DePue: Which one would trouble you more, increases in personal income tax or corporate income tax?

Watson: Well, they're tied together.

DePue: By the Illinois Constitution.

Watson: By the Illinois Constitution. There's always a misunderstanding, I think. Not a misunderstanding, maybe a difference of philosophy. I've always felt like you want to bring the business to your community to provide work for the people you represent, okay? How do you do that? Well, you give incentives to them, because that's what everybody else is doing. It's just not that we're the greatest place to live. There are issues why people decide to locate where they do. Part of that is your tax structure.

If you've got a bad tax structure, businesses may go to Indiana—which has been happening regularly over the last ten years—or Wisconsin, Michigan. Well, not necessarily Michigan, but Missouri. In fact, a bill that I sponsored was called the EDGE program, [Economic Development for a Growing Economy]. We got a lot of national recognition over that because it was a tax incentive for businesses to locate and give them tax credits, income tax credits, on people they hire. There were some other provisions in it, but basically that was it. It was an incentive to bring business to Illinois.

We've gotten way away from that, way away from that. The last tax increase just really... What was it? Jimmy John's, the pizza guy, that left Illinois right after that passed, because he said, "Why should I be domiciled in Illinois when I can go somewhere else and not pay as many taxes?"

The same thing happened with the truckers tax that Blagojevich put on. He put a huge tax on trucks, and they left Illinois. They don't have to be domiciled in Illinois. They could be domiciled in Indiana, where a lot of them

moved, or Missouri, or some other state around Illinois and still operate in Illinois. Those kinds of things...

I felt that we should be providing incentives for businesses to locate, so they can employ the people that live in Illinois.

DePue: Here's another category of taxes, what they would call sin tax.

Watson: Sin taxes: beer tax, liquor tax.

DePue: Cigarettes.

Watson: Cigarettes, all that. I generally didn't support that. We have a cottage industry in Illinois of people running up and down the highway, from Missouri primarily, Kentucky [as well], but Missouri is the least taxed state in the country on cigarettes. I know that there's vans coming out of there and bringing cigarettes into Illinois.

I know people say. "Smoking is bad," and it is. I'm always surprised when somebody lights up a cigarette today because generally people don't smoke. But constantly taxing them? There is a point of diminishing returns.

They continually talk about how raising the tax on cigarettes is going to raise a $150-100 million, whatever. Well, at some point, it isn't. There are going to be [fewer] people that are not smoking as much, and of course, then there's going to be those who purchase cigarettes outside the state (laughs). So there is going to come a point, at some time, where people are going to say, "Enough's enough," and we may have reached that. So, I didn't necessarily support that or beer or alcohol. I didn't support those kind of taxes.

DePue: Here's another big category, and this was something that was evolving quite quickly during the late '80s and especially the '90s, I think, and continues to be an issue today. That's gambling, the expansion of gambling as a revenue source.

Watson: On the first major expansion of gambling in Illinois, I didn't support it.

DePue: Even though the language was probably, at that time, "The money's going to go to education."

Watson: Oh, yeah. Well, that lottery money was going to go to education. Use the kids; that's the way you sell something in Illinois, use the kids, education being the example. You just said it. [The] money's going to go to education, so it's okay.

I changed my mind a little bit about it, especially when horse racing became part of the equation. I was a big advocate for horse racing because in Southern Illinois, we had a lot of people raising horses and breeding them and training them. We had Fairmont Racetrack, still do, hopefully. So, horse racing

was a big part of the economy of Southern Illinois or all of Illinois. We had world class tracks at Arlington. We had Quad City Downs, which was later closed. Anyway, to me, horse racing was a big part of Illinois and county fairs and that kind of thing. So I supported some gambling, once the horse racing provision was part of it.

DePue: The next one we've already talked quite a bit about, and that's educational issues. When we get to '95, that will very much be a thing. I think we've talked about the welfare reform issues as well. How about issues on crime? For example, construction of new state prisons, since early in the Thompson Administration you've had Class X felonies that would increase, inevitably, the inmate population in the state.

Watson: Well, that was economic development for Southern Illinois. We built a lot of prisons in the southern part of the state. Those were good jobs to have, and they were jobs that you could depend on. I was an advocate mostly, of prison construction, supported it. It's become a huge part of our budget, maintaining those prisons. Now they're talking about closing prisons.

We had a big battle with Blagojevich over closing the Vandalia Correctional Center, but that was for different reasons. That was all because he thought it was an antiquated, run down, old prison, when the work camp was built in—I don't know—'95. The other part of the prison was an older one, but it was still very functional and a work camp. And it was a minimum security prison.

So, it was his issue, Vandalia Correctional Center, Blagojevich's issue with them. He either dealt with me, being leader at the time, or... It didn't necessarily deal with... He was misinformed about the savings he was going to receive and about the construction, the ability, of that correctional center to prevail. And it's still there, still operating. But they're closing prisons now, talking about it. Maybe those are things you have to do in times of fiscal restraint that we're in now.

DePue: Does it make sense—talking about the crime issue—the opening of Tamms was about this time, I believe, Tamms being the maximum security prison, the prison of last resort, where you sent the ones who were acting up in other prisons and basically put them in isolation conditions.

Watson: I was an advocate of that. There were times...You think now, how many prison uprisings do we have? If there is one, who's the one who's responsible? They're gone. They're taken to Tamms. So, if there's a problem inmate, there's a place for him. For the most heinous crimes, send them to Tamms. I'm a capital punishment guy. I just feel like, if people are going to commit crimes against society, deserving of special treatment in a correction center, I'm for it.

DePue: Here's one of the social issues that's always discussed, more so on the national level, but at the state level as well; that's gun control.

Watson: On the Second Amendment, I believe in the ability of individuals to bear arms. Of course, that's contrary to the city position, Chicago being the city. If people want a gun, they're going to be able to get it. That's proven. Chicago has got strict gun control laws; they have crime up there.

I was an advocate also for penalties, prison time for crimes committed with a weapon. That's the way you go after that kind of a problem, not to take weapons away from, necessarily, law abiding citizens who use them for hunting and sport shooting. That's not the answer. That's the casualties of those people who are advocate of gun control, is the honest citizen. The one who wants it illegally is going to get it.

DePue: Since you mentioned social issues, always a hot button topic, abortion, even though there's not a lot that can work at the state level on that.

Watson: I've always wondered, Why abortion? It's because of the people who are advocates on both sides. There aren't many issues that are in the General Assembly, parental notification and things of that nature. I was a pro-life candidate. I always felt that the life of the mother and rape and incest should be exempt, but, basically, I was pro-life.

DePue: How about issues on race and affirmative action?[31]

Watson: I was against affirmative action. I can understand when people feel that they are being denied a job because of their color. Now, that's not right! That's obviously not right. But to advocate that they are going to get the job because of their color is just the same thing in reverse. Who's penalized then?

I've always felt, and it's my position and has been my philosophy, that you base someone's eligibility for a position and a job are based on their education, their desire. Affirmative action got into education, got into the job community. I never was a strong advocate of it.

DePue: One last topic, that's environmental concerns.

Watson: Once again, if you get to the point where you hinder your economic development because of your environmental positions on issues, statewide or whatever it might be, if you create an environment in Illinois, being a pro-business environment or an anti-business environment, if issues in a general assembly are about environmental issues, [they] create the whole negative side

[31] Affirmative action refers to a set of policies and practices within a government or organization seeking to increase the representation of particular groups based on their gender, race, sexuality, creed or nationality in areas in which they are underrepresented such as education and employment. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affirmative_action)

of the business climate in Illinois. So, you've got to be careful. You've got to balance that between your job creation and job... The coal industry is a perfect example.

DePue: Was coal an industry in your area?

Watson: Oh, very much so. Oh, yeah. It still is, but not to the magnitude it once was, and that's because of environmental concerns.

DePue: High sulfur coal in the region?

Watson: High sulfur coal, mostly, in Illinois, yeah. They've come up with some technology to try to reduce the sulfur emission, which is good. Hopefully usage of Illinois coal will continue and maybe grow. But I wasn't supportive of a lot of legislation dealing with that.

DePue: The other area I would think would be an impact in your region would be oil, drilling for oil. It might surprise some people that, as you drive around in that area of the state, there are a lot of oil pumps.

Watson: We're still pumping, yeah, mostly kind of southeast of me. Back in the heyday, Marion County and Fayette County were big oil production areas. St. Elmo has a...Marathon was there, and Salem—I can't remember who was there, but anyway—they were large fields, and they're still there.

Environmental issues came into their situation, and in many cases, we shut down oil production in Illinois because of environmental legislation. That, once again, is not necessarily good for the economic climate, just as coal wasn't. Environmental issues, in general, are not necessarily issues that prevail when you're talking about the economic well-being of our state.

DePue: We probably need to finish up pretty quickly here, but I wanted to just run through the committee assignments that you had. We've already talked quite a bit about being on the Education Committee, and that's going to factor in when we get to the '95 discussions, a lot. But another one that I saw listed was the Executive Committee. What is the Executive Committee?

Watson: The Executive Committee is made up, primarily, of leaders, the leaders on both sides. Constitutional amendments come there. Sometimes controversial legislation comes there because leaders are usually pretty stringent about voting with their party, so you can count on them to vote for it or against it, whatever. The Executive Committee is probably the most important committee in the process, both in the Senate and the House, because it's generally where legislation goes to that's really going to have an impact.

DePue: Determining what the priorities would be in the legislative session, for example?

Watson: That's the rules. Are you talking about the Rules Committee?

DePue: No, I'm asking if that was the purview of the Executive Committee?

Watson: Not necessarily. I would say most bills are assigned to their respective committee, like the transportation bills go to Transportation [Committee]. The Ag Committee, they get agriculture bills. Environmental bills go to the Environment Committee. But more of the constitutional amendments, resolutions, things of that nature went to the Executive Committee.

DePue: You were also a member at that time of the Transportation Committee. What were the big issues that that committee dealt with in the '90s?

Watson: Roads and bridges, mostly. We were building a lot then. Build Illinois was still part of the process, back when Thompson was governor. We had a lot of issues dealing with safety on the road. We talked about the alcohol issue, the speed limit issues. Those kinds of things always came before the Transportation Committee.

DePue: Was that particularly a Chicago and suburb-centric committee?

Watson: Not necessarily, no. But Chicago had a lot of interest in it. It was a sought after assignment. Transportation is one of the premiere committees to serve on.

DePue: Because it controls a lot of money (Watson laughs). It's the old... It almost sounds like pork.[32]

Watson: All the money went through the budget committee, the Appropriations Committee. At that point in time, I think we had two appropriations: one and two. I was on one of the Appropriations Committees at one particular time. All budgetary issues go to Appropriations.

DePue: The Illinois Advisory Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse.

Watson: That was because I was a pharmacist. We had the agency, alcohol abuse agency, and I was an advisor on an advisory committee with that.

DePue: Here's the one that really caught my attention, Legislative Printing Unit (Watson laughs)?

Watson: Well, there's several different functions of the General Assembly, and the printing unit is one of them. They print up, of course, your daily ledgers and all that. They do all the printing for everything in general. There's also the Legislative Reference Bureau, the Legislative Information Bureau, these kinds

[32] Typically, "pork" involves funding for government programs whose economic or service benefits are concentrated in a particular area but whose costs are spread among all taxpayers. Public works projects, certain national defense spending projects, and agricultural subsidies are the most commonly cited examples. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pork_barrel)

of things that are mostly functions of the General Assembly, that make the General Assembly work. The printing unit was part of that.

DePue: You've got to have a committee on that?

Watson: Well, I was on a committee with the head of the printing unit, as well as someone from the House, both a Republican and Democrat. So, there was four of us. It was just advisory.

DePue: It almost makes it sound like there's nothing that's not politicized in the legislature.

Watson: Well, these were the arms of the General Assembly. These were the agencies that we controlled. They were part of the function of the process.

DePue: Then, what is the citizens assembly?

Watson: Citizens assembly (DePue laughs)?

DePue: You apparently served on that as well.

Watson: I'm not sure what that is.

DePue: Council on Energy Resources?

Watson: Again, those were side committees of the Senate that dealt with like coal, oil. Since I was from that part of the state, where that was of interest, I served on that committee.

DePue: I think this is probably a pretty decent place to stop for the day. Does that get you to your next appointment; does that work for you?

Watson: Yeah.

DePue: Thank you very much, Senator.

Watson: Okay, very good, Mark, thank you.

(end of transcript #3)

Interview with Frank Watson

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, October 1, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here in Greenville, Illinois today, with Senator Frank Watson. How are you today, Senator?

Watson: Fine, Mark. Good to see you again.

DePue: A nice, crisp fall day to drive down here.

Watson: The weather has changed quite a bit since we've been talking together (both laugh).

DePue: Yeah, in the heat of the summer. Well, October 1, about forty-some days away from an important election for the United States and a presidential year. It's not a gubernatorial year, but the election season is heating up. Any reflections on the current election season, before we begin with your career?

Watson: Well, it doesn't look good right now for Mitt Romney, who is running for president against Barack Obama, of course, from Illinois. Polling is showing that Obama is picking up a few points in key states that are crucial, and it doesn't look good right now for Romney.

But we have the debates starting, I think, Wednesday night, and that will be a time that Romney will have to show some real leadership and firmness. Of course, Obama's a great orator, a great talker; he does a lot of that (laughs). It's not looking good, politically, for the Republicans; let's put it that way.

DePue: Do you believe the polls?

Watson: Not always, no. That's a good question, because [based on] polling in 1992, I was supposed to be history. They didn't think I could win in '92.

DePue: Remind us again who you were running against at that time.

Watson: I ran against Craig Virgin, who was a University of Illinois graduate, an Olympian, a world record holder in the 5,000, 10,000 meters. He was a good candidate. Everybody knew who he was; he was a hard worker. But he did some things wrong, as a candidate would, who has never run for office before, and I prevailed.

But I wasn't supposed to win. The Democrat polling that year had me down considerably, but I beat him by over 10,000 votes. So, no, I do not believe in polling. The only poll that counts is election day. You've heard that 1,000 times, but that's truly the way it is.

DePue: The Illinois House and the Illinois Senate have been controlled, in fact dominated, most would say, by the Democrats, for a long time. Do you see that equation changing in this election?

Watson: Statewide?

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: No. I think the Republicans are hoping to hold on to what they have. There's some districts though; the Quad Cities area is one, I guess—I've never met the man, but I understand he's a great candidate—one that could be a pickup, maybe one up in the suburban area. I think the best case scenario, they're looking for a plus two over what they have now. Of course, the map was drawn by the Democrats.

DePue: The House.

Watson: No, that's the Senate. The map, of course, was drawn by the Democrats. They didn't do us any favors anywhere. This is the first election under the new map, so it's a Democrat drawn map, and probably the results of this election will reflect that.

The House is another matter. People think that we have a better chance of picking up the House over the decade than we do the Senate. It's all based on candidates. If you get good people running, then you can prevail in Democrats leaning districts and even Democrat majority districts. It will be tough, but there's people thinking that we might do better in the House than we will in the Senate.

DePue: Which traditionally—at least in the State of Illinois—has been just the reverse, that the Republicans had done better in the Senate than in the House, at least in the last twenty or thirty years.

Watson: That's accurate. We've had excellent candidates. When I was a leader, we had really good candidates. When Obama first ran… No. No, it wasn't. [It was] the off year election of Bush II [George W.], when we lost five seats in the senate. I was devastated with that, being the leader. We just picked up one seat the

year before, so we were twenty-seven, and we thought we were really moving forward. To get beat like that... It was a Democrat year all over. Republicans did not do well, but we in the Senate, took our hit more than most.

DePue: We're going to be talking about a time period, especially the '94 through '97 timeframe, we'll be talking about today. This is when you were in a position of leadership within the Illinois Senate, correct?

Watson: That's right.

DePue: I don't know how high in that chain you were. Can you give us...?

Watson: Assistant majority leader, of which there were probably three.

DePue: Was there a pecking order in that group?

Watson: Not necessarily, no. We had a president of the senate, we had a majority leader, and that was Stan Weaver. The president of the senate was Pate Philip. Stan Weaver from Champaign was majority leader, and then myself, Walter Dudycz, John Maitland. Walter was from Chicago; John Maitland from the Bloomington area, and myself. Adeline Geo-Karis might have been [one of the] assistant majority leaders.

DePue: I know she was later on. I would think she probably was even by that time.

Watson: I think so, and then Doris Karpiel was a leader, Laura Donahue. In fact, she might have been an assistant majority leader also. There was nothing special about being an assistant majority leader, other than you sat in the room where decisions were made for your caucus.

DePue: The reason I was asking where you were hierarchy wise, within the leadership, is based on selecting candidates or recruiting good candidates to run for the Senate, which is a big part of the equation, as you already mentioned yourself. Were you in a position in those mid-1990s, where you were involved with that?

Watson: I was. Dave Luechtefeld, from just the district south of us, I recruited him as a candidate. He won, and he's been serving ever since. We had a committee that went out and interviewed people that were interested in running, talked to them about their background and experience, and what they wanted to do. We had a good organization and a means by which to recruit good, quality people.

DePue: In the Illinois Senate at that time, the Republicans controlled the redistricting after the 1990 census, so that was a big plus. And the Illinois Senate, the Republicans won control over in the 1992 election and retained it for a long period of time.

Watson: Ten years, the ten years of the map.

DePue: And the Illinois House, only two years. Those two years, we're going to be talking about this session.

Watson: Right.

DePue: In your perspective, what was the difference between you guys being able to control the majority—you're smiling already—in the House?

Watson: This is a controversial thing, because historians will disagree. But being in the room and knowing what happened... I was on the Remap Committee; I was part of that. We were majority driven; we, being the Illinois Senate. We wanted to maintain a majority for the ten years. We drew districts that were compact, contiguous, and all the right things that you have to do constitutionally.

But we also made them such that they would relate to the Republican voters of that particular area. In other words, we tried to put as many Republicans as we could in each district. This is the way a remap is done, whether it's congress or any state that does it the way it's done in Illinois. It's done politically. You'd try to make districts as competitive as you can. We tried to make them competitive, yet leaning Republican. Then candidate recruitment was crucial in maintaining the control of that particular Senate seat.

The House, on the other hand, was member driven. They drew districts, and this is where it's controversial. There will be some that will say, "Watson doesn't know what he's talking about," but they drew districts based on their membership, trying to protect their individual member, versus a majority. Do you understand what I'm saying? I think that had a lot to do with their demise.

South suburbs is the perfect example. We ended up losing a Senate seat in the south suburbs because we were trying to protect our Republican interests in the south suburbs; they were trying to protect the individual members through three Republican seats that they ended up losing, all three. We ended up losing a Senate seat because of the method by which they decided to draw the map.

DePue: As I listen to you, I recall, we did talk about this a little bit last time. But I'm curious; wouldn't the House have to wait for the Senate part of the map to be drawn, because you're dividing that Senate district in two, basically, after that.

Watson: Right. The map passes as a legislative map, both the Senate and the House. It's introduced in the Senate… It doesn't necessarily matter where it's introduced, but it has to pass both bodies, as a map for both the Senate and the House. The House doesn't draw their map, and we draw our Senate map. That's not the way it is in Illinois. Some states they do that, but not in Illinois.

Illinois is one Senate district, and then it's divided in two. The House districts are contiguous with the Senate district. In Illinois, in early years, it wasn't that way either. You could draw a House district entirely different from the Senate district, but that's changed now. When we drew a map and presented it to the Senate—I think it was, where it started—it contained both the House and the Senate districts.

DePue: Are you suggesting then, that in some cases, the House Republicans won the arguments for how the Senate and the House districts were drawn, and in some cases you guys won?

Watson: I would say that's the case, and maybe they got a little more than we did. Maybe there was a little more leverage. I don't know, but I truly wasn't just in the deciding factor of how that was going to be done, but I was pretty close to it.

DePue: This is the stuff that, for most of the Illinois public, causes their eyes to glaze over, and they lose interest very quickly. But it's the ballgame, as far as inside politics is concerned.

Watson: [As far as] inside politics goes, inside baseball. This is all where it's done, where the maps are drawn, and how that's going to affect the next ten years.

DePue: Let's go to 1994. In that particular year... It's an election year. Excuse me; I wanted to ask you about the 1994 budget, so I've got to drop back a year, in 1993. Part of what's going on at that time still, is you're in a recession. The United States and certainly Illinois is in a recession, starting to ease out of that. But there's still a big budget hole.

I wanted to ask your opinion about maybe part of the focus of that year, an income tax surcharge that's made permanent, cigarette taxes are increased. Yet there was still $1 billion hole for Medicaid.

Watson: Well, Medicaid is a problem and will always be a problem, as far as the budget is concerned. The cigarette tax... I was always opposed to any kind of taxes.

United States Tobacco, at that time, invited a friend of mine and our wives, to go to the AT&T Pebble Beach Open—it's a PGA [Professional Golfers' Association] event—and play golf. So we went out there. That was the year before. The next year, I voted for the tax increase. I said to the guy who came up to testify in the committee… I was a sponsor of this as a matter of fact.

DePue: Of the cigarette tax increase?

Watson: I was the sponsor of the legislation, not necessarily the passage, but would spend the education part of it. That's where the money went. And I asked him I

said, "I guess this means we won't be going to the AT&T Pebble Beach Open (both laugh)." He was a good friend. Like I said, I never voted for one before.

But this was Edgar's program; this is what Edgar wanted to do. It was all about more money for education, and of course, more money for the budget in general. That's what [it was] making permanent, the .5 percent income tax. That passed, and I supported it.

A lot of money went into education at that particular point in time. The funding formula was kind of changed a little bit too, where it used to be that high school districts… We have unit districts, and we have high school districts and elementary districts—Your friend, Phil Pogue could fill you in on all that—but the emphasis of money kind of went to primarily the high school districts. We changed it so elementary districts, unit districts, everybody kind of got the same percentage of revenue.

DePue: What's a unit district?

Watson: A unit district is a district that is encompassed by elementary districts and high school districts, in a unit. A high school district is by itself, and then an elementary district is also by itself, separate superintendents, separate school boards. It's a problem within Illinois; personally, I think it is. Being chairman of the Education Committee, it was always trying to deal with the three different types of districts we had in Illinois. It was forever a problem; still is.

DePue: So your perception is that most of the Illinois public thinks the unit district is the model, across the board?

Watson: Yes, I like to think it is.

DePue: That's certainly the case in most of the urban areas; isn't it?

Watson: It is, and downstate pretty much. There's a lot of elementary districts that were in my Senate district, and high school districts. That would be one thing that, over the years, needs to be corrected, going to unit districts. I don't know how you force that, but that's the political problem.

DePue: As a cheap advertisement in here, you mentioned Phil Pogue (Watson laughs). He's one of our volunteer interviewers, and he's done something like forty-five interviews on the subject of school consolidation and/or reorganization. We'll talk more about that as we go through this interview, but it's a great collection.

Watson: I'll bet a big part of his effort will be the whole concept of unit districts and then elementary-high school districts. I bet it will, knowing Phil.

DePue: I wanted to ask about something else that captured everybody's attention in 1993. That was the Great Flood. Did that affect your district?[33]

Watson: No, not really.

DePue: But I thought your district headed all the way over, close to the Illinois and the Mississippi River at that time.

Watson: No. It got over into the Bethalto area. What really happened... We emptied out the prisons, and those people went over and worked. That impacted my district. The Vandalia Correctional Center had a big part in the whole flood effort, the inmates there. They got a lot of awards for that actually. There was flooding up and down the rivers, like Kaskaskia River and Shoal Creek and those types of tributaries. But as far as the actual Mississippi River affecting my district, no. I was involved a little bit in all of that, of course, for relief. We wanted to do whatever we could to help those people.

DePue: The prisoners over at Vandalia, would that have been something that you had to approve, or is that strictly Department of Corrections?

Watson: That was the Department of Corrections. We weren't involved at all.

DePue: Let's get to 1994 then. That's an election year. I don't know that there were nearly as many controversial issues on your agenda that year, but I wanted to ask about the gubernatorial election year in particular. Let's start with the democratic primary race and just get your reflections on it, because you get to be the bystander who watches all of this, with great interest, I'm sure. It was Roland Burris, Richard Phelan, Pat Quinn and Dawn Clark Netsch, who ran in the primary. Any reflections on that primary?

Watson: Roland Burris was from Centralia, which is in my district, but he had moved to Chicago. He was pretty popular down here. Dawn Clark Netsch, because of all the men in the primary, I think that's why she got nominated. She was a highly respected state senator, very liberal, and of course, the senator from Chicago. I would say, with her nomination, went their election, as far as I'm concerned. I mean, Jim Edgar was strong. He had that election pretty well wrapped up by July of that year because he painted her for what she was, a tax and spend liberal from Chicago. People down here weren't ready for that, and I don't think the people of Illinois were either at that time.

DePue: Her signature issue was one that I'm sure you heard a lot about, and one that's going to be front and center of Illinois politics for a long time. Her signature issue was this school funding plan, a tax swap, a proposal to raise the state

[33] The Great Flood of 1993 occurred in the Midwestern United States, along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers and their tributaries, from April to October 1993. The flood was among the most costly and devastating to ever occur in the United States, with $15 billion in damages. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Flood_of_1993)

income tax from 3 percent to 4.25 percent, and then do a corresponding reduction in property taxes. This was all geared toward sending more money to education. Her position was that the State of Illinois just wasn't kicking in its fair share.

Watson: Well, once she came out with that, that again pretty well put a nail in her coffin. People are not for tax increases. If it affects me, if it affects the voter, they're interested; they're concerned. If it doesn't... But as soon as you mention a tax increase, that affects every voter, whether it's going to education or not.

The lottery is supposed to solve all that. I keep hearing that, even today, "Where does the lottery money go?" It's amazing. That was not an issue to bring forward at that time.

Even reducing the property taxes, people couldn't identify with that, other than property taxes are one they write a check for. The public writes a check for their property taxes. The income tax is kind of a hidden tax; it's taken out of your check, the federal income tax. You don't really feel it; you don't feel it. But you do [feel] property taxes. As much as people despise property taxes, the fact that she was going to lower them and raise the income tax, the average voter would say, "Oh, yeah, you're going to lower our property taxes?" And that's the end of that. So she was a loser on that issue all the way around.

DePue: Part of the curiosity about that whole thing is—you just alluded to it I think—How is it that the governor or the state government can lower local property taxes?

Watson: They would increase the money to education, which would lower the property taxes. That's what they want you to believe; you would lower property taxes then at the local level.

DePue: But the state doesn't have control over the rates.

Watson: They have no control over it. There would have to be some way of deciding that the money that went to the local districts would be lessened. The amount that you could tax locally would be lessened if you're getting more money from the state. In other words, you would control it by way of reducing their ability to tax at the local level, too confusing. People, once again, it flies right over their head, and they don't understand. When you mention tax increase, they understand (DePue laughs).

DePue: You had a pretty good feel of the pulse of your district. If this would have gone through and state income taxes would have been increased, and corporate income tax would have gone up as well, would your districts, local school districts, have seen their property taxes lowered?

Watson: We get a lot of state money from our districts, generally, from the State. We are what we call property tax poor. So, no, I don't think we would have seen much because we're getting it already. The people that probably would have benefited from more state money would have been, of course, Chicago and the suburbs, who get... Most of their money is locally generated.

Now, the idea would have been that, "Okay, we're going to replace your local money with state money." That would have been a big thing for suburban. But once again, I don't think people... They don't buy it. They say, "Oh, yeah, right, politicians say this; politicians say that, and do something else."

DePue: What you're saying is the reality in your district is that it would have been a flat out tax increase. There would have been no corresponding on reducing property taxes.

Watson: I believe so. There would have been some probably. Sure, there would have been an effort to do it, But I think, overall, it would not have been a major reduction of property taxes.

DePue: How do the dynamics work in a mainly rural district like this, where a lot of the property tax is paid on farmland?

Watson: That was changed. The Farmland Assessment Act—I think that was in the late '70s, early '80s—where farmland used to be assessed on value only. As the value really increased, the tax burden on agriculture went with that. So we changed it to production and actual value and different methods by which they tax agriculture purposes. That changed, and that was a benefit to agriculture. But now we've seen it spike. This is back in the early '90s now, we're talking about. Here it is 2012, and if they were taxing on the basis of just value, the agriculture community, I think, would be having a major, major problem right now.

DePue: But you suggested that part of the assessment is based on the production, and if production is tied to the price of corn and soybeans, currently that's skyrocketing as well.

Watson: That's going up as well, so they will pay more, yes.

DePue: In the midst of the campaign—and you already mentioned that by late June, July timeframe that Edgar pretty much had this wrapped up—I think it was in the June time frame that he ended up having a heart emergency. He was careful to point out it was not a heart attack, when I mentioned it, but he needed heart bypass surgery, a pretty significant event. Do you recall that?

Watson: Oh, yes. I didn't realize it was as early as it was. It was in June?

DePue: Late June, I believe.

Watson: I remember seeing a picture of him waving out the window taken by some photographer. Back then, again, bypasses weren't generally something people talked about. It's a common thing today, but back then, you talk about bypass, that was a major... It could have been a heart attack, from the public's perception. But it wasn't, and he, of course, came out of it pretty good, and he's probably better for it today. I know how he eats and how he exercises and takes care of himself.

DePue: But even at that time, he looked like he was a pretty healthy, vigorous guy.

Watson: Oh, yes, and he was. He's a good tennis player, active. In fact, I want to think that he was at a fundraiser, I believe, in my district, at Michael's Restaurant—another cheap advertisement, Michael's Restaurant in Highland—that we had a steak dinner. I think it was Ron Stevens, who was a representative from this area... I think it was his fundraiser that Edgar attended the night before he had a heart attack, or at least within the week. That made it even more significant for... There, I said heart attack; see, there you go (both laugh). He had his bypass.

DePue: And he was up in the suburbs when that all occurred.

Watson: Okay.

DePue: The famous picture of him waving outside the window of his hospital room, I think corresponded with the passage of the budget bill that year.

Watson: Oh, is that right?

DePue: Which, in his perspective, to a certain extent, it worked to his advantage to have this operation, because Netsch can't run against him for a little while at least. That looks bad for him, and it makes Madigan a little bit more cooperative when he had to deal (laughs) with the budget. Do you recall any of that?

Watson: Oh, sure, yeah. No, I do not remember the budget battles between Madigan, Edgar and all that, but I do recall Edgar getting a lot of sympathy at that particular point in time, that they laid off of him. I'm really surprised again, to hear that that was in June, and the election wasn't until November. You would think that would work to Netsch's benefit. But we had a good man running for lieutenant governor, I think, at that time, was Bob Kustra.

Senator Watson with his senate seatmate Bob Kustra on the Senate Floor, circa 1990. Kustra went on to become Governor Edgar's lieutenant governor.

DePue: Right.

Watson: He's the president of Boise State today. He was a good man. He always said, "The biggest thing that the lieutenant governor does is wait for the phone to ring." (both laugh)

DePue: Do you recall what occurred with Bob Kustra in the midst of that campaign season? Just as a reminder, he decided, early in '94, "Being lieutenant governor isn't that neat of a job. I think I want to be a radio talk show host."

Watson: Did he decide that during the campaign?

DePue: Edgar talked him out of it, and he stayed on the ticket, obviously.

Watson: And then he did become a radio talk show host, not too long after that. He quit as lieutenant governor.

DePue: He served the rest of his term, that second term.

Watson: Did he really?

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: I was thinking he got out, but no, he stayed in? Okay.

DePue: The other issue that Edgar thought played to his strengths, that was very advantageous for him, was this Baby Richard case. Do you recall that?

Watson: I do, but I... The name, Baby Richard, I certainly remember.

DePue: This was a custody battle—I'm sorry to put you on the spot here—but the custody battle over this baby who had been adopted by a couple in Illinois, and then the father, who was an estranged father and then discovered, "I didn't even know I had a son. I want this son back." It went through the courts, and Edgar says, "The interest of the child should prevail over the interest of the parents." The courts ruled against him. Again, he thought he gained a lot of traction and sympathy from the public just because of that.

Watson: Well, he would. I just don't remember the particulars about it, but when you talk about Baby Richard, yes. I think anybody who lived through that would remember, but not necessarily the particulars.

DePue: It is something like seventeen years ago.

November comes, and it's a very good year for Republicans. I'm sure you recall that it's not just a good year for Republicans in Illinois. There was a huge wave of Republican victories throughout the entire country.

Watson: The off year of the Clinton. That was when Hillary decided she was going to be the appointed vice president and started taking over the responsibilities, became more visible and more active.

DePue: She was going to be the healthcare czar.

Watson: Yeah, the healthcare czar (laughs), exactly.

DePue: And Newt Gingrich, "Contract with America."[34] That was a good year, and it was an especially good year in Illinois, as we've talked about, because that's the year that the Illinois House had enough Republicans so that the Republicans could finally control the house, after a long drought.

Watson: I think every constitutional officer that was elected was Republican.

DePue: I believe you're right.

Watson: It was a good year. It took two years of Republican maps to finally get to the House, becoming a majority. They made progress in, of course, '92, and then in '94, they went over the mark to get control. We'd already had control, so we were ready to rock and roll then.

We had a governor, Republican, and Pate Philip and Lee Daniels were... Pate was president of the Senate, Lee Daniels was speaker of the House. We were in control and ready to lead.

DePue: After that many years of not having a majority in all three, there had to be a whole list of legislative items that you guys were just dying to get passed. I wonder if you can tell us about establishing the strategy and picking the priorities, going into that 1995 legislative year.

Watson: Well, we Republicans wanted to show the people of Illinois that, under our control, things were going to happen, good things we thought, good things for Illinois. Most people probably would agree. Some wouldn't, but most would.

We fast tracked about five pieces of legislation. Maybe in hindsight that might have been a mistake, because we just ran them through, instead of waiting over time to do it and making more of an impact, a long lasting impact. It was just in a small window, a timeframe, in which we got this done.

The public was wowed for a while, but then as time goes on, the public has short memories. But there were five pieces of legislation; I think five. It

[34] The Contract with America was a legislative agenda advocated for by the Republican Party during the 1994 congressional election campaign. The elections resulted in Republicans gaining 54 House and 9 U.S. Senate seats, flipping both chambers. Written by Newt Gingrich and Dick Armey, and in part using text from former President Ronald Reagan's 1985 State of the Union Address. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contract_with_America)

might have even been more, but I believe five that were considered fast tracking.

DePue: Before you go into the details, you were questioning the strategy that you guys had, to get it done as quickly as you can, because they could have been even more effective or because you could have gotten more political benefit?

Watson: More political benefit. I hate to say that, but politics is a big part of what we do (laughs). There would have been more political benefit of stringing it out, not over years but over time during that session. The idea was to get it done, obviously, and that was important to do. But getting it done as fast as we did, I think some would say we should have drug some of that out.

DePue: Would you be one of those?

Watson: Yes, I would.

DePue: What were the five issues?

Watson: The straight party voting in Illinois, after what was called Punch 10, in Cook County. That was a very effective effort by the Cook County Democrats to elect Democrats in Cook County. They said, "Punch 10." Well, ten on the ballot in Cook County was straight Democrat Party vote.

We'd had our lumps with that, although in some areas of the state, straight party voting helped Republicans. I think overall, politically, I think we would say that the end of the straight party balloting was a good thing for us. Overall, I think it's a good thing for the public too. For people to go in and just vote one party or another... There's good people on both sides, so let's let them go down the ballot and take a look and see who might prevail, versus just putting one X or punching one number and going home.

That's the way they used to control it. In the Democrat areas, if somebody spent too much time in a ballot booth, they knew they weren't voting straight ticket. So they were taken off the preferred list (laughs). Seriously, I'm telling you. If you were in the ballot booth more than just enough time to punch that number or to mark that X and didn't come out soon enough, they'd say, "That guy's going in there and voting all the way down the ballot. He's not a Democrat; he's voting for a few Republicans." So that was one issue, the end of straight party balloting.

Welfare reform was a big one that I was directly involved in, Senate Bill 20; I was a sponsor of that. We were trying to end the generation after generation after generation of welfare dependency.

DePue: I thought that Edgar had already started to move in that direction in '92 and '93 legislative years as well. But I guess the important point is…

Watson: The major bill that we passed, even more than Tommy Thompson... He was considered the welfare reform king. He was from Wisconsin, the governor. He got all the publicity, but we did more in Illinois than Tommy Thompson did in Wisconsin, on welfare. Our bill was actually a model bill that Bob Dole, who was a candidate for the U.S. Presidency, was using as his guide to his own program, what we did in Illinois.

We were aggressive, we changed a lot of laws. We tried to make sure that we helped people who needed help. That was the biggest thing. We wanted to get people to understand that they just can't depend on government. And here we are in 2012, and it's even worse today than it was back in '94. Anyway, they can't depend on the government for their personal responsibility. That's what we called it, the Personal Responsibility Act. People have got to take personal responsibility for their own actions. That was the idea.

DePue: Was there a work requirement then as well?

Watson: There was a work requirement, and there was also an educational component. We agreed that education was the key to getting people off dependency. We had revenue that was available for transportation to schools, primarily community colleges, helping people to train themselves. We did a great deal of effort at trying to help people educate themselves, to make them feel more marketable for a job. That was the second issue, welfare reform.

DePue: Was childcare part of that equation?

Watson: Childcare was part of it, yes.

DePue: The State would help with childcare expenses?

Watson: The State would help with childcare. We also had some legislation that particular year that expanded availability of childcare and tried to make childcare more of an educational component, versus babysitting. We wanted people to send their kids to a childcare or early childhood [center]. That was kind of the beginning of early childhood [education], was back in that era, that people understood the necessary reasons for sending their kids to school earlier than kindergarten, at-risk kids primarily, at-risk kids.

DePue: You've already alluded to this, but this is prior to the national legislation that passed in '96.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Do you think the state got its just recognition for being on the cutting edge of that?

Watson: No, not necessarily. I don't believe so. Certainly, Republicans never did, seriously (laughs). Go back to Newt Gingrich, everything he did. It was always the poor old kids that were impacted. Even though I think Newt was right in a lot of cases, politically he wasn't. The public didn't understand what he was trying to do, and I think Republicans in general are just viewed as kind of anti-education, anti-child, anti-woman. It's sad because we're not that way. But the Democrats have done an excellent job of painting us with that brush.

DePue: This is an appropriate time to ask this, I guess. Do you think the media treated you fairly on some of these issues?

Watson: We never get treated fairly by the media, even today. I won't watch... What's the Channel 5, NBC [program], *Meet the Press*?[35] I've never had that station on. I never have had a MSNBC station on. I refuse to watch it. *Meet the Press* and all these, this is all spin. What the people are doing now in politics, it's all about what should be said, instead of answering a question. Sometimes the questions aren't asked fairly either. I've never felt the media has treated Republicans with... I think they treat us with disdain [more] than they do with fairness.

DePue: Would you say that was true for your entire political career, or has it increased or decreased over time?

Watson: I've never had a problem with media in my district. When you get to know people better, you don't have the issue of...they know you, and they know what you do, and they treat you with respect and fairness. I never had trouble with what I would consider local media, never, like the radio stations or even the TV stations.

But when you get into a situation where I'd be interviewed in Chicago or interviewed in the Quad Cities area or Springfield, people that don't know what you're about, I think there is a bias; I really do, against Republicans. I know that some people laugh at that, but I think there is.

DePue: Are you're including the statehouse press corps in that?

Watson: Not necessarily, although I'm sure, if you checked their voting records, probably 90 percent...75, 90 percent would vote Democrat in a primary. I don't know why that is, other than journalism schools that are very liberal, I guess, in their teachings. I don't know why the media is the way they are. That was the second one (laughs).

DePue: It's my fault that we're getting off track here.

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[35] *Meet the Press* is a weekly American television news/interview program broadcast on NBC. It is the longest-running program in television history, though the current format bears little resemblance to the debut episode on November 6, 1947. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meet_the_Press)

Watson: Let's see, a third one. We did mandates, what we considered school mandates. It's a mandates issue for all units of local government, when we in Springfield are dictating policy back to units of local government. I never thought that was a good idea. We wouldn't fund them, the mandates, but we'd tell units of local government what they had to do. We didn't like it when Washington told us, Illinois, what to do, so why should it be any different for us and local governments?

This was education, when we decided to put legislation on the ballot that required committees to look at all mandates that came through the State of Illinois to units of local government, education being the unit of local government. Those had to be approved by a special committee and then approved by both the House and the Senate. I think it was a very good law, and it's been very effective actually. I was involved directly in that one.

DePue: Was this just a one-time committee or is this a standing committee?

Watson: It's a standing committee, going on now. I think they still have it. They did before I retired.

DePue: Can you think of any examples of unfunded mandates that led the Republicans to move in this direction?

Watson: All the pensions. All pension increases at that time were mandated, school holidays, what you taught.

DePue: Casimir Pulaski Day?

Watson: That's a perfect example, a perfect example. I voted against that when it passed, with deference to my Polish friends. We set that up like March 3, or the first Monday in March was going to be Casimir Pulaski Day, and all the kids got off school. That's a mandated school holiday. We changed that and said we no longer made it mandated. It would be locally decided. And everybody decided to make it a school day, but they'd have something in their school curriculum that day about Casimir Pulaski. That was a lot of the things we did up there.

The curriculum, not every district is the same. There's going to be kids going to different schools throughout Illinois that are going to have interests in different topics. We shouldn't be mandating that from Springfield. What's good for one district may not be good for another. Yeah, I think that was a very effective law and a very good one.

DePue: This would have been a mandate, I believe, on the national level. This is the time frame when Medicaid benefits were changing, and I think the federal government was mandating what the state was going to have to pick up the bill on. Does that sound right?

Watson: I think that might have been a little later.

DePue: I know this is a time frame when Medicaid expenses were skyrocketing. That was one of the problems that the State was having in balancing the budget from year to year.

Watson: Well, when you think of Medicaid, most people think it's welfare. It is a form of welfare—you're doing something for somebody—but it's primarily payments to hospitals, nursing homes, doctors, pharmacies, the providers. There's where the majority of the Medicaid expense goes. But with expansion of Medicaid, the numbers of people on it, that certainly has a great deal to do with how much the cost is for each state.

DePue: So that's three.

Watson: Let's see...the fourth [was] tort reform, which was a big one for us because we believed that, not necessarily all lawyers, but litigants, plaintiff lawyers and the plaintiff bar was driving business out of the state. Workers' Compensation was a huge problem. The cost of insurance was a big problem for industries. It just seemed like the balance of scale tilted a little bit towards the bar and the so-called injured. In some cases they weren't necessarily injured.

We wanted, again, to take care of the people who were honestly injured on the job, and tort reform was a big part of that. We put some limits on the awards. That was the demise of the whole legislation, was the fact that we put some limits on what's called pain and suffering.

DePue: You said the demise of the legislation; what do you mean?

Watson: The Supreme Court ultimately threw it out.

DePue: The Illinois Supreme Court.

Watson: The Illinois Supreme Court.

DePue: On what grounds?

Watson: That you cannot put any limits on awards. They did it again with medical malpractice. Not too long ago, they threw it out on the basis of that.

DePue: From your perspective, being involved at some level at least, of helping to craft that legislation, do you think the Illinois Supreme Court was justified in throwing it out, on the basis of the Illinois State Constitution?

Watson: Well, other states had not thrown it out, based on limits. People can interpret a constitution, sentences, verbiage, whatever way they want. We see that when there's five-to-four votes, and it's the U.S. Supreme Court. This was... I don't know what the vote total was in this one. I'm not even sure they publicized it.

It was obviously a decision by the Illinois Supreme Court, based on what **they** interpreted the law to mean. And I didn't agree with that.

DePue: Of course, the Illinois Supreme Court is supported to be nonpartisan, but they do run for election.

Watson: They run for election; they're very partisan. It shows that when they decide on maps for the state. On the congressional maps or state senate maps, house maps, those are mostly always a political decision. It **is** a political decision by the Supreme Court, based on their leaning politically.

DePue: Is the philosophical division within the Illinois Supreme Court similar to what we have at the U.S. Supreme Court, where the conservative members are following the constitution, the Illinois Constitution, more literally, and the liberal Supreme Court justices are taking into account how society and culture has changed?

Watson: That was very well said, Mark (laughs). I would think, yes. At the state level it's hard to really say who's a conservative and who's a liberal, other than party labels. But the U.S. Supreme Court, it's obvious. It's kind of five-to-three, and then you have the guy in the middle or... No, it's four-to-four, and you have the guy in the middle making the decisions. It's not that way at the state level.

DePue: So you don't think they're as philosophically oriented as at the national level?

Watson: I'd say they're more politically oriented. I'm sure there's going to be some that will take exception to that statement. But I do think that they run politically, and I think that's the way many of them serve, not on every issue. I guess I shouldn't say all the decisions that are made by the Illinois Supreme Court are political. That's not the case, at all.

DePue: Since we're in this neighborhood... This is a little bit more contemporary, but how about efforts to reform the public pension system in the state? State public pensions have oftentimes been frustrated by the Illinois Supreme Court. I wonder if you have any reflections... Let me ask it this way. This is a crucial time period. The Illinois House and Senate were both controlled by Republicans. Were there any significant attempts at that time to reform the state pension system?

Watson: Not that I remember.

DePue: How about to properly fund the state pension system?

Watson: No, because it really wasn't an issue; the funding was fine. The funding didn't really get decimated until Rod Blagojevich.

DePue: I know that near the end of Edgar's term in office—it was'97 I think—there was a framework that was set to maintain that.

Watson: Yes there was. Bob Madigan, who was a state senator from Lincoln, was a sponsor. He was chairman of the... Let's see, Pensions and Insurance Committee, I think. Anyway, he sponsored a bill that would set us on a path of progressive contributions to the pension system that would, in a certain timeframe, fully fund the pensions. And once again, that was derailed by the Blagojevich regime.

DePue: You said to "fully fund it." That means it hadn't been fully funded up to that point?

Watson: That's true, oh yes. But it wasn't the crucial, critical issue that it is today.

DePue: But it set the framework for the crucial issue that we have today; couldn't you say that?

Watson: It was a solution to the pension problem. If we'd have stayed on that course, we wouldn't be in the situation we are today. If ten years ago, when Blagojevich was elected governor... If he had stayed on the same course that we had set out in what, '95...?

DePue: Ninety-seven, I think.

Watson: Ninety-seven. Then we wouldn't be hearing about it.

DePue: Once again, I got you off track of the five priorities.

Watson: Let's see, the Structural Work Act; is that the fifth one?

DePue: The Workers' Compensation structural work?

Watson: Yeah, we repealed... Illinois had a law that enabled, again, the trial association to sue a business on the basis of... When someone was injured, if they were standing on a ladder, that was the idea, structural work.

DePue: This is the repeal of the Scaffolding Act.

Watson: Yes. What happened... People would be standing on a Coke carton, and some injury would occur. It was abused; it was abused big time. The Trial Court Association took exception to that repeal, but it was done. I think that was another that helped the business community in Illinois. Trying to create more work, more jobs, that was the idea behind it, to do away with that act. And we did.

DePue: There are some other events in '95 that I wanted to ask you about. Before we go there, let's kind of get up to a different level and ask your impression of

working with a majority in the House of Representatives as well. I don't know how much you personally were involved with that, but what was your opinion of the leadership that Lee Daniels and other Republicans were providing in the House.

Watson: Like I said, we all agreed on these five, what we called fast tracked issues, things that would really turn around Illinois, make a difference in Illinois, make it a better state. We all thought that way. [There were] different styles of leadership from both Lee Daniels and Pate Philip. My association with Lee wasn't really that great. I didn't really deal with him. I know there was some legislation that I directly got involved in, about funding schools, that he took exception to. I can't remember what year that would have been, but that might have been '95, '96.

DePue: That was a long discussion, and we'll get into that a little bit, about school funding issues, from '95, all the way through late '97.

Watson: It's never ended; it still goes on.

DePue: I read one newspaper article that was making an assessment of the Republican leadership, and I'm going to get your reaction to this. They described Pate Philip as, "The bull in the china shop," (Watson laughs) and Lee Daniels was, "The china shop's manager." (both laugh)

Watson: What paper had that one?

DePue: It was probably the [*Chicago*] *Tribune*.

Watson: Well, Pate would always be considered that, because he just spoke his mind, and whatever came out, Pate's Pate. You appreciated that about him; we all did. We didn't always agree, but we knew where he stood. Lee Daniels would be more diplomatic, yes. He'd be the manager of the china shop. I guess that's a pretty good analogy, but really, they both had their own strengths.

Pate was more domineering than Lee was. He was more intimidating to people than Lee would have been. I think that played to his benefit, Pate's, because Lee always felt like he was the stepchild, both, I think, in the county—they both were from DuPage County, and Pate was county chairman—and then, of course, Lee was the minority leader for those first two years.

Instead of being speaker, Pate was president. I think that kind of had an impact on Lee a little bit, although he was good. In fact, we rallied around what we were doing. We felt good about it, and it's just unfortunate we only had it for two years.

DePue: Do you think Pate was good at maintaining party discipline within the Republicans in the senate?

Watson: Yes. I think I've said this once before; we had an exceptional staff that really kind of held everything together, and I think Pate would be considered a strong leader, yeah.

DePue: We're going to get an opportunity later on, to talk about your own style of leadership, but were you more in tune with Pate's style of leadership than Daniels'?

Watson: I liked Pate's leadership style in the fact that he listened to members. That's something I did and wanted to do when I became leader, was get input from members. Not always doing what I want to do or what he wanted to do, he got input from his membership, through his caucus or individual meetings with them. I think that was a big strength of his that most people didn't recognize.

DePue: I was just going to say, there is somewhat of a contradiction. You said he could be very intimidating to people.

Watson: To people he could.

DePue: And yet he listened.

Watson: Yes, he did. I don't think that's a contradiction. You can do both. You can be intimidating and still... The thing that he was intimidating about was just his reputation, but he was really kind of a teddy bear in some ways (laughs). He was good to his membership and always was fair with us, and everybody respected him for that.

DePue: So we shouldn't say he's the bull in the china shop but the big fat teddy bear in the china shop.

Watson: (laughs) I could see where people would say that. He had this image as a cigar smoking, backroom, deal making politician. That might have been the case earlier, but I think he changed, as we all do.

DePue: We talked a little bit about the news media, and I don't think you'd disagree with this, that he gave the news media plenty of opportunity to put labels on him.

Watson: He was great. Whenever he had a press conference, everybody showed up because there was no telling what he might say. He was good copy. He'd make a quote that would be sometimes entertaining and maybe not so entertaining to some people (laughs).

DePue: You mentioned it yourself; he could certainly be blunt, but was he a racist?

Watson: No. And then people put that label on him because of his attitude about people wanting to go to work. He actually... Because he lived in DuPage County,

being a very white, suburban area, he came across, I'm sure to some people, as anti-minority. But he wasn't that way politically at all.

DePue: I think I could get close to quoting him in this respect, but he was known to feel that throwing money at Chicago, the Chicago school system or Chicago in general, was like throwing money down a rat hole?

Watson: He might have said that. There's plenty of quotes out there that would indicate that... He was just being honest about his opinions, but that didn't necessarily mean he was a racist. I think there's a big difference.

DePue: There are a lot of people who certainly had no doubt that he was sexist.

Watson: He appointed the first woman in the leadership. Once again, sometimes I think these labels that people put on us as politicians are not fair. And I don't think that's fair to Pate at all. He did appoint the first woman in leadership—I believe it was Adeline Geo-Karis—before Dawn Clark Netsch got into leadership. So, sexist? Why would somebody say that? What did he do that would…?

DePue: Just the terms that he would use, the way he would talk. Maybe it was behind closed doors, and sometimes maybe it was in front of microphones. I don't have any specific quotes in that respect.

Watson: Then it's just... It's hearsay almost; it's a legend. He becomes a legend for things that he said over the years, and some would interpret that in different ways.

DePue: Did that reputation make it easier or harder for you as a senate leader?

Watson: It didn't have an impact. People appreciate candor, of which he was, honesty, of which he was. I was proud to serve on his leadership team.

DePue: I'm going to change the focus from Pate Philip to Governor Edgar. When I had an opportunity to talk to Governor Edgar, he said that he would prefer to deal with a legislature that was split, that wasn't controlled by the same party in both houses, that it was just easier to get compromise when you had different control in the two houses.

Watson: Having not been governor, I don't know for sure, but I can't imagine that being the case. Again, being in the room when decisions were made during those two year periods, I can't believe that it would have been tougher dealing with Lee Daniels or Pate Philip than it was to deal with Mike Madigan. Mike Madigan always had a long list of things he wanted, and you had to give him that, or you wouldn't get what you want, simple as that. I don't think those two years with Republican leaders would have created a big problem for Governor Edgar. Having not been there, it's easy for me to say, "Yeah, I can understand." But for him to say it, I think he must have had a tough time with one of the two on

something. Overall, I think he would say it was easier dealing with Lee or Pate than Mike Madigan.

DePue: Is part of that equation perhaps the expectations that when you control both houses, and you're the governor of the same party, then the expectations are ratcheted up quite a bit?

Watson: Yes. I could see where personnel matters—let's put it that way—or decisions that are made that affect government, I could see where a lot of pressure could be put on a Republican governor by other Republicans, that this be done, where that could have been a problem for him. But legislatively, I can't imagine.

DePue: The five issues that you laid out here for us, was there general party unity on those five issues?

Watson: We might have had some trouble with Governor Edgar. I remember Steve Schnorf was his point person on the welfare reform. They weren't necessarily enamored with all the things that we were doing. For me to remember all that I couldn't, but they went along with us. Getting him through the hoop was a little bit of a problem. Basically, I think everybody was onboard with what we wanted to do.

Ron Stephens and Frank Watson talking to Governor Edgar about welfare reform in 1995. They were fast tracking the legislation after gaining control of both houses following the election of 1994.

DePue: How about Democrat support, were you getting any of that on some of these initiatives?

Watson: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, we had some support. We had a lot of support for...maybe not the tort reform. Although I want to think that maybe some of the downstate Democrats might have voted for that. There were two downstate Democrats that helped us on a lot of things: Bill O'Daniel from Mt. Vernon and Jim Rea from Christopher. They helped on a lot of legislation for us.

DePue: What was the second name again?

Watson: Jim Rea. Jim Rea from Christopher and Bill O'Daniel from Mt. Vernon.

DePue: Another one of the initiatives early in 1995, the Conservation 2000 initiative was initially passed. I'm going to read this from their own web page now. "Landmark legislation was passed without a dissenting vote by the General Assembly, initiating Conservation 2000, a comprehensive, six-year, $100 million initiative designed to take a holistic, long-term approach to protecting and managing Illinois's natural resources." Again, this would be one of the initiatives that Edgar would be proud of, to be protecting natural resources.

Watson: Sure. What year was that?

DePue: March 27, 1995.

Watson: Ninety-five. He promoted that. The five that I mentioned all came from the legislature. He was the one that directed that one. Of course, he's got state parks named after him, as he should. That was landmark legislation that really took Illinois to another level when it comes to preserving the environment in our parks and natural resources.

DePue: That gets us to higher education reform, another one that I think Governor Edgar was especially pushing from his side. That was another initiative, as he saw it in 1995, that was crucial. Do you have any thoughts about how that worked its way through the system?

Watson: I can't recall what the... We did the Chicago School Reform.

DePue: That was the next thing I was going to ask about.

Watson: School construction, we did that.

DePue: Higher education reform was to reform the way the college system was organized. You had the Board of Trustees and the Board of Governors; that was reorganized. Sangamon State University became the University of Illinois, Springfield, so it was directly connected with the University of Illinois and the Chicago Circle Campus, Governors' State and things like that. That wasn't something that caught your attention?

Watson: That was when we ended the election of trustees at the University of Illinois. They became governor appointed. I can see pluses and minuses with that. I was just now with a trustee of the University of Illinois, and we talked about the members, the governor's appointed members, of the University of Illinois Trustees and how their participation is limited.

You have people who run for the office; they want it. When you're appointed, you don't necessarily have any, maybe, burning desire to be a trustee. Not just at University of Illinois, but all the state universities had their own... Well, University of Illinois was the only one that was elected. The rest of them were all appointed. So that changed drastically. I think... There was some other things. Didn't we change the Boards, the Trustees, to be more regional than university?

DePue: I don't know the details on that. This is the kind of thing that captures the public attention. Certainly the debate about the Illini mascot was broiling by this time. It's one of those things that just went on from election season to

election season, Chief Illiniwek.[36] Where did you sit on that whole issue, and how did it work out in your district?

Watson: Well, I'm surprised you even have to ask (both laugh). I was for the chief. I never looked at that as a mascot that was anything other than a mascot. No, I don't mean that. The chief was revered. He was something that, when you became Chief Illiniwek—and I've known several—you went to Oklahoma, to the reservation, learned their traits, the dance, what they did. I never thought that I looked at it as anything other than being looked upon as... Now, what's the word I want to use? Not revered.

DePue: Respected.

Watson: It was very respected. It was very respectfully done, and everyone looked forward to that. It was a big thing when he came out on the football field or in the assembly hall, wherever. It was a great honor for somebody to be selected to be Chief Illiniwek. It wasn't something that was looked upon downwardly at all.

It was just a few people who started all this, and look what they did, not only to Chief Illiniwek, but all the national symbols of their schools have changed. No, I was for the chief and still am.

DePue: Here's another initiative that was coming more from the gubernatorial side, but I'm sure one that you were intensely interested in. That was Chicago school reform.

Watson: The answer to that is yes (laughs). I was chairman of the Education Committee when we first took control in '93. We came up with language of the Chicago school reform. It passed the Senate because we were in the majority. It got over to the House and didn't pass.

DePue: What did the Republicans in the Senate see as the fundamental problem with the school system in Chicago?

Watson: Accountability, educators not being accountable for the students. I visited a lot of schools in Chicago when I was chairman. I can remember specifically going into classrooms where no one was even in there. A principal, for whatever reason, would decide to take me into a particular classroom, and then nobody was there, study hall or whatever.

[36] Chief Illiniwek was the symbol of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, associated with the university's intercollegiate athletic programs, from 1926 to 2007, when the university retired him. For more than two decades prior to that, a controversy had brewed between fans and alumni and those who viewed such mascots as cultural appropriation of images and rituals that perpetuate stereotypes of American Indian peoples.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Illiniwek)

It was very disruptive. It was just things that people... They had a term they called "supernumerary," where if someone was not fit to necessarily be in the classroom, instead of dismissing them as a teacher, they became a supernumerary, and they were like a substitute teacher. They went to the unit office and waited there to be called to do something else.

A lot of things were going on with Chicago public schools. Of course, Bill Bennett came to Illinois and proclaimed Chicago schools as the worst school system in the country. That was during Reagan's term; he [Bennett] was secretary of education. There were a lot of problems in Chicago.

We just thought accountability, responsibility was one of them, and that's what we did. Then when we took control, both of the senate and the house and the governor, we passed the legislation that would have significant changes. It created local school board councils that would be made up of individuals from the local schools, up there in the region or in the neighborhood. They were accountable for principals.

A lot of parts of that legislation has been changed, but the intent was to create more responsibility locally, individually, by the individual schools to run their schools, versus top down, create more personal responsibility in the neighborhoods. That affected that in some ways I think was good.

DePue: I know part of that equation was that, prior to this change, the school superintendent and the School Board were able to operate pretty independently of the city government, in that it was important in the legislation that the legislation pass that responsibility directly on to Mayor Daley, under Richard M. Daley.

Watson: We did give him the responsibility of that.

DePue: In fact, it no longer was called the superintendent; the position was chief executive officer, I believe.

Watson: Paul Vallas would have been his first appointed. That was a very good appointment. Paul Vallas became... You didn't have to be an educator to be superintendent. I think a businessperson, someone with some business practice, was well suited for that.

DePue: He came from the position of budget director for the city.

Watson: Yeah, maybe even the state. He worked for the state at one time, for Phil Rock.

DePue: And then he went up north.

Watson: And then he went up north, okay. Then he became superintendent. He did very well for himself, going into other schools throughout the country. But we did give the mayor that responsibility, and that was a good appointment.

DePue: I'm sure part of the discussion was what to do with the teachers union and the whole issue of tenure? I know that the tenure track for teachers in Chicago changed from a two-year time frame to a four-year time frame, and more power was given to local principals and to that whole hierarchy, to discipline teachers. Was that an especially contentious part of the legislation?

Watson: Very much so. I can remember during debate, I said that when I heard from the Chicago Teachers Union, there was never a mention of the child, of the student. To me, that's what education is all about. But not from the union's point of view. I thought that was wrong, and I said so. I got a lot of hate mail as a result of that. But I felt it; I just felt like the kids are what's important in education. What you do for them determines what the rest of their life is going to be. Give them a good chance. Get them a good opportunity to get out and do something. I don't necessarily think that was what the union's attitude, at that point in time, was the case.

You said, work rules. That was all about the supernumeraries and the idea of giving principals more control. Of course, the local school councils, giving them more control over the principal was an idea to just make it a building. The school was a building, not a unit, the big Chicago public schools. It was a building, and these people were responsible for it.

DePue: As you recall, was this something that Mayor Daley was in favor of?

Watson: No, he wasn't, not initially.

DePue: Was it something that you could get Democrat votes from Chicago to back?

Watson: No.

DePue: What was the reason for their opposition?

Watson: The Chicago Teachers Union. A lot of money went into those people up there that were running for office that came from the Chicago Teachers Union. I don't think there was one Democrat from Chicago that voted for this...Judy Erwin. I take that back. Judy Erwin was a House member, and she supported it. She was from Chicago.

DePue: A Democrat?

Watson: Democrat.

DePue: Did she hold her seat afterwards?

Watson: Yes. In fact, I think she was appointed to... I don't know if it's the executive director of the Board of Higher Education or whatever. I think she's out of state government now, but she was looked upon after that, with a lot of respect, by our side anyway, the Republicans.

DePue: Was privatization of schools, charter schools, any of that part of the equation?

Watson: Charter schools was a separate legislation, but the whole idea again was primarily being for Chicago, the charter school idea. I still think it is. It has some great deal of merit.

DePue: I could be wrong on this, but I believe that somewhere down the road—I don't know how many years—Mayor Daley and other Democrats started to take credit for some of this change? (Watson laughs)

Watson: When it became effective, when people recognized that it was a good thing, yeah, there was a lot of people rushing to the table to say, "Yeah, I was there." But Mayor Daley was not. I was directly involved in all of that. It was Pat O'Malley in the senate, myself, and Dan Cronin, who became...

Dan Cronin was the education chairman when we passed the Chicago School Reform, and he was the chief sponsor of the legislation. The other two of us were cosponsors but were directly involved. We were on the committee, and we wanted to see something done. But Cronin was the guy who was the one who passed it in the senate.

DePue: Did you have any direct dealings with Daley on it?

Watson: No. Everything came through his people he sent to Springfield. He didn't come to Springfield very often.

DePue: How much of the credit for the effectiveness of the reform can be put on Paul Vallas, as the first administrator?

Watson: A lot, I would say a lot...and the mayor. The mayor made the right decision. He didn't want it, but he got it. We gave it to him whether he wanted it or not. He made the right decision in selecting Paul Vallas, who became a good superintendent. And he had Arne Duncan. Arne Duncan is now the U.S. superintendent—I don't know what they call it—Anyway, he's superintendent of schools at the U.S. level, appointed by Barack Obama. He was also appointed by Daley.

DePue: Secretary of Education is he?

Watson: Secretary of Education (laughs), excuse me.

DePue: Well, it's interesting; history keeps evolving, and it's just within the last couple of weeks that the Chicago Teachers Union went on strike. Mayor [Rahm] Emanuel decided to take on the Chicago Teachers Union, and they solved the strike. Was part of this legislation that it was illegal for the Chicago Teachers Union to go on strike?

Watson: Yes, that's correct.

DePue: So what happened?

Watson: It was changed. When the Democrats took back control, I believe they changed it. This was in ’95, so they had ample opportunity over the last decade, certainly, to get that done.

DePue: Now there are all kinds of discussions about how poorly the Chicago school system does, that it only graduates about 50 percent of the kids who make it into high school, a graduation rate that many of them are illiterate, or they fall well below the scores. Is that because the legislation you guys passed in ’95 wasn’t really as effective as you thought initially, or is it because it was watered down over time?

Watson: Well I think, initially, it was very effective. Maybe it was watered down, but I think education is only as good as the parents. If kids aren’t raised properly and disciplined in their home…

The schools are expected to do unbelievable things with students today. They’ve got to feed them; they’ve got to educate them; they’ve got to administer all the student’s medications. There’s a lot of responsibility of being an educator today. If parents aren’t going to be part of the equation and just send their little Johnny and Susie off to school, and let them take care of it, and then deal with problems when they come home... I think what the big problem with education today is parent involvement and [the] lack of and disinterest that that’s created. Unfortunately, [there are] students all over, everywhere that just have no desire to be educated.

DePue: You mention parents. I would think a significant percentage of the students going to school in Chicago have only one parent.

Watson: Only one parent, that’s a perfect example. That explains... The school system is a symptom of what happens in the home. And as a result of what’s happening in the home, oftentimes kids come to school; they sleep at school because they can’t at home. It’s too bad, but it’s a societal problem that has to be dealt with. Our country has fallen woefully behind others in our education successes, and we’re letting the masses down. Maybe we’ve got some people that are doing well, but overall, I think education itself has not done a good job in the last ten, fifteen years.

DePue: It almost sounds like you’re suggesting that problems of the American school system—let’s take the Chicago school system, specifically—can’t be solved by legislation addressing the Chicago school system.

Watson: I would say so. I think that that sometimes can be the case.

DePue: So what is the solution?

Watson: Well, that's a whole different... I really think education... When we took prayer out of schools, and we're taking more and more out of schools as we go on, even the Pledge of Allegiance for Pete's sake. Then the unions prevailing. I'm not anti-teacher. I just think sometimes the union side of education has had a lot to do with the problems. I don't know if it's... You want to instill incentive in people, and you want to instill a desire to do something. I think the union kind of takes that away sometimes.

DePue: Getting back to 1995, it was a crucial year, stepping away from school reform. Edgar signs the Truth in Sentencing Bill that year that ensures that those convicted of violent crimes stay behind bars for a longer time period, and to include, if you're found guilty of first degree murder, you're going to spend 100 percent of your sentence. Do you recall that legislation?

Watson: Yeah, everybody was for that, but then, of course, that created a problem in our corrections' units. It was a problem previously, but that just exacerbated the number of people incarcerated. In Illinois, [that number] went to another level. We had to build more prisons, and that was over the time period. That's been a bad thing for Illinois because we've had the cost of incarcerating people, the expense of building the prisons and keeping them updated.

DePue: Does that mean, in reflection back on it, that you wouldn't have voted for it at the time?

Watson: (laughs) You couldn't be a law and order senator from Southern Illinois and not vote for that (both laugh). That's one of those things where you look back and you think, Maybe that wasn't the right thing, but at the time, and even today, probably most people would vote for it, because you don't want to be soft on crime. If you're perceived to be soft on crime, well then that's not a good thing politically, but there's a cost with that.

DePue: You mentioned that everybody was for that. I'm assuming you mean the Republicans in the senate were lockstep in support of that.

Watson: Oh, yes.

DePue: The Democrats?

Watson: I think a lot of them were. Maybe not the city, different constituency in the city. That's where the crime is. Wherever crime was prevalent, those senators didn't vote for it or those reps didn't vote for it, whoever they were.

DePue: Even though it was their citizens that were victims of it.

Watson: Yeah, I'd say that most... I shouldn't put a blanket over all that, over everybody, but I think, if you look back, I think the people that opposed it weren't concerned about the citizenry.

DePue: The next thing on the list—a more pleasant topic perhaps—(Watson laughs) June 5 of 1995, the Illinois House and Senate passed the state budget, the earliest agreement in sixty-two years. Maybe for that reason, you might not remember much about it.

Watson: I actually thought there was a time when we did it by June, what 5?

DePue: June 5.

Watson: I thought it was sometime in April, we... Didn't we adjourn once, before the actual adjournment date?

DePue: I think maybe it was in future years. Certainly in Edgar's timeframe, the early years, because of the budget deficits and all.

Watson: That's right. The actual adjournment still was June 30, I believe, that year. Yes, I think so. So that being the case, I can see where, yes, to have an agreement like that. That helps everybody, especially all the units of state government that depend on the budget. July 1, and we pass it June 5, that helped them a lot, they [the school districts] knew money they were going to have.

DePue: At the end of that legislative year, did you feel pretty good about what the legislature had accomplished?

Watson: Yes. I feel good about those two years, when we were in the majority, the governor [was] Edgar, and Lee Daniels was speaker, and Pate was president of the senate. Yes, I feel good about those two years.

DePue: Would it be fair to call them the highlight of your legislative career?

Watson: No. I would put my time in leadership as my highlight. Even though it was under Blagojevich and all the problems we had, I would say that that would have to be the highlight.

DePue: This would have been legislation also passed in that time frame, but July 1, 1995, the state government reorganized the new Department of Natural Resources. So you had the Department of Conservation, Energy and Natural Resources, the Department of Mines and Minerals all coming together.

Watson: That was a big initiative of the governor's. Once again, that didn't come in the legislature. Some of us had reservations about that. You consolidate, the idea being you're going to save money, and everything is going to be under one umbrella. It doesn't always work out, and I'm not sure it did in this case. But I think the idea being that all the environmental agencies of state government were going to be under the Department of Natural Resources made some sense. I supported it.

DePue: I don't think the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency was part of that.

Watson: No, they're not, no they're not. The Natural Resources of Illinois were all part of it.

DePue: What was the rationale not to include EPA; do you recall?

Watson: I have no idea, other than the strength of the EPA is strong, Illinois EPA. To put it into another agency of others, together, might have diluted their strength and their respect that they had throughout the state. I'm not saying that everything that the EPA did was good. The regulations that came out of the IEPA and some of the decisions they made over the years have not necessarily been beneficial. But everyone was always concerned about the environment, and maybe a political decision is part of that too.

DePue: I would think if you do put it into the Department of Natural Resources, then you've got EPA bumping some serious heads with the folks in mines and minerals as well.

Watson: (laughs) Well that's true; that would be, because they did. They constantly do that.

DePue: Did you have constituents that were very much aligned with the mining industry?

Watson: Some. We don't have them anymore. The coal mining industry is out of my area altogether.

DePue: Well, that would be because of the sulfur content, right?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Was that something driven by national or state legislation?

Watson: More national, yes, because of the high sulfur content. Albers Coal Mine, they provided coal to the power plants that were being regulated by the U.S. EPA, and of course, they had to cut down their emissions and that was part of it, by using different coal. So we bring coal, now, from the western states, to burn in our power plants.

DePue: How much pain did that cause in your district?

Watson: A lot, because there were 400 and some people employed at the Albers Coal Mine, let alone the management and all that. Yeah, it was significant pain as a result of that decision. I flew to Houston, in fact—Exxon owned them—trying to persuade them to keep it open, but to no [avail].

DePue: Did it cost you politically because of what changed there?

Watson: No, not at all. It would have if I had sat aside and did nothing, but I think most people felt I did everything I could to try to keep it open.

DePue: It sounds like most of the mining areas though, were south of your district. Would that be right?

Watson: Right, there are some up in the northern part of it, Macoupin County. But the southern part of the district would have been Clinton County, now Washington County. There's a coal mine there now.

DePue: Well the next subject here—probably the last for today, unless you want to hold off for next time—is a rather long discussion about the educational reform in terms of payments to schools, et cetera, and that went on from 1995 to '97. I thought I'd just lay that all out in the same session. Are you ready to talk about that?

Watson: Yeah, I think so.

DePue: Let's start with some background from your perspective, about the challenges of how the State of Illinois funds education, between state and local districts, how that works itself out.

Watson: Well, as a downstater, I mean, we've always felt we have not been funded adequately. Of course, the suburbs—as I mentioned earlier—their property tax rich. They have a great base of support from industrial and commercial, residential that support their districts. A lot of their revenue they get for schools is locally driven.

DePue: How much is just the fact that, if you're buying a house like this in Chicago or the suburbs, it's maybe twice as much to purchase the house in the first place as it is down in Greenville?

Watson: Well, that could be when property values were high, so they paid a higher tax, percentage wise.

DePue: Sorry to interrupt you.

Watson: No, that's fine. But that's the way it is. Property values were much higher in Chicago and in suburban areas, and as a result, their property tax base was much greater than ours is downstate. If you're fortunate to have a nuclear power plant or some coal mine or some major industry within your school district, that oftentimes helped, but a lot of them were downstate.

We always felt that we were making an effort downstate to tax ourselves adequately to create enough support for our schools. We weren't getting enough from the state. As a result, our per student expenditure is considerably less than what it is up north. They're paying higher property taxes, but their values are higher. So there is a give and take there.

We felt that we should be getting, not equal per student expenditure, but somewhat closer than what we've gotten over the years. That was a very contentious issue with school funding, was that whole effort of downstate schools.

DePue: You just described a scenario where you would generally be in favor—you're going to correct this I'm sure—Your constituents...You, in particular, as a politician, would generally be in favor of increasing state income tax, so that the state can kick in a higher amount of money for your school districts.

Watson: There was issues, different ways of doing it, but certainly state support for our local school districts, yes.

DePue: So, the state's got to get us money someplace.

Watson: They talked about a local income tax. I supported that.

DePue: I know Governor Edgar, when he ran in '74 and '76, he was in favor of that.

Watson: Yeah, there was an effort to do that, so that districts, wherever you were, you could tax, because we felt that we were sending a substantial amount of money—we being downstate, and that's Rockford all the way to Cairo—that we were sending a substantial amount of our income to the state, as any region would. Chicago feels like they send, and they do. The suburban areas, and they do, they send a lot. But we felt that we should be getting a little more back, to help our per student expenditures.

If I knew that the income tax—just as the lottery was supposed to do—over and above what the current level of funding [is], the income tax would go to fund education. But it gets siphoned off for other projects. If you really, truly knew that it was going to go to education, I think people [would] have a different attitude about it. But I don't think they trust the political system in Illinois, didn't trust politicians to do that and make sure that the dollars [that] are made available today for education will be there tomorrow.

DePue: Did your constituents think that when they paid their state income tax, it would end up in Chicago, and they wouldn't get their fair share?

Watson: That was the attitude of a lot of people here, still is.

DePue: Is that your attitude?

Watson: Not necessarily, no. My attitude has changed over the years. I recognize the importance of Chicago to this state and the region. The industrial base that's up there, they contribute a great deal to the economy of this state. It comes out of the six county area up there, and most of the public doesn't recognize that.

But I think being there and seeing what I've seen and how revenues are generated in Illinois, they come out of the Chicago region.

DePue: Here are some specifics, in terms of... I found this in an article, I believe. "In general, 70 percent of the funding,"—this would have been the '95, '96 timeframe.

Watson: This is an article from '95?

DePue: Yeah, it would be addressing that time frame. Seventy percent of the funding came from property taxes, up to 95 percent in some of the richer suburban districts of Chicago, the collar counties, et cetera. One report asserted that, "Seven hundred thousand of the state's 2 million students were not supported adequately with funding," and it could range anywhere from $15,000 per student to $3,000 per student. Of those 700,000, are most of those are rural districts, or is some of that Chicago?

Watson: Some would be considered Chicago probably. What was the number again, 700,000 of the total?

DePue: Two million.

Watson: That would be downstate. Every district was guaranteed a certain amount from the state. So those districts that got 95 percent locally generated, still got 5 percent of the money from the state. New Trier would be a good example of what you said, $15,000 a student? Those kind of districts, that had huge local property taxes, they were probably close to 95 percent funded. But because of the revenue generated locally, they were able to put that kind of money behind each student. That's great for them.

I understand why there was so much objection by suburban schools to us dictating policy. They felt that their schools got their money locally, therefore their local school boards ought to control their districts, not somebody sitting in Springfield that might be from somewhere else. I totally agree with that. They took exception to a lot of things that we mandated onto every school district, and they resisted that because they felt their revenue was coming locally, and it was.

Us downstate is different entirely. You have a community that has no real industrial or commercial base; it's all residential. Property taxes, they always look at us as not paying a lot of property taxes. Well, that's because our income isn't as high as theirs, for one thing. So, if you compare apples and apples, we were right up there with them and still are, but our funding from the state doesn't match.

DePue: I would think that's why this equation of how you determine tax rates for farmland was so important as well.

Watson: That's true; that's true. Jim Edgar recognized that. That was his big proposal, back in '96, you said?

DePue: Well, it's going to start in '95, and it goes all the way to the very end of '97.

Watson: I have a picture. I was sponsor of the bill that school construction was part of and more money for... We shifted money from high schools to elementary districts. That was a big part of Edgar's educational reform package, of which I was a sponsor, one of the sponsors. At that particular time, everybody thought that was great. We solved the problems of education. Of course, we didn't. We've talked about it before, as time goes on, more money is needed, or more changes are needed.

DePue: Here's the initial step that Governor Edgar took. Mind you, this is May 4, 1995, just a few months beyond the election, where he pummeled Dawn Clark Netsch for suggesting that the state should raise income tax and then have this corresponding decrease in property tax. His solution is, let's appoint a special commission on education, a blue ribbon commission.

Watson: We had a lot of those.

DePue: (laughs) He appoints University of Illinois President, Stanley Ikenberry, to head that commission of eighteen members. It would be their job to figure out how to solve the problem of this imbalance in state spending for schools.

Watson: The Ikenberry Commission, yep.

DePue: Were you generally supportive of that move?

Watson: Yes, oh yes, very much so.

DePue: But when you said, "We're good at appointing commissions." Oftentimes the political comment is, "It's just a way for a politician to protect themselves from the pushback."

Watson: Shift the burden, yeah. Ikenberry, of course, was president of [the University of] Illinois, Stanley Ikenberry. He was well respected in the state. I don't remember who all was on that commission, but it wasn't just some fluff appointment. Those people worked, and everybody expected that their suggestions would be seriously considered.

DePue: The results of the commission came out in March of 1996. Here are the reports. They recommended that a standard flat minimum rate that each student should receive in the state of Illinois would be $4,225. At the time, it was much lower than that, maybe around $2,900-$3,000 per student. So that would be a significant increase.

They further suggested the state fund at the level of $2,000 per student, which must have been a significant increase as before. They recognized, if that was the case, there would need to be a $1.9 billion increase in state taxes, with a corresponding decrease of $1.5 for local property taxes. So it looks to be (laughs) very similar to what Netsch was proposing a couple years before.

They sought to guarantee a baseline support each year, equalization of grants for areas with low property wealth—as you've been talking about, rural areas—and they recommended that the state's share should at least be 50 percent. That's, in essence, what the Ikenberry Commission reported. How did that go down in the Illinois Senate at the time?

Watson: The last one you mentioned, the 50 percent, of course, what the suburban districts felt was that, okay, 50 percent. Then we should get 50 percent from the state, where they were getting 20 percent, 25 percent. So, there was differences of views about what that statement actually meant. What we looked at, of course, was that we would get 50 percent of the money from the state. We would come up to that level, or maybe even, in some cases... That was at least the minimum, right, 50 percent?

DePue: Yeah, a minimum of 50 percent. But the other important minimum is $4,225, and it sounds like you were way below that.

Watson: We were woefully below that, and that was the big feeling from downstate schools, was the per student dollar amounts spent per student would go up. And that was significant for us. Most people downstate supported this idea, because it was going to help school districts that were what we called woefully underfunded. Whether it was either local or state, they didn't get enough money to do the job.

DePue: That's the report. So Edgar has to translate that into his recommendations for legislation. He comes out and says, at the beginning of this whole push, "The system isn't equitable. It isn't fair. It isn't right." Would you agree with that?

Watson: Oh, yeah, I agreed with him, yep.

DePue: He did take the recommendation that says, "We need to figure out how to increase state taxes by $1.9 billion," and began looking for a $1.4 billion swap in property taxes. He did support this notion that the state should kick in 50 percent. So, now you've got what looks, again, to be very close to what Netsch was proposing, a state income tax increase, as the most likely way to find $1.9 billion more in state revenue. What was Pate's response to it?

Watson: Oh, he wasn't for this at all, no. In fact, it ended up as a constitutional amendment.

DePue: That was the other part of the initiative, that Edgar was pushing for a constitutional amendment. You're right.

Watson: Okay. I supported the constitutional amendment, but Pate didn't. Most of the suburban people did not support this at all.

DePue: Did that divide the caucus then, in serious ways?

Watson: No. It divided our opinion on an issue but not the caucus. The caucus was always strong.

DePue: How about the Democrats from Chicago, would they have been in support of this?

Watson: Some areas probably would, but they were already at the minimum, I'm sure higher than minimum per student dollar.

DePue: I'm wondering if it's part of Edgar's strategy, that he figures I'm going to get some Republican support but I'm not going to get the suburban Republicans, that's just not going to happen. But I can cross the line by getting Democrats in Chicago, especially.

Watson: I think they did support it. I think there was significant enough money going to the Chicago schools, but I just don't remember.

DePue: What were you hearing from your constituents?

Watson: They were for it. School people were all for it, because they recognized that we were going to get an influx of new revenue.

DePue: But they also would recognize that their income tax is going to go up, and they're probably not going to see a drop in their property tax.

Watson: Well, that's not what the constitutional amendment said. I mean, a certain amount of money was going to replace…

DePue: So the constitutional amendment would mandate that the property taxes would be lowered.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: But it doesn't get through the legislature in '96, and I think it ran into even more trouble in the House and the Senate?

Watson: The leaders being from suburban [areas], I could see where it would have problems.

DePue: January of '97, Edgar gives his State of the State speech and education funding is at the very top of the list. In January and February, he goes around the state to drum up support. So he's putting a lot of his political capital into trying to get this passed, even though he knows he's got some interesting political

dynamics in the legislature to get that through. And he actually, in April and May, he uses $375,000 of his own campaign fund to run campaign ads in support of this. Do you remember that?

Watson: No, but if he did, that shows you how committed he was. I do remember that he was very committed to it. Besides bringing the state fiscal matters into order, as he did as governor, being "Governor No," education I think would be the second issues, that both higher and secondary education would be what he's remembered for.

DePue: Governor No and the very tough budget years that he had the first couple years, but by 1997, the economic equation was entirely different. Those were boom years, and everything was going well. August of 1997, he announced his decision to not run for reelection, to basically step down from politics. Did that surprise you?

Watson: Yes and no, I guess. He was concerned about the impact that the pressure of the office was on his health. Of course, having the bypass already, I can see where a decision like that could be made. He was a relatively young man at the time. We kind of looked at him as the future of the party in Illinois, whether it would be staying on as governor or going U.S., or doing... He was the leader of the party, and it was a disappointing day when he said he was stepping down, not running.

DePue: Part of the equation at the time was a possibility of even running for the U.S. Senate. I think [Illinois Senator] Carol Moseley Braun was seen as very vulnerable at the time.

Watson: He was courted twice, as a matter of fact, to run for the U.S. Senate. The first time, I understood why he stepped down. The second time, heart bypasses aren't what they used to be. They're a bump in the road anymore, a big bump, but it's not like a heart attack (DePue laughs). It corrects problems, potential problems. So you should be healthier after you have a bypass, and I think he has been. Of course, like I said, he took care of himself and eats right and doesn't partake of the wrong beverage necessarily a lot (laughs). So he did the right thing; he's done the right thing for his life.

DePue: We still have this issue that's unresolved and takes us through the rest of that particular calendar year. In the fall, the legislative battle heats up again. I guess this is the fall veto session. The legislature would adjourn early July, if not in the June time frame, so in the veto session. He calls for higher taxes on cigarettes, on phone bills, higher taxes on riverboats, and higher penalties on late income tax filers. He comes up with a number of $485 million more into the state coffers each year. He's trying to get to that point of having enough money. It passes in the Senate. Do you recall how you would have voted on that one, probably in support?

Watson: I supported it.

DePue: It's defeated in the House by four votes, and he's not able to get Chicago Democrats...at least all of them aren't voting for it. Do you know why Chicago Democrats would have had problems at that time?

Watson: No, I don't.

DePue: And then it comes up again. He calls a special session in December. It's in that special session that apparently—and this is early, early December—this is finally passed and establishes a baseline of $4,225 per student. Included in that package is $1.5 billion in funds for local school construction.

Watson: I was a big proponent of that. I might have been a sponsor of this (both laugh). I'm serious.

DePue: When the last bill came forward?

Watson: I might have been. At least I remember speaking on it, because school construction was a big deal. We'd set the parameters by which schools would be eligible for it. Consolidation had taken place in the '50s primarily, so a lot of schools were crumbling. Then, of course, the little bitty schools, there were a lot of problems with school construction. They didn't have the wherewithal to do it locally. So making money available from the state level was important. We did the bonding issue. We did that earlier too. Back in the '70s, we did a school construction plan, and we modeled what was done in the '90s, and what was done in the '70s.

DePue: It sounds like, from your perspective, the beneficiaries of the construction portion of the bill would have been some of the more rural, poorer districts in the southern part of the state.

Watson: We also made it available to new districts, which helped the suburban area that was rapidly growing up there. They were having decisions to make to build new schools. We made it available to them, also. It was a very popular program because the next... Governor Ryan expanded it further, and I think we may have even done it again.

DePue: Was school consolidation encouraged as part of the legislation?

Watson: There was a component on school consolidation. I guess, if schools did consolidate, we made money available for them to build a new school. That would have been it.

DePue: How does the issue of school consolidation play out in a district like yours?

Watson: Not good. Everybody wants to keep their own local school. In some communities, that's the economy of the community, is the school district.

People have gone there, to school. “I was an Eagle. My son’s going to be an eagle,” that kind of thing. If you talk to a district right now about consolidating with someone else, the community that is being impacted, as far as closing a school, would be vehemently opposed to it. It’s a hot potato, politically, in rural districts primarily.

DePue: Another part of this package, though, isn’t just the funding levels. I think there was a component that dealt with teacher certification and tenure issues as well. Is that, again, to sweeten the pot as far as some of the Republicans are concerned or just legitimate concerns about the issues that we’ve talked about before?

Watson: I’m almost sure I was a sponsor of this, because I caught a lot of heat for this.

DePue: What? From local school boards?

Watson: Not school boards.

DePue: Teachers unions?

Watson: Teachers didn’t like the idea of tenure only being... I think you had four years now, before you became tenured. Before, it was two years.

DePue: That was the solution for Chicago, but as I understand, Chicago is a completely separate school district. So I would assume this isn’t applied to them.

Watson: Probably not. It probably didn’t apply to any school district that was—what is it—500,000 students in the Chicago schools?

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: There was a way in which you just carved out Chicago and did it for everybody else. Tenure was a big issue for educators, still is, but the idea being that two years wasn’t enough to find out whether someone should be in education or maybe they ought to be doing something else.

So we expanded it to four years, and that was downstate. It was met with mixed emotions in the education community, primarily unions. Again, not necessarily teachers, unless you were a teacher that was in that time period, you know, they were always concerned about getting tenure. That was important to any educator.

DePue: I think we’ve talked about this before. The teachers’ union is like most unions. Most unions are typically going to back the Democrat and not the Republican. Did you generally get good support from teachers in your district?

Watson: From the teachers, I did. Then the union, in the ultimate end, when they realized they couldn’t beat me, they said, “Okay, we’ll join you” kind of thing.

My attitude about funding education was always very progressive. I was about more money for kids, for schools. It was the collective bargaining issues that I had a problem with, with the unions. If they want to collective bargain, do it locally, not in Springfield. You would be making decisions in Springfield that would ultimately impact every district. If you want to do something locally, do it, but not force it on every school district. That's how I got sideways with the union.

DePue: Correct me if I get this one wrong. But as I understand it, pension issues is where this is all coming to a head today. The teachers' pension fund is grossly underfunded. Are pensions negotiated at the local level, and then the state taxes pay for them?

Watson: No. Pensions are dictated by the Teachers' Retirement System. The legislature controls the language that gives the pensions out, not locally. That's another reason I was kind of sideways with the union all the time. I didn't necessarily think it was a good idea to be expanding pensions, without increases in funding, and we did that on a regular basis in Springfield.

DePue: We, as the legislature as a whole? You were generally opposed to that?

Watson: I was generally opposed to that. That was another negative with the unions; I wasn't supporting those type of issues. I think it proved me right. I think I was right by voting no. It's easy to vote yes and be everybody's friend, but to vote no on issues that impact...that no one knows you voted no, except the people who wanted the issue. That's kind of tough politically, but that's the way I did it. I explained it, and most people understood it. So I was able to survive thirty years doing that (laughs).

DePue: The other thing that I didn't mention, it wasn't just that one fiscal year of '97 or '98, but in fiscal year 2000, the state funding level would increase to $4,325. I shouldn't say state funding, the minimum that a student…

Watson: Local and state dollars.

DePue: Correct, $4,325, and then in 2001, $4,425, and it has only gone north from there, because most governors, the first thing that they're going to talk about supporting is education.

Watson: That's right. It has to. As costs go up every year, you've got to put more money behind it. Salaries have gone up considerably, as maybe they should. You don't want people not being paid properly in education, or the best and the brightest don't go into it.

DePue: Left out of this whole bill though, is any mention about requirements for property tax relief. I don't think the constitutional amendment went anywhere either.

Watson: No, it failed, but not by much. It was close. The business community went against it, and that's what doomed it.

DePue: The bottom line is that it passes; local school districts get more money from the state. But the other part of the bottom line is the State of Illinois is sitting at what, a $17 billion budget deficit right now, in that neighborhood?

Watson: Probably. Incredible, isn't it, how we can get ourselves this far in debt. It's kind of a shame. You have no idea where the state's gone, and the people responsible for it don't seem to have any urgency of solving the problem, none, the governor or the speaker of the house. The speaker of the house is the one that controls everything, and he could decide, We're going to do something differently. But he doesn't because it's not necessarily politically expedient to do it.

DePue: Well, we've covered a lot of territory today, governor. But we didn't cover a lot of years.

Watson: Governor? I never made it to governor.

DePue: I'm sorry, Senator, Senator. Did you ever have a consideration of running for executive office?

Watson: A Republican downstate can never get elected, I don't believe. Edgar, he was appointed to secretary of state, so he had the name recognition out there to get to the next step, to governor. I don't think a Republican downstate can win.

DePue: Anyway, we covered maybe three or four years total, but there was an awful lot of territory, because those were busy years, when the Republicans were in control.

Watson: Very much so.

DePue: It's been a fascinating discussion. I think, next session, we'll get into the time when you are legitimately the leader in the senate. That's a few years down the road, but we'll get to that point.

Watson: Okay, very good.

DePue: It won't get any less interesting as we talk about the Ryan and the Blagojevich years.

Watson: (laughs) No it won't; no it won't.

DePue: Thank you very much, Senator.

Watson: You bet.

(end of transcript #4)

Interview with Frank Watson

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Interview # 05: October 10, 2012
Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is October 10, 2012. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm in the library with Senator Frank Watson. How are you this morning?

Watson: I'm wonderful. Good morning, Mark.

DePue: What brings you to Springfield today?

Watson: You (laughs). You, and then we also have an event this afternoon at the mansion. I'm on the committee, the Executive Mansion Committee. We have a meeting this afternoon and then tonight, a fundraiser.

DePue: That's an amazing building, I think, the mansion is.

Watson: It is, and it's got a lot of history there. We talked about that, Dave Bourland.[37] I think you have…

[37] Dave Bourland served two stints as mansion curator for the nonprofit Illinois Executive Mansion Association, and then became the manager of exhibits at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. (https://www.sj-r.com/article/20150625/NEWS/150629646)

DePue: I've met Dave.

Watson: He certainly would be one to interview, because he's been there a long time and done a wonderful job there. They've got a lot of memorabilia there and Lincoln stuff.

DePue: Is that the largest mansion in the country? I think he mentioned that it was.

Watson: It could very well be. I really don't know, but it's good sized; there's a lot of square footage there.

DePue: Let's talk a little bit more about Jim Edgar. That's where we left off last time. We finished off with a fairly detailed discussion about his education initiatives. Since you were on that committee... For a while, were you the chairman of the committee?

Watson: For two years.

DePue: That's obviously a subject dear to your heart. At the tail end of the Edgar Administration, 1996 and '97 especially, a lot of oxygen was being used up, in Springfield at least—and I suspect in a lot of newsrooms—about the "scandal" in the Edgar Administration. That was the MSI scandal [Management Services of Illinois].[38] Can you talk a little bit about your opinions about that scandal?

Watson: Of course, it was in the Edgar Administration. Everybody called Edgar, "Mr. Clean." I think, as it turned out—and I think still today—people would associate Mr. Clean with Jim Edgar. I don't think it really had much of an impact on his history as governor or even at the time. It was a big story and a lot of talk about it and concern, but it didn't inhibit his ability to govern.

DePue: Do you think he knew about the scandal, that he was involved with it?

Watson: No. No. The unfortunate thing about being somebody at the top, you have a lot of people under you, and you can't control everything that goes on. You're involved as much as you can, but decisions made by someone else impacts you. You're at the top; you take all the hits. I don't necessarily believe that he was directly involved at all.

DePue: It was toward the tail end of that—and he actually had to testify a couple times for that—It was about that same time, though, the fall of 1997, I think there were probably even some discussions that he had with his chief lieutenants at the State Fair in August of '97, about whether or not he should retire or move

[38] During Illinois's Governor Jim Edgar's second term, the relationship between his re-election campaign and Management Systems of Illinois (MSI) came under federal scrutiny. MSI, Edgar's largest campaign contributor, had been granted a contract that cost an estimated $20 million in overcharges. Edgar was never accused of wrongdoing. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Edgar)

on to the senate perhaps, run for the senate or run for governor again. What would your opinion have been on what he should have been doing?

Watson: Oh, I would have loved to see him run for governor again. He was doing a good job; things were righting themselves. He was a very responsible individual. He had to say no to a lot of people; he had to make the tough decisions. I thought he was a great governor, and I would have welcomed the opportunity for him to [hold that position] another four years.

DePue: Were you surprised when he announced his decision to retire?

Watson: Yes, I was, but I understood, of course, with his health condition and concerns. Rightfully so, he probably made the right decision. But selfish as I am and being a partisan, we lost an awful good Republican for future offices, whether it be U.S. Senate or who knows what he might run for. He was a great governor, a good governor, and did an outstanding job.

DePue: Anything that you can think of the last year, especially in 1998, from a legislative standpoint, that was significant?

Watson: Nineteen ninety-eight. No. All these years run together in the legislature. After thirty years of them, it's hard to pick out particular years and remember what went on.

DePue: It was an election year, so that was obviously the focus of the year, and Edgar was able to leave office with roughly a $1 billion surplus. That's quite different from when he walked into office.

Watson: Yeah, right. That's what I say, four more years of Jim Edgar would have been good for Illinois.

DePue: He also left the state with a rainy day fund. Were you involved or the senate involved with setting that up?

Watson: Yes, very much so. We felt strongly about that, that money should be set aside. Now, it's not being used properly; it never has been. The idea and the thought and the concept of money being available for bad times, putting money away, is a good thought. We do it in our private lives. Why not government? I thought it was a excellent concept, but like I say, it's not necessarily been used as we would have liked.

DePue: When you hear the comments that there was a $1 billion surplus, is that the same thing as the rainy day fund?

Watson: No, not at all. There was a fund set aside—I think it was around $400 million—that was set aside for when times were tough, and you'd have to delve into that and take it out and use it for whatever purposes. So you had money set aside, a savings account.

DePue: I assume that Illinois no longer has any money in the rainy day fund?

Watson: I think that they're required to have it, but it just comes in and goes out. Like I said, it's not being used as it was intended.

DePue: Nineteen ninety-eight, that's an election year. Were you up for reelection that year?

Watson: Let's see, '92 was four years (laughs). You know, I don't remember; I don't recall.

DePue: Well, the assumption we can take from that is, by this time in your career, you're not much worried about reelection campaigns (Watson laughs).

Watson: My really tough election was '92, and then 2002 was a similar type of election. But in between there, I didn't have much.

DePue: And 2002—which we'll get to a little bit later—was a year following redistricting?

Watson: Right, yes.

DePue: Let's talk just a little bit; I want to ask you a couple questions about the gubernatorial election that year. The Republican candidate is George Ryan.

Watson: Right. I made three predictions in my...and I was wrong on all three (laughs). I said Charles Barkley is too small to play in the NBA; light beer will never sell, and George Ryan will be a great governor. Unfortunately... George Ryan did some good things for Illinois, but I think his legacy will obviously be tainted by the fact that he served several years in prison. But he was a guy who got things done, and he worked the other side well, maybe too well.

DePue: So, you were happy to see George Ryan on the ticket for the Republicans that year?

Watson: I was. I was. He had a lot of experience in government. He was a legislator; he was speaker of the house; he was lieutenant governor; he was secretary of state. So he was just primed to be governor. He ran against Glenn Poshard from Southern Illinois, which of course, being from Southern Illinois myself, [I] had some feelings for the fact that here's a downstate guy running. Anyway, I was all for George.

DePue: George is from Kankakee County.

Watson: Yeah, downstate in many people's eyes (laughs).

DePue: Well, that was my question.

Watson: It is, I mean it's south by eighty [Interstate 80]. But Kankakee County is considered downstate. It's just amazing, but it is to the people up north, where the population center is. But to us downstate, we're way downstate. If Kankakee is downstate, Greenville is way downstate, and I don't know where Carbondale will fit into all that. They're almost off the map; they're in Kentucky or Tennessee (both laugh)

DePue: Let alone Cairo. How much had you heard the about the Republican machine from Kankakee County?

Watson: Ed McBroom was a state rep with George, and George's brother was... George and his brother—Tom I believe his name was—were both pharmacists. Of course, me being a pharmacist, I had a good relationship with George, both professionally and politically.

DePue: That was the perfect icebreaker then wasn't it?

Watson: Yeah, oh yeah. But George was a tough guy to get to know. He was not a warm and fuzzy guy that you walk up and have a conversation with. As time went on, I think he softened up. He didn't soften up; maybe I realized that his gruff mannerism was just a mannerism. He really was a very caring individual and warmed up to all of us, over time.

DePue: Tell me a little bit more about your personal relationship with Ryan.

Watson: Well, he came down... When I first ran in '78, he was minority leader of the House, so he needed extra members, of course, to hopefully become Speaker.

He helped me in my election in '78, when Dwight Friedrich and I were both running as Republicans. Many thought that we couldn't elect two Republicans. But George took exception to that and came down and campaigned for me, had a fundraiser for me, so I felt very good about his support.

Anyway, once I got elected, I felt like I was part of the team, as opposed to just walking in a room cold. I knew him and the people around him, so I was ready to go when I came there. I felt very comfortable with him.

DePue: What was the relationship that Pate Philip had with Ryan? How would you describe that?

Watson: I would say one of the reasons Pate stayed on as president of the senate was, he wanted to serve as president of the senate with George and [was] looking forward to it. I think they were the same kind of person. They were get things done kind of people and both kind of [had] the attitude [of] being the backroom, smoke-filled room, get things done type politician. I think he was really looking forward to it, Pate. I think he would tell you that.

DePue: Personality wise, there seemed to be some similarities as well?

Watson: Yes, I would say so. They both were the same type of politician, same type of personality.

DePue: You're avoiding saying what kind of personality it is (laughs).

Watson: Well, they were very gruff, very opinionated. You knew where they stood. That, to many people, is refreshing. To me it was. But to others it would be kind of standoffish maybe, that they weren't necessarily part of the get things done type individual. I felt the opposite. I felt they were very much so.

DePue: From the perspective of the senate, I want you to reflect on a comment that many people made, that it was Lee Daniels who was Ryan's main guy in the legislature.

Watson: That's correct; I would agree with that statement. The Illinois State Senate Republicans were really not one of George Ryan's favorite caucuses. We had some exceptions with him and some problems, like we just talked about. He walked in with a $1 billion surplus. The governor is only good—and George Ryan's case is the same as most people—all of us are only as good as the people you have around you. I always felt that George, some of the people he had around him and [who] were whispering in his ear, were not necessarily best for Illinois.

DePue: Even right from the beginning of his administration, you felt that way?

Watson: Not necessarily, no. But as time went on, and you saw who was in the room—who was there and what was being said—you recognized that things weren't going as good as maybe we'd have liked.

DePue: Who were some of those people?

Watson: (laughs)I don't want to... I wouldn't want to do that, but a lot of them came up in the case in which he was indicted.

DePue: So what was it that you saw that concerned you, that some of these people were doing?

Watson: Well, just them being there. I knew the type of person they were. Some of them weren't even Republicans, not that I was concerned about the fact that he had Democrats advising him. He had to have, because he had to work with both... He had to work with Mike Madigan, so he needed people in the room that would advise him that way.

But it was the Democrat who was there, or it was the Republican that served with him in the house, or maybe it was a state senator that I would always question when I was a member. I always wondered, you know, what

are they looking out for? Are they really [for] the people of Illinois, or is it maybe themselves? I just think, when you're in a position that he is, you've got to surround yourself with good people, and I think some of them that he had were not.

DePue: Even in the midst of his election campaign in 1998, there were lots of rumors swirling around about corruption issues that had been going on for quite a while in the Secretary of State's Office. I assume you heard all those stories.

Watson: This is about the selling of tickets? Yes. Campaign fundraising that was being done on state time?

DePue: How much credence did you give to all those allegations, back in 1998?

Watson: What a lot of people don't understand or don't realize—maybe understand is not the word, realize—I think many of us were oblivious to the... I guess the law that says you couldn't campaign on state time. There were people doing that all over. Not necessarily out there knocking on doors and doing that kind of thing, but even just a conversation now is considered... You can't do it.

I don't necessarily think that some of the things he was doing—not everything, but some of the things he was doing—he was alone. There were other people doing the same thing, by campaigning on state time. Now, he maybe took it to a different level—not him, but subordinates took it to another level—but it was being done.

DePue: What was the term, "cash for license," "cash for bribes?" People would go into the Secretary of State's Office, and the power of the secretary of state is you get your license from them. They had the ability to license truck drivers, and there was cash being exchanged so that people could get truck licenses who had no business driving trucks.

Watson: That could be true, even license plates. This kind of thing... Paul Powell, he had a shoebox full of money.[39] Well, a lot of it came from people who wanted license plates or wanted some favor from the secretary of state.

DePue: You mean a certain number on a license plate?

Watson: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: You've kind of mentioned this already, Ryan is described as a dealmaker, that he had the experience and the temperament to work with both Republicans and Democrats. Would you agree with that?

[39] Days after Illinois Secretary of State Paul Powell died in 1970, a shoe box was found, filled with cash, in the hotel suite where he lived. That shoe box became an enduring symbol of the shady side of Illinois politics. (http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2013-02-24-ct-per-flash-paul-powell-0224-20130224-story.html)

Watson: Yes. Like I said, to his detriment sometimes. I can recall the day that I think George Ryan's portrait was unveiled. Emil Jones, who was the president of the senate, a Democrat, called him one of Illinois's greatest governors. It's because George worked with Democrats and maybe, like I said, too freely (laughs).

But we in the Illinois State Senate, our caucus, had problems with George. That's too bad, and I'm sure that bothered Pate Philip. Like I said, he was looking forward to serving with George and being part of the administration, being president of the senate. I'm sure he was very disappointed.

DePue: Would you say that George Ryan was more comfortable in the skin of an executive or as a legislator?

Watson: I'd say he was more comfortable as a legislator, because George was one who... He had trouble speaking. He had to read his speech whenever he went somewhere. I never thought he was really comfortable as governor. But like I said before, he got things done. A lot of good things came from his administration, even though all the tainted corruption that went on, some good things came out of the administration.

DePue: You just mentioned Emil Jones. He had been the senate minority leader, I think, most or all of the years...yeah, all of the years that Jim Edgar and George Ryan were governors. Tell me your impressions of Emil Jones.

Watson: (laughs) We didn't get along very well. I think a lot of it happened—and I talked to him about this—when Pate was president of the senate. Some people would say he [Pate] was disrespectful to the minority leader on occasion, and really didn't give him the respect that the position warranted.

DePue: Why were they saying that, do you remember? Were there specific incidents?

Watson: Well, I just think Pate just was... That's the way he was. He was a Republican, and anybody that's a Democrat, they're wrong. I think he took that approach to Emil. I know how Pate probably treated him.

Pate called him every day to give him an idea of what was going on for the day, so that was good. And Emil called me. As [senate] minority leader, he called me every day and [would] kind of give me a rundown, what was expected and all that. I appreciated that, but we were different people, different philosophies. He was too close to Blagojevich. I mean, he was Blagojevich's guy.

DePue: I want to develop that a lot more, but that's probably the next session we have.

Watson: Okay. Everybody said, "Well there's a real good streak in Emil Jones. He can be mean, but he has a real good streak in him. You'll get along." It just never happened, never happened.

DePue: You talked about George Ryan's difficulty as a public speaker. How about Emil Jones?

Watson: Emil, yeah, he did have a problem, just even debating. He was a good debater, but a lot of times people couldn't understand him, and that's too bad because I'm sure he had a lot of good things to say.

DePue: Were you one of the people who couldn't understand him sometimes?

Watson: Yes. You know, your dialect, peoples are different. I'm from Southern Illinois; they think I'm from the deep south when I go to someplace up north or even out of state, they'll think I'm from the south. We all have different dialects, but Emil did have a problem. His own membership even would say that, that sometimes they couldn't understand him.

DePue: How did he end up getting selected as the minority leader then?

Watson: Well, tea leaves, I guess, were lined up for him. When Phil Rock left, he was just in a position of… Of course, I would assume that the mayor of Chicago probably said, "Emil's the guy." That usually goes hand in hand.

But he worked well with his own members and that showed up. When he became [senate] president, there was a lot of tough decisions that were made by Democrats that weren't very popular, politically popular. And he was able to keep his caucus pretty solid. I think his members had a lot of respect for him.

DePue: The last time we talked about Pate Philips and his reputation and the allegations—just because Pate was Pate—allegations about him being racist and sexist, et cetera. Now, here we've got Emil Jones, who's a powerful black legislator. Did that factor into the friction between the two?

Watson: Race? Probably on the fringe. I think mostly it was the fact that he was a Chicago Democrat, and Pate didn't like Chicago Democrats at all. But maybe on the fringe there was some racial overtones to it.

DePue: Were there people, either in the media or within the legislature itself, that made accusations because of that relationship, that Pate was being racist?

Watson: No. I think some of the things that Pate would say, that would come out, maybe not as it was intended, it was quoted and reportedly said, led people to believe that.

DePue: Any specific examples you can recall?

Watson: Let's see (laughs).

DePue: That you want to recall?

Watson: There was one about lottery tickets. I can't remember what was the exact quote, and I wouldn't want to… There was another one about car washes, "If it wasn't for the car washes…" He was colorful and a very quotable legislator, Pate was, and we'd laugh at it at lot of times. Sometimes you cringe a little bit, but mostly it's just Pate being Pate. Even the other side would say that.

DePue: Were there others that said that's just Emil being Emil?

Watson: Probably, yeah. [It was] just his style, and it didn't match mine; I'll tell you that.

DePue: You've said that a couple times. How would you describe his style, Emil Jones's style?

Watson: He was very...I'd say, top down. He carried a lot of water for the administration, Blagojevich. I think he had to dictate to his caucus what they were to do. He was pretty rough. He was a good negotiator. You couldn't sell him short in negotiations. But just different styles, he and I, different personalities and clashed.

DePue: Let's talk about what most people would consider George Ryan's biggest legislative accomplishment, and that would be Illinois First. I understand that he first introduced that May 21, 1999, early in his administration. It was known by some as—Maybe this is the kind of thing that the news media likes to embellish— "Fat Friday" for the four key pieces of legislation. It amounted to $12 billion ultimately, funds for infrastructure: roads, schools, transit, et cetera.

Daniels was the guy who was the main carrier of that piece of legislation, but who was doing that in the senate, as you recall?

Watson: I believe it was Pate. I supported it. I think putting people to work and building roads and schools, construction, all that kind of thing is important. I supported that legislation, and I think Pate was the sponsor in the senate.

DePue: It was the kind of legislation that everybody can see that they might be able to get a piece of the action.

Watson: Pie, a piece of the pie.

DePue: Were there things that you were hoping to see come out of that piece of legislation?

Watson: Yes, yeah, very definitely. The interchange at O'Fallon, Green Mount Road was one of them, St. Rose exit off of US50, a overpass in Greenville for the industrial park. Yes, that's all part of the negotiations. People surely understand that if you put your vote on the line, you expect something...not necessarily something for it, but you want to see something good happen in your district as a result of you supporting it. Why else would you support it?

Yeah, the school construction was one of my initiatives, back when we were in control in the early '90s, and this expanded that considerably. I think it was about $2 billion went into school construction.

DePue: How did it work? How did the list of projects that would possibly be funded by Illinois First get developed?

Watson: It's usually the secretary of transportation who would come into the office, Kirk Brown, a very good man, very professional. He'd come in and say, "What are your needs? What is it that you would expect from legislation like this, to get your support?" And you'd lay out your agenda.

They wouldn't promise, necessarily, that things would be done, but they would certainly take them into consideration, serious consideration, since you're supporting it. That's the way it was done, and I imagine it still is.

DePue: That's the transportation part, but you mentioned the school funding initiatives as well.

Watson: That was totally separate. They had a formula by which schools could apply for funding. That was not, no. We weren't expecting, necessarily, money for our particular school out of that legislation. We just knew there was money going into the formula, and we'd hope that our schools would benefit. And many of our schools did in my district.

DePue: Was there something that was going on among the "Four Tops," where they'd sit down with a list that they might have gotten presented from [Secretary of Transportation] Brown's office or others, and say, "Here's the list, now we've got to whittle this down some," or "We've got some other things that we want to add to it?"

Watson: I think mostly you over-promise, not promise; you over-...You, as a legislator, and maybe as a governor or staff, would say, "Sure, we'll take this into serious consideration." Whether or not it gets done or not is another matter, because of just the ramifications of how much money is available.

DePue: So again, is it the Four Tops meeting that kind of starts crossing some things off the list?

Watson: No, I don't remember that at all. I just remember speaking with the secretary of transportation about what I had in my area that I had an interest in.

DePue: So are you suggesting that it was the secretary of transportation, the secretary of state's office that's coming with this list of things; "Okay, we have to whittle down the list a little bit."

Watson: Well, they'd take whatever you gave them into consideration. Some legislators' lists, I'm sure, were way too long, couldn't do everything. So

they'd have to make a decision. That was generally not the secretary of state, but Secretary of Transportation, Kirk Brown and his staff; they had to fit the projects into the money they had available and the timeframe.

DePue: But that whole process... I'm sorry to keep going back to this. I can't think of a process that gets to be more political, and you're suggesting that politics was removed from it, that the senators and the representatives weren't arguing among each other and saying, "I'll give you this if you give me that." That wasn't going on?

Watson: No.

DePue: That wasn't going on?

Watson: No, no. Not that I'm aware of.

DePue: Is that because the dollar figure was big enough that everybody can get their piece?

Watson: It was a pretty big program, and everybody was at the well, looking for their bucket, fill it up.

DePue: Well, let's face it, Senator, the term that's normally used for this kind of spending is pork.

Watson: Well, there's two things you don't want to see done. One is the legislative process in action. You don't want to see that, nor do you want to see how sausage is made. Both things (laughs), in many people's eyes, would not be necessarily good. This is the way it was done.

This is the way things get done, is negotiation. Part of the negotiations was you, being a legislator, senator, whomever, elected official, putting out what you would like to see considered for your district. If it could be done, fine, and your vote will be accordingly.

DePue: But the way you've characterized this so far, the legislative process wasn't quite as ugly as making sausage in this case.

Watson: Well, I think people generally would be disgusted about the way... If they really saw and got involved in the process, came here as a novice, maybe as an elected official and really saw how things were done, maybe that's what they would expect, but really surprised that it's that way.

DePue: Were you happy about the things that you were able to procure for your district?

Watson: Oh, yeah. I don't have the list right in front of me, but I had a long list.

DePue: Would you call any of it pork?

Watson: Pork is, I think, a outsider's, maybe a media generated term, that describes getting things done by a legislator.

DePue: Is pork what the other guy got for his district?

Watson: Could be. It could be, yeah (both laugh). Oink, oink. As a legislator, if you weren't involved in the process, and you didn't support this, you would call everything, probably, pork for those who did. But it was getting things done. It was not necessarily projects that weren't needed. That's another thing. These are projects that were warranted; there was a need for it.

DePue: If that's the case, why wasn't this taken up in those very heady economic years at the tail end of the Edgar Administration? Why isn't he the guy who advances this?

Watson: Jim Edgar wasn't necessarily a builder. He wasn't one that had the big projects. He was in education; that was his focus. I'd say, like Jim Thompson, he [Ryan] had big projects. He had a lot of construction going on, and I think George Ryan was the same type of governor as Jim Thompson was.

DePue: Was this supported in a bipartisan way then, Illinois First?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: You say that unequivocally.

Watson: Yes, I do. Yeah, there were Democrats... I know some Republicans who didn't support it. George had a mean streak about him, and if you weren't on his program, if you weren't doing it, then you didn't get involved in the spoils. That actually sometimes took place, and he didn't make any qualms about it. He was very vocal about it at the time. There were certain senators I know that didn't support this, that he took exception to.

DePue: That he perhaps punished in the way that they didn't get... You used the word spoils.

Watson: Yes. He had a mean streak in him that he would... I wasn't invited to a groundbreaking of Kaskaskia College in Centralia. John Jones or I, neither one were invited. Bill O'Daniel, who was John Jones's opponent, was. And we went anyway. John Jones and I both went and participated in that groundbreaking, even though we weren't included by the Ryan Administration.

That's when things got bad with George Ryan and the Illinois State Senate. I don't know what led up to that, if it was the gun issue or if it was...what it might have been.

DePue: What was the gun issue?

Watson: Assault weapon ban.

DePue: That he was pushing for an assault weapon ban?

Watson: Right. That was the big dividing [issue] between him and Pate Philip. George wanted this bad, the assault weapon ban. An assault weapon to you is different than an assault weapon for somebody else. You know what it is when you see it, but you can't define it. That's the problem with all this kind of gun legislation, is how do you actually put it down in writing, where you don't ban something with unintended consequence. George kept us there for quite an few days extra to deal with that. Pate took a hard line against it.

DePue: It sounds like you did as well.

Watson: I did as well. I'd say the majority of our caucus. I think that's probably where we really got south with George Ryan and the governor's administration was during that time.

DePue: Do you recall roughly when that occurred? Was that later in his administration?

Watson: No, I would say early. I would say it was the earlier years.

DePue: Who were some of the other senators who were kind of the outliers, who didn't necessarily support Illinois First?

Watson: That's a matter of record, but I know that Dwayne Nolan [Central Illinois], he didn't support it, and Laura Kent Donahue [Quincy]. Both of them, I think, paid a political price for not supporting it.

DePue: Part of the package... If you're going to spend $12 billion to build up the infrastructure of the State of Illinois, you've got to find some way to fund it. Can you tell us about how that was accomplished?

Watson: It was mostly a liquor tax. I think license plate fees.

DePue: Yeah, I think it went from $48 to $78, and since everybody has to get a sticker for their license plate, you notice that kind of an increase.

Watson: Right. But again, I always felt that... I don't know if there was a motor fuel tax involved in it or not.

DePue: From someplace I found that there were 138 other fees that were increased, but there was no other tax increase connected to it.

Watson: Okay, but people that use the roads should pay for it. License fees, your motor fuel tax and all of that, I've always felt that that was a fair tax. People are using the roads that are paying the tax through their license, through their license plates, transfers, those kind of things, title transfers. To me that was the people that ought to pay. So, as a result, I always generally supported those kind of taxes and those kind of fee increases, if it was going to roads.

That's the key thing too, if they start diverting funds out of the road fund. The road fund is a special fund within the administration. If you start diverting money out of that for other purposes, then I take exception to that, because I think that is what it's for. It's for maintaining and building new roads, and that's what it should be used for.

DePue: Who would the person or the agency be that would control how that money was spent?

Watson: Ultimately, we did, the legislature and the governor's office, but through the budget process. Just like the state police, they're funded out of the road fund. There's a multitude… If you looked at it, there's some things that aren't... You could arguably say the state police, at least. They could cut some too. There's a lot of expenditures come out of the road fund that aren't necessarily road related.

DePue: Is it the Comptroller's Office though, that has to ensure that the discipline that you're taking money out... That's not…?

Watson: No. It's the Governor's Office, the legislature, those who appropriate money.

DePue: The governor's budget director and those people.

Watson: Right. But they couldn't make a decision to just divert money out. That had to come from the legislature.

DePue: Then you guys were watching that pretty closely?

Watson: I was. I always did, because as a downstater—once again, downstate needs its roads and bridges and maintaining new highways, whatever—that was important to me and my district. Whenever the road fund was brought up, the antennas went up; I was on alert.

DePue: You mentioned that you didn't necessarily have faith in all of the people in the Governor's Office that he had in his staff. How about the budget director? I don't even know the name of that person. Is that one of the things that you were concerned about?

Watson: No. I couldn't name him either. I'd probably know him if you mentioned it, but I can't… Robert Mandeville was during the Thompson Administration.

DePue: Joan Walters was for most of the time of the Edgar Administration.

Watson: That's right. I can't remember.

DePue: I should know that myself, and I don't. I wanted to read a couple quotes here. This is still dealing with Ryan's ability to push through legislation, especially the Illinois First project. This is a quote from Rick Pearson from a *Chicago Tribune* article. He obviously was a *Tribune* reporter. "Ultimately, socializing and arm-twisting, Governor George Ryan single-handedly returned pork to the state house menu during the spring legislative session, weaning hungry legislators from the low fat diet served up by Jim Edgar, while passing the largest public works program in the state's history."

Watson: That would be Rick Pearson (laughs). One thing about reporters, people have to read what they write. That's pretty colorful. That's how pork gets established, is somebody says, "This is a pork project" or "You're participating in pork legislation." Again, I don't necessarily agree with the analogy that everything that's pork is bad.

DePue: But if you take the word pork out of there, would you otherwise say that that was a fairly accurate statement?

Watson: Yeah. I agree, because Jim Edgar was Governor No, and his emphasis was education. I think he was very pleased with what happened during his administration in the education arena. Then here came George Ryan, and he had a different approach.

DePue: So, some of these things were way overdue. They needed to happen.

Watson: Yes. We hadn't had a construction capital project bill. Well, we did have the school construction under Edgar, but not roads, bridges and universities.

DePue: In the middle of Build Illinois, it was I think Thompson's initiative. That was in the middle of his administration I believe.

Watson: Probably so. That was another good bill. Whenever you start spending money and a lot of money, people probably take exception, but it has to be done, to do what we have to do. In Illinois, back then—I wouldn't say so now—but then, Illinois was a... The economy was going well, and we were a state that people wanted to work in and wanted to have their factories here. Things were going good.

That's all changed, but then, as a result, you want to have a good educational system; you want to have buildings that are [to] update, and you want to have roads that are constructed and maintained. That's what Jim Thompson did, and that's what George Ryan did.

DePue: One other quote. This is from Democrat, Robert Molaro (Watson laughs). I don't know if he was in the house or the senate.

Watson: He was in both. He actually was one of those members that was elected to the senate and then went to the house. There's not many of those (both laughs). Steve Nash, I think, did that. They both were in Chicago, and I think it was right after redistricting. Anyway, Bob Molaro, I'm sure it's very colorful what he has to say.

DePue: "He schmoozes us and schmaltz us. He grabs your arm at the executive mansion and hands you a drink. I mean, this guy is the governor, it's heady stuff."

Watson: Well, yeah. George could be a very gracious guy; he could be fun to be around, especially when he wanted something done. He went out of his way to make you feel a part of it and good about it. If you weren't a part of it, then things would be different.

DePue: The next subject is something that perhaps surprised a lot of people about George Ryan, a decision he made, and that's in October 1999, his decision to take a trip to Cuba. He took Lee Daniels with him, didn't take Pate Philips.

Watson: Probably Pate wouldn't go. I don't know. I don't know if he was invited or not.

DePue: What was your reaction to the news that the governor of Illinois is heading to Cuba, a country that we didn't recognize at the time?[40]

Watson: The Federal Government [didn't recognize].

DePue: The Federal Government.

Watson: It was agriculture. I didn't have a problem with it, and I wouldn't have a problem today if we extended some relationship with them and developed something. We do it with most communist countries, why can't we do it with Cuba?

DePue: And what would your rationale be for that opinion?

Watson: Just that they've probably got things we would like, and we've got things we could sell to them.

DePue: Primarily economic reasons?

Watson: Yes.

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[40] Bilateral relations between Cuba and the United States were severed in 1961, during the Cold War. Diplomatic relations between the two nations were restored on 20 July 2015. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba%E2%80%93United_States_relations)

DePue: That it would benefit the State of Illinois, to sell our products there?

Watson: Yes, sure. And then, of course, they'd sell a lot of cigars (both laugh). I hope the balance of trade wouldn't be all that. But yeah, they have needs there, and certainly why not make our products available to them?

DePue: Looking at 2000, which is another election year, I don't know that there was much that was going on legislatively. Ninety-nine must have been a big year legislatively, with Illinois First and some other initiatives that Ryan was pushing. There was a June 29 gas tax relief bill. Do you recall that?

Watson: Yes, I was the sponsor in the senate.

DePue: Tell me about the reason for backing that piece of legislation.

Watson: Well, coming from a border area—where I do—of the state... And, of course, Missouri, they have the lowest motor fuel tax in the country. So we were losing out. And gasoline had spiked.

Gasoline was very expensive, so we were looking for some sort of relief for the Illinois motorists. A side benefit of that was all the petroleum marketers that are selling fuel and then ancillary products in Illinois. We had passed a six month—I think it was sales tax—sales tax on gasoline [that] was removed, because the motor fuel tax goes into the motor fuel tax fund, and we didn't want to disrupt that. George agreed to do it. It cost about $230 some million to do this for six months, but we felt it was needed.

In fact, I would have at the time, and maybe still do, support **some** reduction, because sales tax is almost tax on tax. You have the motor fuel tax, and then you have sales tax. One of those should go, and to me it was sales tax.

DePue: But you say $230 million loss of revenue?

Watson: Yes, $230 million loss of revenue. I think that's what it was, and that was for six months. That bill actually passed in the secretary of state's... We had some problems, I think, in the senate. We had some fixtures fall or something. Anyway, we were over in the secretary of state's building, having session, when that bill passed.

DePue: But temporary tax relief, just the temporary.

Watson: It was temporary, six months.

DePue: Why just temporary?

Watson: I think that was the only thing that they would accept. I would have made it more permanent, but George was not for that.

DePue: Was there any attempt to find the $230 million in lost revenue someplace else?

Watson: No, not necessarily.

DePue: Was this still during a time—this is 2000—that the economy is still roaring along pretty well?

Watson: Yeah, I think things were going good.

DePue: I think this is after the dot-com bubble burst though.[41] I can't recall specifically when that was. How about another tax initiative, the property tax relief bill? That was going through at least on the house side; I'm not sure it went through on the senate side.

Watson: I think it did. I'm almost positive it did. One time, people actually got a check from the State of Illinois, based on the property tax they paid, I think. I don't remember how that worked. I don't know the formula for that. Anyway, it was an initiative that Pate felt very strongly about, and those in the suburbs did because they were paying very high property taxes. They looked at this as some form of property tax relief. But I only think it was for one year.

DePue: Here is, perhaps in your district, a more sensitive subject: renovation of Soldier Field (Watson laughs).[42] The price tag at the time was $587 million.

Watson: I didn't really support a lot of those things early in my career, Navy Pier and expansion of O'Hare at the time, a lot of projects I didn't support for Chicago. But as I got more into the process, I kind of softened my opposition to that.

I recognized the importance of the economic viability of the City of Chicago and what that means to the state. The O'Hare expansion, I supported when I was the leader. The United Center, the work on that, and a couple of other projects. I can't recall what they are at the moment. Anyway, I just felt like those were things that... And they weren't asking a lot from the state, for that matter. Generally, all they asked for was an increase in hotel rates or the hotel tax or something that would come primarily from the City of Chicago, to pay for it. If the money wasn't generated, then they had the full face and the credit rating of the state behind it. So, ultimately the state was responsible. But in many cases, they didn't have it.

The White Sox was a good example. The White Sox stadium [Guaranteed Rate Field], when they built that, I didn't support that at all. But it

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41 The dot-com bubble was a stock market bubble caused by excessive speculation of Internet-related companies in the late 1990s, a period of massive growth in the use and adoption of the Internet. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dot-com_bubble)

42 In 2000, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley announced that Soldier Field would be completely renovated and expanded as part of Chicago's Lakefront Improvement Plan. As part of the reconstruction project, the majority of Soldier Field was demolished with the exception of the exterior. (https://www.isfauthority.com/facilities/history-of-soldier-field/)

was paid for primarily by people in Chicago, who were either visiting or staying there or eating there. The state had very little responsibility, but ultimately, they would be the state of record, as far as having to make sure it got paid. I don't know that they had to pay that much.

DePue: So, by the time something like Soldier Field comes along, you had kind of moderated your views.

Watson: Moderated my views would be a good way to put it.

DePue: From our previous discussion, it sounds like 2000 was not a reelection year for you. It's not a gubernatorial year either—that would have been '98 and 2002—but it's a presidential election.

We're getting beyond Illinois in this case. It was an interesting election because, by late into the election night, there was still a huge question about who had won, whether it was George W. Bush or Al Gore. We all recall that it got pretty ugly. Jumping back a little bit, were you at the Republican convention, the national convention, that year?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Do you remember anything about that?

Watson: I was a George W. Bush guy. I wasn't for his dad; in fact, I was a Jack Kemp delegate. That was the first election I ran as a delegate and lost. Then every election thereafter, I was with whoever ultimately the candidate was who got nominated and went to all the conventions. I remember it being a very upbeat, positive convention. I actually think it was in Houston; wasn't it? [the 2000 Republican National Convention was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.]

DePue: I don't know. Home turf for Bush if it was.

Watson: Yeah, it might have been. I don't recall that, where it was.

DePue: What were your thoughts, watching the election returns come in that night?

Watson: Not good. I just felt like...because all the areas that the votes were still being counted were always questionable areas, as far as fraud and a lot of inner city voting that was going on. I just didn't feel good about it, at all.

DePue: Didn't feel good about the Republicans' chance of winning, or didn't feel good about…?

Watson: Right. He [Gore] was declared the victor. Then, of course, Florida. My mother in-law was down in Florida, and my sister in-law lived right in Palm Beach County. They were carrying signs and all this, against the hanging chads and

all that went on there.[43] It was just laughable almost, the way that thing came out. I know, if you're on the other side, you'd feel the same way. It was not a very pleasant situation, and they can't be happy with the outcome because ultimately, the Supreme Court took it over and made the decision.

DePue: I assume you agreed with the Supreme Court's decision finally, to…

Watson: Bring closure to the whole thing.

DePue: Bring closure.

Watson: Yes, because you could just see it slipping away. When Bill Daley went down there, of course, one of the Daley's of Chicago, it was just almost too much for the public to handle. Bill Daley, I got to know him after I became leader, and he's a nice guy. But at the time, when you send a Chicago Daley, everybody [was thinking], Oh no. It was, yeah, trying times for Republicans.

DePue: This might sound like a peculiar question, but your views of the ultimate result and the whole process of the vote counting, would you say that they were primarily partisan in nature? Were there some philosophical issues that you had about the way the process was working out?

Watson: I'd say mostly partisan. I was a Republican; it felt like things weren't going well, whether it was Palm Beach County or Dade County or wherever it was in Florida, where people were questioning the votes. I'd say, from a partisan view, not necessarily philosophical. Although I definitely philosophically opposed Al Gore. I just thought that George Bush was the right guy.

DePue: Was there any impact of that election on how elections in the future would work out in the State of Illinois?

Watson: I don't believe so. We've always been fiddling with elections, code and making changes, but I don't necessarily [think], as a direct result of that, there was anything that was done.

DePue: The next subject then is the cloud that's starting to grow over George Ryan's administration. As you get deeper into his administration, the allegations only grow, and it's obvious that the U.S. Attorney's Office is looking very hard. This would have been... I always have trouble with this, Fitzgerald, Patrick.

[43]On election night, November 7, 2000, TV networks first called the key state of Florida for Democrat presidential candidate Al Gore, then for Republican candidate, George Bush, followed by a concession by Gore that was soon rescinded. The results were too close to call. In the 36 days that followed, there were accusations of fraud and voter suppression, calls for recounts and lawsuits filed. Three weeks after election day, the State of Florida declared Bush the winner. Florida's electoral votes, resulting in his winning the national presidential election. (https://www.history.com/news/2000-election-bush-gore-votes-supreme-court)

Watson: Patrick Fitzgerald was the U.S. attorney, Chicago, Cook County.

DePue: Yeah. My confusion is always because the state senator who helped arrange for Patrick Fitzgerald's appointment as U.S. attorney is Peter Fitzgerald.[44]

Watson: That's true; that's true. Peter Fitzgerald was a U.S. senator. I think Patrick Fitzgerald was from out east.

DePue: I believe he came from New York. I'm not sure about that. Now, in retrospect and sitting here in 2012, he's developed quite a reputation because of the actions that he's taken in that office.

Put yourself back in the late 2000s. There's just this steady drumbeat of allegations coming out about what had happened in Ryan's years as secretary of state, and by that time he had a record. You've talked about your disappointment with a lot of the people with whom he had surrounded himself as well. What were your feelings at that time?

Watson: Well, of course, disappointment. I was disappointed about Blagojevich. It wouldn't have mattered, Republican or Democrat, [when] you just put faith in people, and they don't follow through, you're disappointed.

DePue: Were you convinced by late 2000 that he probably was guilty of a lot of these things that were alleged?

Watson: They were just alleged, and I wasn't necessarily convinced, not being privy to everything, just what was being said outwardly, not the other. Maybe the crux of the whole prosecution might have been different than what I was led to believe. I don't necessarily think that I was ready to hang him, as a lot of people were. Give him more time; let's see how he proves himself out.

DePue: The phrase I was looking for before is "a license for bribe scandal." That was the essence of what was going on, and we discussed that before.

Scott Fawell was his chief of staff. Now, you were reluctant to mention any names; I'll mention that one. Again, that one's a matter of public record. What was your view of him as chief of staff?

Watson: His mother was a state senator, and I believe his father was a U.S. Congressman, Harris, I think. I'm not sure about that—but anyway, he's related—from DuPage County. I had no problem with Scott Fawell. His mannerisms were different than a lot. He was a young guy coming in there; he

[44]Following his role as United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois, Patrick Fitzgerald served the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Special Counsel as the federal prosecutor in charge of an investigation that led to the prosecution and conviction of Scooter Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff. Later, as a federal prosecutor, he led high-profile investigations leading to the convictions of Illinois Governors Rob Blagojevich and George Ryan. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Fitzgerald)

was kind of full of himself, as you would be, appointed to a lot of responsibility. I didn't necessarily have any problems with Scott in dealing with him in the Governor's Office or the Secretary of State's Office.

DePue: There were others in his administration you had more concerns over than Fawell?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: And again, you don't want to share any names?

Watson: No, I don't want to do that. I see no purpose in that or no benefit, other than somebody... And it could be that the people I'm concerned about were not the problem; it's just my view. I'm not going to hang anybody here.

DePue: By 2001 it was clear that Ryan was damaged goods. But it was roughly about that same time that he came out with what he otherwise is very well known for; that was his struggle and his ultimate decision about the death penalty. You're shaking your head.

Watson: Well, that's another reason that we became so crossways with him, we being the Republican caucus in the senate. Most of us felt that there's a place for the death penalty, and it should not be done away with. I think most people felt that... Again, it was those people that he had around him who were influencing George. It was, maybe, trying to divert himself from his problems too.

DePue: That ultimately is the question that people have about his decision to, not necessarily do away with the death penalty, but what, suspend all of the death sentences?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: He suspended all of the…

Watson: Yes. And I thought he let some people go.

DePue: This was in the same time frame that there were initiatives by colleges and universities across the state, young law students, who were looking at death penalty decisions where, after the fact, the state had found DNA evidence or other evidence that overturned several decisions. I think that probably was one reason that Ryan made the evolution in his thought that he did.

Watson: I would agree with that. To me, how somebody could [make] the decision to put them to death and have these questions that seemed to be surfacing, whether it was DNA or whatever it might have been. There must have been a shadow of a doubt. To put somebody to death like that, I can't understand that. I don't understand the proceedings and the court proceedings that took place

that led to that. There had to be a breakdown in the whole process at that point, when those kind of decisions were made by the court systems, juries, whatever.

DePue: But that didn't change your decision about the validity of the death penalty?

Watson: No. I think that there is a time and place for it.

DePue: I lost my train of thought before, but the question now that people have is, did he make that decision for political reasons or because he sincerely believed it?

Watson: I think he sincerely believed it; I really do. I was with him enough to know the passion he had for that, and of course, I saw what he did. He went all over the country advocating for that, so I believe he believed it.

DePue: Ryan made the decision in 2001 not to run for reelection, did that surprise you?

Watson: No.

DePue: As a career Republican, did it concern you?

Watson: Sure. The legacy of George Ryan was going to have an impact on the next election; we all knew that. Unfortunately, for Jim Ryan (laughs), he was the next candidate for governor. Sad to say, with a name like Ryan and no relation of course, he was our attorney general, and he would have been a good governor. But Blagojevich beat him and used the Ryan connection and the whole bit about the corruption of the Ryan Administration against Jim Ryan. That had a big impact in that election.

DePue: Before we leave the Ryan years... Because of the 2000 census, redistricting is going to happen, and it's going to impact 2002. We already alluded to that a little bit. How did redistricting work out for the Republicans at that time? (Watson laughs)

Watson: It worked out very well. I was on a committee, the committee in the senate, two of us were. I think we've had this discussion, but Walter Dudycz, a Republican from Chicago…

DePue: But this is 2000 now, and I know that Republicans lost the draw in 2000, for 2001 at least.

Watson: I think you're correct. George was secretary of state when we... I'm sorry. So, yes, we did lose.

DePue: Were you involved in the redistricting process in 2001?

Watson: Yes, I would have been, not as directly as I was back in 1990, but I'm trying to think what...

DePue: The memories aren't quite as clear because you didn't win that year (laughs).

Watson: You're right; you're right, but I'm just trying to... That's when I ended up with Decatur. They made a district... The district was incredible. They called it "a meandering Irish stream." That's what our lawyer called it. It was the poster child for gerrymandering. I ended up with Decatur, which I'd never had. I couldn't fathom how I could even end up with it.

DePue: Decatur, a lot of Democratic votes in Decatur?

Watson: Yes, there was Macon County, but... Decatur turned out to be a good thing for me, politically. I was well accepted, and Dwayne Noland, who had been their senator from the area, just kind of led my introduction to the community, you know, Frank's okay.

Even though Dwayne and I were put... He wasn't in the district, but he could have moved into the district. He represented Macon County and Shelby County and Moultrie County and even parts of Effingham. He could have easily run for the state senate in the primary against me in that particular year. He was from Blue Mound, which was just outside of the district, and he was in Bill Brady's senate district. So he would have had to move, and he decided not to run.

DePue: Would it be accurate to say that the Democrats had designed all of this to put all of you Republicans in a bind?

Watson: Very much so, yes.

DePue: Were they targeting you?

Watson: Maybe. I felt like I was targeted about every time they drew a map. I had to move once. Yeah, I felt like they were targeting me, or at least making it very inconvenient for me.

We tried to get them to rotate the house districts around a little bit, so that the senate districts could all change. Keep the house districts as they are, but there was like three senate districts, the eastern part of the state, Dale Righter's district; my district, which would include Decatur, and then John Jones's district, which would have been south of me, in Marion County and Clinton County.

We had a proposal that would have... All we had to do was move the lines, and everybody would have been fine. But they wouldn't have anything to do with it. The Democrats are very partisan when it comes to redistricting.

DePue: And Republicans aren't? (both laugh)

Watson: I knew you were going to say that. I kind of set you up, didn't I, with a softball?

DePue: There are some that have said there is no more partisan event than redistricting.

Watson: That's true, because that's the life blood of the party in either the house or the senate or congress or whatever it might be, are the maps and who's in them and who's out.

DePue: Legislative year 2000. I believe on June 22, a coal bill passed. I've got to believe, because of your district, that would be one that you were paying attention to. Do you remember anything about that particular bill?

Watson: Coal legislation?

DePue: I don't know any of the particulars. Would it have had anything to do with high sulfur coal, which is the kind of coal that would have been mined in your area, I would think.

Watson: Oh, yeah, mostly all of Illinois is high sulfur coal. No, I don't know; I'm not sure.

DePue: I did want to ask you, the other event in 2001, of course, happened on September 11. What do you recall about that day?

Watson: I know exactly where I was, everybody does. I was at a golf tournament in St. Louis, at Bellerive Country Club. Dave Luechtefeld, the state senator from down there, and I went to a... It was a practice round. It was on Wednesday, and we were there at that time. We had already gotten to the golf course, because you had to get there early, and so we did.

Word spread rapidly about the first tower and then the second tower. Then, of course, they just suspended play, and the tournament was never held.

DePue: What was your initial reaction, hearing that news?

Watson: I couldn't believe it. We'd never been attacked on our own soil. That's how I look at it, as an attack, an act of war almost. It was just gut-wrenching, when you saw all the video of everything, people jumping out of windows. Of course, I now have gotten friends that were either close-by or whatever, that experience would directly affected by it.

DePue: As an Illinois State Senator, did you think at the time, there are some things in Illinois we need to do right away?

Watson: Yes. The Sears Tower, which is, of course, a building in Chicago... Everybody felt like it could very well be a target in the future, so yes. The water supply

and bridges, there was a major concern that this wasn't just an isolated incident, that it may happen again.

DePue: Did you have any nuclear power plants in your district?

Watson: No, but we have more power plants here in Illinois than anywhere else. And yes, that's a major concern.

DePue: Did the legislature come into special session after that, to address any of these concerns?

Watson: I don't remember. I don't know.

DePue: These are all actions that could be handled at the executive level?

Watson: I don't recall if there was legislation as a direct of that or not.

DePue: Let's move to the 2002 legislative year. March 2 of that year, the general fund balance was at nine cents. So, a couple years before Ryan gets to office and there's a $1 billion surplus, were the legislators starting to worry a little bit about the budget by that time?

Watson: Oh, yeah. That's one other reason why the senate Republicans were looked upon with disdain by Governor Ryan, was the fact that we all were concerned about the spending and the deal making that was going on with Democrats, primarily, that was spending related. We just were concerned about it.

When George left office and Rod Blagojevich came in, we had discussions with him about... Being the leader now, being the leader of the senate. I can recall having discussions about the problems of Illinois and that we need to fix this, and let's work together, blah-blah-blah. And that was just the Ryan Administration.

DePue: From what I've heard, the Ryan Administration was working, in some cases at the end of his administration, more closely with the Democrats in the senate, to get things through?

Watson: Oh yeah, yes. We were not necessarily part of a lot of discussion.

DePue: Was he still able to hold the caucus in the house?

Watson: No. He was working closely with Lee Daniels. He and Lee were very good friends and had worked well together, all throughout his career and Lee's career.

Then Pate had been too, but Pate just took exception to some of the policies. As a result, we weren't included in a lot of things.

DePue: I think one of the things that was on the table was an $800 million bill for expansion of McCormick Place. By that time, I think Fawell was CEO of McPier.[45] Was Pate in the caucus against that one? Do you recall?

Watson: Well, with all the cloud that was hanging over everybody there at the time, including Scott Fawell, I know there was a lot of exception. But I think it ultimately passed. The expansion ultimately did pass.

Most people recognized the fact that Chicago, if it isn't number one, it's up in the top tier anyway, of destinations for conventions. Of course, that's important, is to have an updated, adequate facility that can take care of those. So I can see why that would be done. But with all of the problems of the administration, there was some real concern about it.

DePue: This is a more minor issue, this next subject. But we are sitting in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and library and museum funding was up towards the end of the Ryan Administration as well. It just so happened that the foundation board—I think at the foundation or the board of trustees— included Lura Lynn Ryan, Mrs. Lee Daniels and Julie Cellini, among others. Do you recall your view about funding for this institution?

Watson: It wasn't very positive (laughs). I think I ultimately supported it. If it hadn't been... I think Denny Hastert, being speaker of the house, we got considerable federal money coming into this. But in hindsight... It's a wonderful facility, well visited. It was the thing to do. I don't recall how I voted; I may not have supported it, but I was wrong.

DePue: At the federal level, I know Senator Fitzgerald had some serious objections, especially about how the competitive bidding process was working its way out.

Watson: Well, Peter had a lot of problems with a lot of things in spending. I mean, he was a very fiscal conservative, and he took exception to this because, like you said, some of the construction bidding that went on... But his overall philosophy was just anti-spending. and he didn't look upon this as being a worthy project.

DePue: He did have something of a reputation of a maverick.

Watson: Yes. In the circles of politics, Republican politics in Illinois, he was not looked upon as a team player, I guess. But by the public, he was looked upon very favorably and rightfully so. That's the way you ought to serve. If you're going to serve, especially at the level he was, be independent about it and be your own man or woman, and he was.

[45] The Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority, commonly known as MPEA or McPier, is a corporation that owns Navy Pier and McCormick Place in Chicago. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropolitan_Pier_and_Exposition_Authority)

DePue: You had already talked a little bit about the 2002 gubernatorial election, but I wanted to drop back just a little bit and talk about the Democratic primary, because most people thought that's where the real race was at, that whoever emerged from the Democratic primary was going to be able to beat whoever emerges from the Republican primary.

In the Democratic primary, you've got Rod Blagojevich—we've talked before—Paul Vallas, who had been the executive director of the Chicago school district, and Roland Burris, kind of a perennial candidate in Illinois. We know how the outcome was, but your view about those three candidates and the way that primary worked its way out.

Watson: Well, Paul Vallas, I respected a lot as primarily the superintendent of schools in Chicago. I thought he did a good job, a wonderful job, and I thought he was an odds-on favorite to win that.

Rod Blagojevich was... Who was he? He was a short-term legislator, here in Illinois, didn't really do much, and admittedly so, even in Washington. I think the only major piece of legislation he introduced was to name a post office. He was out there for six years, maybe three terms.

DePue: Had you even heard about Rod Blagojevich, when he was a member of the Illinois House?

Watson: I knew who he was.

DePue: Did he have any reputation at that time?

Watson: No, not really.

DePue: Not good or bad?

Watson: No. He was a very good friend of a representative from my regional area, Jay Hoffman; they were roommates. Of course, Jay was instrumental in him getting the support that he did from labor and from the public employees' unions. That's what did it for him, those two entities: organized labor and the public employees union's support of Blagojevich. That's what beat Paul Vallas.

DePue: All three of those gentlemen are Chicago politicians, Chicago-based. But Vallas carried Chicago. Obviously, Roland Burris carried the black neighborhoods of Chicago, and Blagojevich carried downstate. So what you just said, it sounds like Jay Hoffman was instrumental in helping him to win in downstate Illinois?

Watson: I would say so. He was very active in the Metro East region, of course. That's where he's from. Yeah, I think he [Hoffman] had a lot to do with it. Nobody knew too much about this guy, Blagojevich.

We thought, as Republicans, that was a good thing for us, to have a guy with... Nobody could pronounce his name on the ballot. We had Jim Ryan, who of course, arguably, his last name being Ryan was a definite negative, but here he was, a statewide office holder. People knew him and respected him, and we thought that we were going to be okay in the election.

DePue: He was—I think you mentioned—the attorney general at the time.

Watson: Right. He was our attorney general. So he was well regarded, politically and publicly.

DePue: As I recall the race, Rod Blagojevich didn't run against Jim Ryan; he ran against George Ryan.

Watson: Yeah. I'm sure there's people today that voted against Jim Ryan, thinking he was George. That was pretty masterful, the whole election process of Blagojevich, from the primary up to the general. Unfortunately, that was probably the only good thing the guy did.

DePue: So you think he ran a good campaign that year.

Watson: Oh, yes. I didn't like the fact of nailing everything to George. But politics is what it is, and he took advantage of that, even though Jim Ryan had no relationship to George, none whatsoever. I think that's why he got beat.

DePue: Blagojevich won by 52 percent, versus Jim Ryan's 45 percent, so a pretty significant victory. As a career politician, as a career Republican, what did you think about the state of the Republican Party in Illinois, coming out of that election?

Watson: Well, first of all, I never considered myself a career politician (both laugh). But thirty years in office, I guess that pretty well spells it out then. Well, we were devastated. The party was in shambles, had no leadership. It was a bad time for Republicans. After we'd just gone through a real good period, where we had all the constitutional officers for a period of time, and of course, elected governors. Things were good for the Republicans until the problems of George Ryan's administration, and the public took it out on us.

DePue: Was it that simple, that George Ryan pulled the whole party down, or were there other reasons as well? Why was the bench so shallow? Let's put it that way.

Watson: We still have a problem with that. I think it was. The fact that the governor, who is the leader of the party, arguably, is Republican, his administration controls a great deal and has a lot of influence in the workings of the party. When he's gone, there was a void there, of leadership. And no, we did not have a deep bench.

That's a problem that, I think, we see today with Republicans, even nationally. We're not developing people like we should be.

DePue: But the State of Illinois did have, with the Republicans, I think a twenty-six year run, from '76 all the way to 2002.

Watson: Oh, yeah. We've become such a red state supposedly, everything a Democrat state, but we were…

DePue: You mean a blue state.

Watson: Blue state, excuse me, blue state being Democrat. We've become a very Democrat state, where nobody, even politically, they don't even look at Illinois as a possibility. Of course, Obama being from here, that might have something to do with it. But basically, they've written Illinois off. That's unfortunate because that's a big turn of events from over the last ten, twelve, fifteen years.

DePue: And that trend, to go from a state where Republicans dominated at the least, the gubernatorial level for so long, was that also an effect of George Ryan or is that demographics or other issues that are causing the state to go so decidedly blue?

Watson: We lost the rudder of the ship; it came off and we had no guidance, nobody really pushing us in one direction or another, no leadership. I think demographics now, have changed so much in Illinois that we may be forever a blue state.

DePue: What would you say was George Ryan's tragic fall, the thing that led to his downfall?

Watson: The license issue.

DePue: Was there something about his personality or character though, that you would attribute that to?

Watson: Not necessarily. He wasn't somebody that individuals would warm up to, but all in all, he was a pretty good leader, as a governor. He got things done. Whether you agreed with him or not, he got it done. I think people would respect him for that. But what he ended up with was an administration in shambles, and [it's] hard to respect that.

DePue: You've already mentioned that you were disappointed by a lot of the people that he surrounded himself with.

Watson: You keep going back to that (laughs).

DePue: That's oftentimes a criticism, so I guess my question is, did he pick his friends and advisors poorly?

Watson: I think so. I think that may have been a fault of him or at least a fault of somebody he selected, that ultimately decided who's going to be in the administration.

DePue: Unless you have any other comments, I think that's probably a good place to stop for today. Next time is all about Blagojevich, and I know you'll have quite a bit to say about that.

Watson: Okay (laughs). All right, very good, Mark.

DePue: Thank you very much.

Watson: Thank you.

(end of transcript #5)

Interview with Frank Watson

ISL-A-L-2012-036
Interview # 06: May 8, 2013
Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Wednesday, May 8, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, and I'm back with Senator Frank Watson, after a long hiatus (Watson laughs).

Watson: Probably about what, five and a half months?

DePue: I think maybe October was our last session, the October and November time frame. Then you headed down to Florida or some nonsense like that (Watson laughs).

Watson: Yeah, I did, for five months. We came back at Christmas, and I guess we couldn't get together.

DePue: We both have busy schedules.

Watson: Yes, right, that's right.

DePue: When we left off last time, we had gotten up through the election of 2008. No, I'm sorry, the election of 2002. That means we can start with the Blagojevich administration and also in the time frame when you are now going to become the senate minority leader.

But before we get there, I wanted to ask you some other questions and start with your experiences with Barack Obama, when he was an Illinois State Senator. He was in the senate from January of 1997 to the fall of 2004. You were there the entire time. Did you have a lot of personal dealings with him?

Watson: The first time I met the man, I didn't know who he was. I think he took Alice Palmer's place. She might have died, but he was... Anyway, he comes over, and I'm standing with Carl Hawkinson, who was a state senator from Galesburg, his hometown, the Peoria District, in that area. We're standing there together on the senate floor, and this guy comes over.

He said, "Are you Frank Watson?" I said, "I am." He said, "I understand you're the education guy here in the senate." Well, I was chairman of the Education Committee, not necessarily I'm the education guy, but I happened to be chairman at one point in time when we were in the majority, Republican. I said, "I was chairman of the committee." He said, "I want to do good things for kids, and I want to work with you in any way we can to accomplish that. Nice meeting you." And that was that.

I remember turning to Carl, and I said, "Can you believe it? A freshman senator coming over and acknowledging like that?" That was my first time that I met him. Just him being that aggressive and that concerned about kids and wanting to work together and all that really made a big impression on me because I remembered it. It's not something you would just normally remember.

Then, of course, he ascends to these higher offices. I was very impressed with him the first time I met him. His philosophy and mine were just totally different. We just went a different direction.

DePue: Did he serve on the Education Committee with you?

Watson: No. Not with me, when I was on it.

DePue: Did he indeed work with you on some educational issues over the next few years?

Watson: Not really, not much, no. We really already had done Chicago school reform when he got there, and that was the big one. That would have been one he would have really probably got involved in and would have had a lot of interest in. He probably served on the Education Committee, but I couldn't tell you whether I was on it when he was on it or not. Anyway, just the overture from a freshman to someone who had been around a while was pretty impressive, I thought so.

DePue: Did you have a lot of experiences with him beyond that point, not just in education but in other initiatives as well?

Watson: He pushed universal healthcare all the time for the State of Illinois, which was a budget buster. We didn't have the money to put into this, but he kept pushing it. Obviously, that carried forward to his time in the presidency.

DePue: Was he in the lead on pushing that from the Democratic side?

Watson: He was a sponsor.

DePue: Was that right from his early years in the Illinois Senate?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Or later on?

Watson: His early years. He's obviously a very eloquent speaker and a very bright guy. We all recognized that right away. But he had a tendency of speaking down to people, "I'm the smartest guy in the room," that kind of thing, and he did it even to his own members. Privately they'd tell you that, because he was a back bencher. He was a rookie; he'd just got started, where a lot of these people had been around a long time. All the leaders and people like that are generally more senior. So he wasn't really a leader at all in the senate.

DePue: Even his last couple years in the Illinois Senate?

Watson: No. I would not say that he was considered a major leader. Under Emil Jones, he was given a lot of leeway to do things he wanted to do.

DePue: How would you define that relationship with Jones?

Watson: It was very good. I can remember when Barack ran for the U.S. Senate in the primary, Emil was his biggest supporter. I thought, He's a member of the senate, and he probably should support him. But I didn't think he had much of a

chance. Of course, he gets nominated, and we self-destruct, we being the Republicans.

DePue: Would you describe that relationship with Jones as a mentor relationship?

Watson: I would, because Emil was there forever. He was there before I was. I came in '78; so yes, I'd say he guided him quite a bit through his state career.

DePue: So it was Emil Jones reaching down to help this young Illinois senator who looked like he had a bright future, or was it more the other direction?

Watson: No, I think he looked down and thought of him as a bright future. But when you think about it, Barack Hussein Obama? Who would think he would have any kind of national appeal, let alone statewide, to be a U.S. Senator from Illinois? With a name like that, it wasn't conducive for the ballot box. There's people who have a good ballot name, and then there's those that don't. That wasn't necessarily considered to be a good one back then. But to his credit, he prevailed.

House and Senate softball team stand for their formal portrait at Comisky Park for the 2nd Annual Clout Classen. Circa 1980s, courtesy of the Sporting News in Melrose Park, Illinois

DePue: Do you have any other stories that you recall of encounters or dealings with him?

Watson: I was the coach of the softball team (laughs). We had a softball team, the senate did, and we played the house every year. During the '90s, I was the coach. I thought, Man, here's this young guy from Chicago, runs pretty good. But he couldn't throw, and he couldn't hit; he could hardly catch. They talk about what a great athlete he is. He may be a decent basketball player and a bowler, golfer, whatever, but he couldn't play softball. So we didn't.

I think he got offended at that, and I don't know that he ever came back to try to make the team. Everybody makes the team, but some people think they ought to be anointed and play all the time. Well, it doesn't work that way.

DePue: Do you have any other stories that you recall of encounters or dealings with him?

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Everybody makes the team, but some people think they ought to be anointed and play all the time. Well, it doesn't work that way.

DePue: Was this Senate Republicans against Senate Democrats?

Watson: No. The state senate played the house. Every year we have a charity that's game, and we raise money for charity.

DePue: Wait a minute senator, you mean you cut the future President of the United States? (both laugh)

Watson: I do say that, "I cut him off the team." But it wasn't like that. He was not a good softball player, and we had good softball players.

DePue: So the two memories (Watson laughs) you have of him in the senate is that first meeting and on the softball team?

Watson: No. I made a speech when he left, and I had a lot of accolades from the other side for things that I said about him. [It was] kind of a bipartisan effort to wish him well as he goes to the U.S. Senate and represents the state as a whole, not just Chicago or his district. It was a big challenge for him, never knowing that he's going to aspire to a higher office. I wanted to see him do good, and I want to see him do good as president. I want the country...for things to go well. Maybe they haven't gone as well.

DePue: I wanted to ask you especially about a couple of things that came up just in the presidential campaign for 2008. One was the number of "present" votes that he had. Was that something that you guys on the Republican side were paying any attention to at the time?

Watson: Very much so. I can remember turning to... In my row, where I sat, Ed Petka sat next to me and then Peter Roskam was on the aisle. There was a chair in between us. I remember turning to... There would be votes that would be fifty-eight to nothing to one, one being a "present" vote. What's that all about? It would be Obama, I think 240 times.

We looked this up, obviously, for John McCain. I was out doing stump speeches for McCain, talking about this guy's inability to make a decision. Why was he doing this? Why would he vote "present" on all these bills? I thought Hillary Clinton would use it immensely in the primary, but she didn't. She didn't use it much at all, but McCain did. And it was true; why do that?

I always say, "The green button is there; that's a yes vote. The red button is a no vote, and the present one is a yellow one." That's yellow [by] design. You're there to take a position. Your district sent you there; you've got to vote yes or no. You might be wrong in their eyes, or you might be right, but at least take a position. Don't be voting present all the time.

DePue: Did you ever hear any explanation for why he was avoiding doing that?

Watson: No.

DePue: Any speculation at the time?

Watson: That he didn't really want to take a position. It was all about the future. That was the speculation.

DePue: Among the Republicans especially?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: How about his position on abortion, because there was a position he was willing to take?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: And partial birth abortion.

Watson: Oh, man.

DePue: Even this controversy about after birth abortion. Can you shed any light on that one?

Watson: He was probably the most liberal of all senators, or at least one of them. There were probably several of them like him on abortion. The partial birth, I just never understood that, how anybody can support that. But he did. I guess he can explain it. Someday he's going to have to.

DePue: Any other issues or policy issues that you recall?

Watson: Just universal healthcare, he kept pounding that down our throat. It was costing... I think it had a price tag of almost $3 billion for us to do that in the state. And, of course, we would attract others from other states.

It was not a good issue at the time because of the economy, with the financial situation in the state, which hasn't gotten any better, worse if anything. He kept pushing that, and no one could even understand it. Even Democrats would say, "This guy..." Why he wants this so bad, no one could really...other than it was a philosophical thing, and he felt strongly about it.

DePue: Are you suggesting that he wasn't necessarily viewed as one of the top leaders among the Democrats in the senate?

Watson: No. No, he wasn't because he was... What did you say, eight years; is that what it was?

DePue: Ninety-seven to 2004.

Watson: So, eight years roughly he was there. That's not really a long time for anybody to gather up any seniority for one, or any respect on going into a leadership position. I don't think he was ever put in the leadership. I don't know that; I shouldn't comment on that, but I don't think that Emil Jones ever had him.

DePue: Again, the things you were hearing were that he was obviously preparing to launch his senatorial campaign and then the presidency as well, is that Emil Jones was taking other people's names off the header for a particular bill and putting his name there, so he could get more visibility.

Watson: That goes on. I mean, that goes on if you're a freshman member, and you come from a very tough district, and there's a good piece of legislation out there that you ought to have your name on, be associated with it. That happens.

DePue: So do you know that as a fact, that Jones did that on occasion?

Watson: I would assume he did, although he never needed any help in an election, that district up there. In the primary maybe, but in the general election, they would always elect a Democrat. I'm talking about in those marginal districts that could go one way or another, at least on maybe some bills you would cosponsor.

I always said you never got elected or failed to get elected by the votes you cast here in Springfield. Very few bills would make a difference back home. There would be a few, but basically, you can vote on whatever you think is right. Then you can answer to your constituency, and usually that works.

DePue: I'm assuming that part of your guys' confusion for why he voted "present" all the time is in partly because he came from such a solidly Democratic district?

Watson: No, not necessarily. We just couldn't understand it. Do you have the numbers? Was it 240?

DePue: I don't know

Watson: That's what I was told. That's a lot of "present" votes. I don't even know if I voted present ten times in my thirty years. The only time I would is if there was a pharmacy bill, and it would be a conflict of interest, or maybe we took a caucus position of just voting present on a bill, just to say we were there, but we don't necessarily support it. It's a rarity that people vote present.

DePue: The other thing you hear about that he was doing down here in Springfield was the poker games. Do you know anything about that?

Watson: Oh, yeah. I'm part of that group, but I don't think I ever played in a game with him. I played a lot of cards here, but I was never in the IMA, that was the Illinois Manufacturers Association. They would have a game at their place. I

don't think that I ever played there. I played at Stan Weaver's apartment a lot of times. That's where we'd go to play cards, the Republicans.

DePue: How much do you remember about his senatorial campaign in 2004?

Watson: I thought it was going to be an ill-fated campaign, just on, again, the ballot name. Not timely, when you think about 2001, with all we went through there and for a long period after that, still going through it and today. I think it was Dan Hynes and Blair Hull, might have been one. There was three candidates, I think.

DePue: I don't know that Roland Burris would have been running in that one.

Watson: He might have been; he might have been. But I do remember Dan Hynes and Blair Hull. Everybody thought it was going to be Hynes, because the regular organization in Cook County supported him, and he was well known, being comptroller at the time. Everybody thought he was the nominee. Obviously, he wasn't.

DePue: What we're talking about now is on the Democratic primary side...

Watson: Yes.

DePue: ...that he emerged from that as the candidate. How about the general campaign? I think Jack Ryan started out as the candidate for the Republicans.

Watson: Right. It was Jack Ryan and there was—once again, in the primary—Steve Rauschenberger, a state senator, was a candidate. So was Jim Oberweis and others. Anyway, Jack Ryan came out of that primary.

Then, of course, his escapades with his former wife came out in the divorce paper of some sort, that the media got a hold of. He just kind of self-destructed and got off the ballot.[46] And then entered Alan Keyes, who was, I think, a Maryland resident and obviously didn't mount much of a campaign. He carried some counties downstate, but other than that, it was a non-event.

DePue: Again, the whole story about Jack Ryan having to bow out—as I have heard at least in some circles—is because the Obama campaign was trying to force the issue to get the release of these otherwise sealed divorce papers, the child custody papers. Any comments about that?

[46] When a judge released of some of Jack Ryan's divorce papers, the effect on his campaign was immediate and catastrophic. In the divorce records, Jeri Ryan claimed her husband had taken her to sex clubs in New York City, New Orleans, and Paris in the late 1990s and tried to get her to have sex in front of other people. Though his main argument was that the divorce was a non-issue, Ryan curiously sought to put a positive spin on the accusations. He officially dropped out of the race in July 2004. (http://downfalldictionary.blogspot.com/2008/12/jack-ryan-sexless-sex-scandal.html)

Watson: That was it. They were supposedly sealed in some court somewhere, and the *Tribune* got a hold of them, I believe, the *Chicago Tribune*, and of course, what came out was not very good for Jack Ryan. As a result, he got off the ballot.

DePue: Do you see that as revealing character of the guy who kept voting present in the Illinois Senate, or is it kind of contrary there?

Watson: From a guy not taking positions, which he did by voting present... You've got to stand up for something, even if it's right or wrong, stand up. He did run a pretty good campaign against Alan Keyes and was all over the state. He came into Greenville, my hometown, and went to the drugstore. I wasn't there at the time. He was very active.

His inability to make decisions, though, I think sometimes we might even be seeing that today, after five years as President of the United States, the whole thing with the red line in Syria (laughs).[47] The media is making a joke of this. It keeps moving; now it's purple; it's green. I think maybe [it's] the makeup of his character, is the fact that he has a tough time making his mind up.

He's very liberal, very philosophical guy, but when it comes to punching that button and making your vote of record, he had a difficult time with it.

DePue: It was even before the general election or right at the cusp of the general election where he skyrocketed to fame because of the speech he made at the Democratic Convention. Obviously, you knew about it at the time. What was your response to hearing about that?

Watson: I was proud of him. Here he was, kind of a junior senator from Illinois, and here he had been selected to make the keynote speech at the Democrat National Convention. Somebody was pushing this guy—that's what everybody thought—and he hit a homerun with that and just escalated from there.

DePue: Among you and your colleagues in the Illinois Senate, who were you thinking was pushing him?

Watson: The word was John Kerry all the time, that John Kerry made the decision that he asked him to make that speech. Whether that was the case, I don't know, but

[47] In August 2012, President Barack Obama told a group of reporters the use of chemical weapons by Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria would cross his "red line." A year later, Syrian forces killed more than 1,400 people with sarin gas. Obama didn't respond immediately. Instead, a month later, he agreed to a deal with Russia to remove and destroy 600 metric tons of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile. (https://www.vox.com/2018/4/15/17238568/syria-bomb-trump-obama-russia)

that was what our speculation was. There's always... You hear all this background stuff.

DePue: I thought you were going to say somebody from Illinois, because John Kerry, from Massachusetts, who's the head of the ticket, why would he select some obscure guy from Illinois to do that?

Watson: He, I guess, made a name for himself out there, and he does speak well, obviously. He's a very good communicator. Maybe he's wrong a lot of times, but he does communicate his thoughts well.

DePue: I'm putting you on the spot here; I apologize for that.

Watson: No, that's okay. I don't know that anybody from Illinois pushed that, Dick Durbin or Emil Jones. I don't think Emil had that kind of clout at the national level.

DePue: Durbin was already the Senate majority leader by that time, correct? Durbin was?

Watson: He probably was, although that never would have been... Yeah.

DePue: At what point in time did you think, Boy, this is a serious candidate for the presidency? Was it at that moment in time?

Watson: When he beat Hillary. No, I didn't think of him escalating that fast anyway. That was another issue, inexperience that he had. His lack of experience, being just a senator for that short period of time, really didn't give him the tools to go into a presidency, knowing, I think, things that needed to be done and surrounding himself with people that could get things done. That's always an issue. You're only as good as the people around you, and I think he made some bad selections. Geithner hadn't paid his taxes... There was a multitude of problems with some of those people.

DePue: Tim Geithner you're talking about.

Watson: What is it?

DePue: Tim Geithner.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: The Secretary of Treasury.

Watson: Secretary of Treasury.

DePue: What did you think about his campaign?

Watson: I was never a big John McCain guy.

DePue: (laughs) But you just said you went out campaigning for him.

Watson: I did; he was the standard bearer. I had to help him, support him. But if you meet people and talk to them a little bit, personally... I didn't like his maverick attitude, and he was just kind of standoffishness. I liked George [W.] Bush—I know a lot of people didn't, still don't—I think time will give him a better place in history. And he took on Bush a lot.

DePue: McCain or Obama?

Watson: McCain. But then he became our candidate, so I supported him. A war hero, [it's] easy to support a guy like that. I certainly didn't want Barack Obama to be our next president.

DePue: Do you think Obama ran an effective campaign?

Watson: Yes, I do. He was the first one to do all the technology, the social media stuff that everybody uses now.

DePue: Would it be fair to say that it was the Democrats' election to lose, that they had all the advantages because of the animosity the country had about President Bush?

Watson: I would say it was tough for McCain to follow Bush. But he was independent of him because of his stands he took against him when he was in the Senate, took against Bush, that distanced himself from him. It wasn't like [Dick] Cheney running for president or somebody of that nature.

DePue: The day after the election in 2008, what did you think it said about the United States as a country, that Barack Obama had been elected president?

Watson: Obviously, that a black man would get elected. That said good things, that that could happen. But from a purely philosophical point, I didn't think it was a good thing at all. Once again, I think... Not many times am I proven right, but history, I think, is going to prove us right on this one because we are not in very good shape right now. All the policies that have been promoted by this administration, I think, has gotten us to the point that we are in now, economically I'm talking about. Maybe our place even in the world, with the stature this country once had, I think, has been eroded a little bit.

DePue: Now, jumping four years ahead…

Watson: And I think that goes right back to the yellow button (both laugh). I really do. I think it goes right back to the yellow button, the fact that he's so hesitant to make a decision.

DePue: Were you surprised by the election results in 2012, with him being reelected?

Watson: Not necessarily, no. I really thought though that [Mitt] Romney was going to win.

DePue: Were you more a Romney guy than a McCain guy?

Watson: I was neither. They were not my Republicans. That's not the wing that I supported in the Republican Party.

DePue: What did you see that was wrong about them as Republicans?

Watson: About McCain, I just didn't like his independence and speaking ill of other Republicans and being so outspoken on it, to kind of focus the center on him versus maybe what it should be. I always thought that was... And he's still doing that today (both laugh). But that's John McCain, I guess. That's the nature of politics; you bring the focus to yourself.

Romney, I wasn't really a Romney guy over the years, although to be elected governor of Massachusetts, that tells you something about the man's philosophy. To be elected in Massachusetts as a Republican is obviously not a good thing for a Republican. (phone with musical ringtone)

DePue: That doesn't sound like music typical of Greenville.

Watson: No it's not. That's my wife too. I told her what I was doing, so maybe she'll... No, that's typical of Florida (DePue laughs).

DePue: It does sound more typical of Florida. Do you want to take that?

Watson: No, I just turned it off.

DePue: Was Romney too moderate?

Watson: Too moderate, yeah. I'm pretty conservative. But once again, I got involved in his campaign and felt good about his election, the possibilities of his election. But I knew, running against an incumbent president, is not always... That's not a good thing, generally. But things had not gone well for Obama, and things weren't going well for the country. I felt maybe the public would say, "It's time for a change."

Our electorate has changed a lot. I'm not sure a conservative can get elected, even a moderate Republican like Romney. I'm not so sure that's what's in the future for politics in this country.

DePue: We've talked before about the demographic shifts and how that caused political shifts for the State of Illinois. So you're suggesting that's kind of being replicated on the national level as well?

Watson: I think so, yes.

DePue: We're going to jump back to 2002. We've already talked about that gubernatorial election, so now Rod Blagojevich has been elected Governor of the State of Illinois. And now the Democrats are going to have the majority in the senate and, at least in part, that leads to James Pate Philip making the decision to retire. Did that surprise you at all?

Watson: Oh, yes, yeah. We all wondered; how can he serve as minority leader after being president of the senate? Pate had been around a long time. I thought he might stay, but then he made that announcement at our caucus the night of our caucus. Then we decided... The next night we actually voted on who was going to be the leader.

DePue: Had he talked to you about making that decision before?

Watson: I actually even drove over to the dinner with him. He and I went over together to our caucus dinner, where we were meeting and all, and he didn't tell me.

DePue: Was he favoring a different candidate than yourself?

Watson: Yes (laughs). Yes, he was.

DePue: Who was that?

Watson: Kirk Dillard, DuPage County. With Pate, county politics runs pretty thick, and DuPage was kind of the center of Republican politics in Illinois in Pate's mind. So naturally, the next leader should be from DuPage County.

DePue: I would guess though, that if he did decide to bow out, you were ready to launch your candidacy. Is that correct?

Watson: There was a group of us that had been talking about this, because I'd say in... I don't know what year it would have been, but anyway, Pate had talked about leaving, like '96 or...had talked about the possibility of retiring and that "somebody's got to be ready to take my place" kind of thing.

So, there was probably about five, six of us that met. I kind of became the candidate of that group. There were others, obviously, who were thinking about it, who would have made good presidents of the senate. That's when we still controlled it. I know John Maitland was one of them who was thinking about it, and there were others. That never happened. He stayed in until we lost the majority in 2002 and then he got out.

DePue: So, Kirk Dillard is at least one other candidate. Was anybody else throwing their hat in the ring?

Watson: Steve Rauschenberger was a candidate. He was a good friend but, obviously, thought of himself as being the leader of our caucus and would have been very capable.

DePue: Putting modesty aside then, how did you manage to win the caucus vote to become the next minority leader?

Watson: After Pate made his announcement, again the five of us or six of us—however many it was—met and talked about gathering support.

DePue: Were these all downstate senators?

Watson: No, not at all.

DePue: Who else was in that group?

Watson: Ed Petka, who was from Joliet; Todd Sieben from Geneseo; Brad Burzynski.

DePue: What was the last name?

Watson: Burzynski, B-u-r-z-y-n-s-k-i. Gosh, I need to go back and look. Oh, Dave Luechtefeld.

DePue: Go ahead.

Watson: All right. Anyway, the next morning, I go into my office real early. I call every senate Republican, every senator and left a message that I wanted to talk to them; I wanted to be leader, and I would appreciate their support. That way nobody could say I didn't ask them, and at least they had my voice message.

One thing that happened during that period of time was my secretary, Joanne Minks, said to me, "Adeline Geo-Karis would like to see you." Her office was right around the corner from me. I went into her office. Adeline was a member of the leadership. She might have been the first Republican woman to be in leadership and well regarded, well respected member. But we had different views on some things. Anyway, that didn't matter. She's a member of our caucus. She said to me—to her credit she said to me—"I want to be honest with you, Frank, on what I'm going to do in this election." She'd gotten my message. I said, "That's fine, Geo." She said, "I'm going to be supporting Kirk Dillard." I said, "I appreciate your candor. Thank you very much." That was the end of it.

I left to go back to the office. The phone rings again, and it's Joanne. She said, "Geo wants to—Adeline Geo-Karis, we called her Geo—wants to see you again. I go back in there, and I thought, What's this about? She said, "I want to just tell you that, if Kirk doesn't make it on the second ballot, I'm going to support Steve Rauschenberger" (both laugh). I'm, What? Well anyway, that's okay; that's all right. I said, "Geo, you do what you've got to do. That's fine." I left there, and I just couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it.

Then, of course, I got elected leader, and she expected to be in leadership. We had our differences after that. I mean, the people that bring you

to the dance, you take them home. The people that helped me, I want them to be part of my leadership team. And the fact that she'd been in leadership all those years, that's fine. But how could I go to the people that helped me and say, Well, I'm going to put Adeline in after…" So, we had some problems after that.

DePue: How many votes did it take?

Watson: Well, we had twenty-six members, so I had to have fourteen. You have to have a majority. In a minority caucus, you have to have the majority of the minority. In the majority caucus, you have to have thirty votes to get elected president.

Anyway, here we all voted and put them in a hat. Dick Klemm, who was a state senator from McHenry County, counted the ballots, and I felt pretty confident that I had it. So did Kirk, for that matter. So, somebody out there was telling both of us they were supporting us. That's not good that somebody would do that. Anyway, he felt he had it won; I felt like I had it won. Then all of a sudden Dick Klemm opens up a ballot; there's nothing on it, didn't vote for me or Kirk. Steve Rauschenberger had bowed out at that time, so it was just Kirk and I.

DePue: So, it could be an election determined in the first vote.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: And it was?

Watson: It was.

DePue: By a squeaky margin?

Watson: I think I had fifteen, was what I had. Then there was the blank.

DePue: I didn't ask you this before; why did you want to be minority leader?

Watson: I wanted to be president (DePue laughs); that's what I would like to have been. That was a goal of mine when I got into this. Some people want to be governor; some people want to be different things. My goal was to be president of the senate or minority leader, but preferably president, because I always liked the local politics of the senate, or the house for that matter, but more the senate. It was different than being a statewide officeholder. You still had districts, and you had people you represented, so there was a lot of diversity and difference of opinion.

DePue: Obviously, you've been around the senate long enough to know the game, the implications of being the minority leader now, that you're one of the Four Tops.

Watson: Five. The governor and the four leaders, the five tops.

DePue: And at least in Illinois politics—you can tell me when I'm off track on this—that the four leaders in the house and the senate are expected not just to be the caucus leaders when the senate is in session. You're the ones who are supposed to figure out, by looking at the map, finding the next group of senatorial candidates, sponsoring their career and getting more Republicans elected to the Illinois Senate. And oh, by the way, while you're at it, raise the money it takes for them to run a good campaign.

Watson: That was the knock on me, was how can a downstater—You had to be from the Chicago area to raise money—how could a downstater? And I proved them wrong on that. I raised a lot of money as an individual state senator. Then, of course, when I was minority leader I did pretty well too.

DePue: But you didn't do well enough to ever get the majority back.

Watson: No, I didn't. I always felt bad about that. We picked up one seat in the next election, 2004. Gary Dahl got elected.

DePue: D-a-h-l?

Watson: D-a-h-l, um-hmm. He was a good member and beat Pat Welch, a longtime senator from the Morris area. I can't even think of the towns that are up there, but it was Grundy County and some of Will County. So we picked up one in the next year; that got us to twenty-seven. That was as high as we got.

DePue: The criticism about the Republicans' inability to raise funds oftentimes was directed more at the house than the senate side.

Watson: They did pretty good. Tom Cross, he was the leader the same time I was. We both became leaders of our respective caucuses at the same time. Tom's done a good job raising money.

DePue: Did you inherit Pate Philip's staff?

Watson: I did, a good staff. We had the best staff in the building. I always felt that way. There was a lot of them that left though, after Pate decided to leave. Some of the key people left.

DePue: I ran off for 2000 and then 2002, the Democrat and the Republican staff. There were a couple names that I was especially interested in. Carter Hendren was one that left?

Watson: Carter Hendren left; Tom Taylor left. They formed a lobby group, been very successful, still today.

DePue: Was there any reason? They just wanted to break off on their own and saw that as the opportunity to do that?

Watson: I think so. See, we were in the majority for ten years. So it's tough, all of a sudden, when you're calling the shots and making policy and creating the agenda for the day and all that, to just become a minority leader or staff member for that matter. I think that had something to do with it.

I don't think it was necessarily my election, although Kirk Dillard said that Carter would stay if he got... And Carter was a key member of our staff. But Brian McFadden became our chief of staff when Carter left.

DePue: Was he already on the senate staff?

Watson: He had been, but then he was Karen Hasara's chief of staff, who was mayor of Springfield. He was wonderful; he was a good man.

DePue: So you brought him back to work on the staff.

Watson: I brought him back, um-hmm.

DePue: And you thought the new staff was just as effective as the one that Philip had?

Watson: I think so. But remember, we're in the minority again. It's easy when you're in the majority to be very effective because you establish the agenda; you create the policy; you make the budget. Then when we became minority, that all shifted to the Democrats.

DePue: Who else did you bring onto your leadership team as senators?

Watson: Peter Roskam became a leader. He supported me earlier, a congressman now from DuPage County. He caught a lot of flak for that.

DePue: For backing you?

Watson: For backing me (laughs).

DePue: We're almost violating Reagan's first rule of politics, huh, speaking bad about Republicans.

Watson: No, I'm not speaking bad of anyone. Peter Roskam, him supporting me was a big risk on his part.

DePue: But he was getting some heat from other Republicans in DuPage County?

Watson: Yes. Oh, certainly, certainly, but I think it worked out for him pretty well, because he's become a pretty good congressman. He was our floor leader, a very articulate guy, the best debater we had. I put him in a position of a lot of responsibility. He was the spokesman on the Executive Committee. I could see him as a rising star.

DePue: Was Christine Radogno part of your team as well?

Watson: No, she was not. No, she didn't support me (both laugh). I did; I took care of the people that took care of me. Maybe that's wrong, but if it's wrong, then so be it.

DePue: Is it as simple as this, that you represented the more conservative wing of the Republicans, and people like Radogno would have represented the other wing?

Watson: Yes. She wasn't necessarily... At that point in time, she hadn't had the experience to become a leader. But I ended up putting her in leadership over time, as people left, retired or whatever. She's become a very effective leader today, and I supported her for leader.

DePue: Politics within the party and politics outside the party are entirely different animals I would think (Watson laughs).

Watson: That's right.

DePue: What were the major legislative initiatives that you, in the minority, were pushing for the next few years, as minority leader?

Watson: We had to work with the governor. We were all about a capital program, roads and bridges, construction, universities, schools. We had a school construction program, that I was actually the original sponsor of, that had been continued. We wanted to see that. That was very successful, helped a lot of schools build new buildings, helped local taxpayers with state support for construction. So we wanted to see that continued.

The first year, when I got sworn in as leader at the convention center, swearing in day, when the governor's sworn in, inauguration day, I met with Blagojevich down in this holding room—they had us all downstairs—and talked to him. I said, "My caucus, I believe, will be willing to help you straighten this state out." We were in a financial mess at that point in time, even then. We needed to cut back, and I felt our caucus would deliver the votes to get that done. We'd help the governor, if that's what he saw fit to do. I wanted to work with him. That's where we took a total different direction. He went the other way.

DePue: What was your reaction after that first meeting though? Did he seem to be responsive?

Watson: Yes. Oh, he's a very engaging guy when you talk to him. He focuses on you, and he's very good one on one. And he was very good campaigning. He's very good in front of a camera. He has some ability about him; he did have. When he was a candidate, to be able to walk into a room and say all the right things... Even if he felt like he wasn't going to be able to fulfill a promise, he was able to convince people he was.

DePue: Would you say he was a charismatic guy?

Watson: Yes, very much so.

DePue: Would you have used the same word for Barack Obama?

Watson: Probably. He has a way with words, and so did Blagojevich.

DePue: This might be some initiatives that you were pursuing when you guys were in the majority in the senate, but I read an article that was talking about your major accomplishments. I don't know that we've talked about some of these, so I want to make sure we get them into the record, Medical Malpractice Reform Law.

Watson: That was the big issue that was really initiated, the start of it [was] in Madison, St. Clair County. Madison County, Illinois was always called the judicial hell hole. That was a **national** term we had for it, because of all the lawsuits. Everybody wanted to file a lawsuit in Madison County, because the judges were very liberal with their decisions and their awards. Because of that and doctors being sued, we were losing doctors. The people—this is when the people can have something to say about what goes on here in Springfield—they had meeting after meeting after meeting, got organized, Madison, St. Clair County. Then it just kind of caught fire.

George Bush came to Madison County to give a speech about medical malpractice. They focused—they, being the people of those two counties—focused that issue as one of the real true troubles and problems of Illinois. We wanted to see something done about that. We wanted to see some revisions and reforms that would make medical malpractice more affordable, available to doctors, so that they would stay in Illinois. We were losing especially neurologists, just right and left. There was very few south of Springfield; they were going to other states.

DePue: Were you successful?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Was this during the time Blagojevich was governor?

Watson: Oh, yeah. He organized some of the meetings in his office. I think he didn't really want it; the trial lawyers were vehemently opposed to it. But I think again, just the pressure from the public... This is one of those lessons that [if] people can learn it; they can really make a difference here; [that's] the way they handled that.

We had people up here from all over the state, just lobbying on medical malpractice. Doctors were here. The legislature, the senate and the house, recognized that there was a real problem with this, maybe not necessarily in Chicago or other cities, but as a state as a whole, it was a problem. We were able to pass it. It was not an easy thing to do, and of course, they ruled it unconstitutional.

DePue: They, being the Illinois Supreme Court.

Watson: The Supreme Court, a split vote.

DePue: What was the rationale for declaring it unconstitutional?

Watson: It was the awards.

DePue: The caps on the awards?

Watson: The caps.

DePue: And then the steam went out of the whole initiative?

Watson: It had an effect. The public got aware of the problem. As a result of that, I think there were fewer lawsuits. During that time period, I think the cost of medical malpractice insurance dropped some. So, I think it was effective in that regard. Now today, we don't hear much about it. So I like to think that we did some good, even though it's not law.

DePue: These would have been state judges that the lawsuits were going before?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: So, were there some changes in the judges in that area of the country as well?

Watson: There was. That became an issue, especially the Supreme Court issue, the deep south and the fifth judicial district, that was a huge issue, and the Republican prevailed down there. Lloyd Karmeier, who was a very good man and a very good judge, still sitting on the bench. That was ten years ago, I guess, that he was elected. That was one of the most expensive Supreme Court races in the history of the country, for that matter. It was millions of dollars, and it was spent by the business community and the medical community on one side with people wanting medical malpractice, and then the other side was the others: trial lawyers, labor, those who traditionally opposed it.

DePue: It's very much at that point in time, that those were red meat issues for both the Republican and Democrat parties.

Watson: Very much so. I don't think the Democrats wanted to talk about it. Those that were against it, they didn't want to have to deal with it. But it kept getting brought up.

Here, in my hometown, Greenville, two doctors, they were cousins. One went to Indiana. They practiced medicine in Greenville, a small town, and they both were graduates of Greenville College and left. One went to Indiana; the other went to Kansas, because of the high cost of medical malpractice.

DePue: Another accomplishment I wanted to hear about was economic development and the EDGE program, an initiative that, apparently, was intended to attract industries, businesses, to the State of Illinois.

Watson: Economic Development for a Growing Economy. I think it was Senate Bill 90 or 93. Yes, it was a program that Missouri had. It was a tax credit for new jobs, the tax credit being a State of Illinois tax credit that would benefit new businesses or existing businesses that added jobs. It was a very... It's being used even today.

DePue: So it was successful.

Watson: Very much so. George Ryan was the governor when we did that. He came down to Greenville to actually sign the legislation.

DePue: How about the college tuition savings program? Was that prior to or after Blagojevich was governor?

Watson: No, it was prior. Both of them, College Illinois and the one Judy Topinka, Bright Start, I was a sponsor of both of those.[48, 49] School is still out I guess, on some of that. Of course, the economy was not good at the time and some things were... The money was invested, and the investments didn't go well. I would say that maybe, on those programs, we've had some problems.

Now there's a new one out called Bright Directions. That's one that Dan Rutherford started. That one is being promoted now more than the other two. I'm not even sure what the status of the other two are now.

DePue: In general, you've described yourself as a small government Republican. So why did the State of Illinois need to get into the business of having college savings programs?

Watson: Well, it was a good thing. College tuition—especially since Blagojevich took office—tuition was just skyrocketing, and this gave the public an incentive to invest in their children's future. Of course, it had some benefit coming from the state to those people.

The College Illinois Program was one in which, if you bought a contract on your child, today you would get tuition for today's...whatever it is today. Then when your child was ready to go to school, that tuition would be made available at that particular time. A lot of people took advantage of that. But it did have some financial difficulty because of the market.

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[48] The College Illinois!® 529 Prepaid Tuition Program allows individuals to set up a plan to pay for college tuition and mandatory fees at today's current contract price. (https://www.collegeillinois.org/)

[49] Bright Start 529 Plans offer a tax-advantaged way to save for college by starting early and putting away even a small amount of money each month for educational expenses. (https://www.brightstart.com/)

DePue: Your area of Illinois... I don't know if the Greenville area directly, but certainly in the district, there was coal. Were you backing some coal initiatives or environmental initiatives related to coal?

Watson: We had coal mine after coal mine in our area close. A lot of it was because of the environmental laws.

DePue: This is high sulfur coal.

Watson: High sulfur coal. Unfortunately, that's what we have in Illinois is high sulfur coal. It's hot when it burns; it creates a lot of BTUs, but it also has an emission problem. The laws, regulations pretty well put an end to a lot of that. The desire to purchase that coal was lost on environmental issues.

DePue: But this would have been federal regulation and EPA rulings that would have…

Watson: Some of it was state. Some of it was state, and so we were just trying to... In fact, some of the legislation, we just wanted to be the same as Indiana or the same as Iowa or whatever, so that our regulations would be similar. But we went steps higher, and that created a lot of problems for the coal industry.

DePue: Was that legislation that you were backing or opposing, to make it stricter?

Watson: No, I was opposing that. I was trying to roll back some of the regulations, because I always felt that... After seeing the Albers Coal Mine close in my area and my district, and seeing the end of the careers of an awful lot of good people because a coal mining job was a good job. It paid well, that one and the Coffeen Mine that's right next to my area.

You see the impact that has on families and on people. They move or whatever; they're uprooted and have to go somewhere else to get a job. I would rather see us concerned about the job and the quality of the job for someone, more than some restriction on the environment. Maybe, long-term, that's not a good policy, but certainly short-term.

DePue: Were there some environmental initiatives, especially in rehabbing a lot of these old coal mines, especially open pit mines?

Watson: Scrubbers on stacks, that was a big deal. We created that, but that was expensive to do that.

DePue: But there was legislation promoting the use of scrubbers, that you were backing?

Watson: Yes. We wanted something to keep the coal mines open. If it's going to be an emissions problem, then scrubbing the coal prior to usage would help with that. So, we tried to create incentives for the coal industry to go into scrubbing.

DePue: Here in Springfield, I know that they've got a new coal fire plant. It's got the modern scrubbers on it, and they're using high sulfur coal.

Watson: And there's still people that do. There's an awful lot of western coal—that's low sulfur coal—being imported into Illinois.

DePue: I just read though, recently, that the coal production in the old fields in West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the fields out in Wyoming are actually on the decline, and coal production in this basin here, in Illinois, is on the increase right now.

Watson: I'm not aware of that, but that's a good thing for Illinois. I can't imagine why Illinois coal would be out producing or at least escalating while lower sulfur coal would not. Coal usage in general has just dropped.

DePue: Right. I mean, that's the explanation for why, nationwide, it's on the decline. We've gone through quite a few here; you mentioned some more. Was there anything else, in terms of legislative initiatives, that was especially important to you, while you were minority leader?

Watson: The biggest thing I remember, the most contentious issue, was the budget. We took total exception to that process in 2004. That's when I threw the papers in the air (laughs).

DePue: I wanted to get to that. This is a good transition point because the last thing I had for legislative initiatives was the continual butting of heads over budget and pension issues. That gets back to the governor. I kind of put him aside for a while, and I want to ask you about a few other persons that are going to be important. You've talked a little bit about Emil Jones, already. What was your personal relationship with Jones?

Watson: We didn't have a very good personal relationship. To his credit, he called every day to give me what the agenda was and what we'd be doing on the senate floor. Pate Philip did that when he was president of the senate. He called Emil Jones when Emil was minority leader, that ten years. So Emil did that.

But we did not socialize together. I tried to, and I think maybe... I had conversations with him about it, you know, "What's the problem? What's the issue? Why can't we just kind of work together here?" And I think, honestly, he would have liked to have done that, but maybe being president of the senate, you've got to show your power, because maybe that's what Pate Philip did to him. I oftentimes said, "You know, I'm not Pate Philip. You don't have to beat me down just because of something maybe Pate had done." Because they did not get along either.

DePue: They're both Chicago or suburban politicians, but Pate obviously had a style…

Watson: He had a style of his own (laughs).

DePue: His was different from yours; would that be fair to say?

Watson: Oh, yeah, I'd say so. But you just never know how you would be as president of the senate. I wouldn't have led like Pate Philip led necessarily, but he had a long strong attributes that I appreciated. No, I was a get along guy, I don't create a lot of waves.

DePue: Let me ask you this. The perception, the public perception, you know when you go to bars, and you're talking to your buddies.

Watson: That's where you get everything done, is in a bar (laughs).

DePue: The public's perception of Emil Jones was, can you be any more inarticulate? People would translate that, can you be any dumber and still be the senate majority leader, the senate president?

Watson: He was not dumb by any means, but he did have... He was hard to understand, and that sometimes was an issue with me, just picking up what he's saying.

DePue: You mean listening to him and understanding what he meant to say?

Watson: Yes, yes, actually what he's saying. I think he knew that. I think he made some progress with that over time. But I don't think he was dumb. He was street smart. He knew how to get things done.

DePue: He was an effective caucus leader?

Watson: Yes. Yes, he was, very much so. He got support on legislation. I don't know how he got it, what he did to his members, but there was some real critical votes that were made by Democrats during that period of time, that he got everybody in line, and that's to his credit. His members responded to his type of leadership.

DePue: Was there a considerable amount of diversity among the senate Democrats as well?

Watson: Oh, yes, he had other black members, he had Hispanic members, and then he had whites.

DePue: Downstate members, and he was able to keep them under discipline as well?

Watson: When he took over, he had thirty-three members; we had twenty-six. Phil Rock had a little more challenge than Emil did. Phil Rock had a caucus of thirty and diversity in his caucus was kind of the same. But I think people responded to Emil's leadership. His own members didn't like the way the speaker of the house was dictating policy and kind of pushing them around, and that was the practice of the speaker, I mean he controlled the process. He did dictate policy

and made policy, and that took exception to senators who didn't necessarily like that. Then they would rally around Emil because of it.

DePue: You're talking about the Democrats in the senate.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: We're obviously talking about Mike Madigan here.

Watson: The speaker, yes, Mike Madigan.

DePue: And again, the street reputation of Mike Madigan was—still is to this day—the most powerful politician in Illinois. Would you agree with that?

Watson: Oh, yes.

DePue: Why?

Watson: Because he is; there's no doubt about it.

DePue: What is it about Mike Madigan that makes him so powerful?

Watson: That's what he seeks, I think, more than anything. I don't know why he stays in this business. I think it's the power of being speaker. He surrounds himself with good people. Both on his leadership and certainly his staff are excellent. So he's got people who can get things done and can get it done right, and he's been very effective. He's been doing this for thirty-some years, thirty-six years or so. To prevail that long, here in Springfield... Just to live that long here in Springfield (both laugh) is quite an accomplishment. He's the only constant that has been here through all the times here, and he holds some responsibility—he has to—for the problems of this state, whether it's pension contributions or economic policies or spending. He was always at the helm. As much as you respect the man. There's some of the things that have transgressed here in Illinois, that haven't always been good, and he'd been a part of it.

DePue: Normally when you ask, "Who's the most powerful guy in the state?", you're looking at the top, and you're looking at the governor's position. Are you saying that, under the Ryan Administration, that Madigan was probably the most powerful?

Watson: I'd say Ryan worked with everybody. Probably Madigan got done what he wanted done in that administration, and I'd say Emil did. Emil said, when they hung the portrait of George Ryan in Room 212, I think it was—at least that's where the ceremony was—I can recall Emil saying that this was the best governor he'd ever served with, George Ryan. So, he obviously got a lot of things done under George.

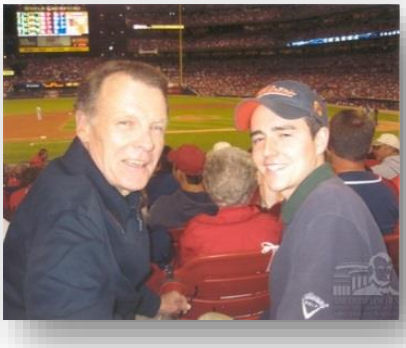
In the senate, we did not. We didn't go along with George on a lot of things he wanted, and he took exception to that because he was the governor. Of course, Pate was our... We controlled the senate, and he needed Pate for a lot of legislation. And they were good friends. In fact, I think that's one of the reasons Pate stayed on as president, is he wanted to serve with George Ryan as governor. But some of the policies that came out of George Ryan's administration, whether it was assault weapon bans or some of the spending and all that went on, we in the senate, Republicans at least, did not go along, necessarily.

DePue: What was your personal relationship with Mike Madigan like?

Watson: When I became leader, I'd say it was good. It's a matter of respect. I think he thought that when I told him I was going to do something, whatever it might have been, I stuck to it. I can remember him calling me one summer, I was in a meeting in St. Louis, the phone rings; it's the speaker of the house. I'm thinking, Well what could this be?

Anyway, he asked me, "Are you still okay on this issue? Have you changed your mind?" And I said, "No." I said, "I told you I was going to do it, and I'll be there when it's needed." I think he just respected that, and so I got along with him.

He called me several times, after I had my stroke. He called me four or five times, just checking on my well-being, and I've usually stopped in to see him when I'm in Springfield. We might have disagreed on a lot of things from a policy point of view, but you've certainly got to respect the man for his ability to lead.



Speaker Madigan and his son Andrew at a St. Louis Cardinal Ball game in 2006.

DePue: Would you say you had that old fashioned kind of collegial relationship that you hear about from the old days?

Watson: Yeah, I'd say that might have been it. I went to a baseball game with him. His son came to St. Louis. He called me, wanted to know if I'd want to go. I went down there, met him for dinner at Charlie Gitto's Restaurant, right by the ballpark. Had Italian food; had a picture taken with he and I, and they put it up in the restaurant. So, yeah, I'd say so. We'd talk baseball a lot. People don't know that, but he's a very knowledgeable baseball fan and a big White Sox supporter. So we talked baseball a lot.

Speaker of the House Michael Madigan and Senator Watson at Charlie Gitto's in St. Louis in 2006, prior to a St. Louis Cardinal game.

DePue: I know Blagojevich was a big Cubs fan, so there's one strike against the two of them, huh?

Watson: We talked a lot of baseball too, with Blagojevich, sometimes when it was inappropriate (both laugh).

DePue: There's one other person I wanted to ask you about, in terms of the Four Tops. That's obviously Tom Cross, your colleague on the house side of things. How did you and Tom Cross get along?

Watson: I'd say well. That first year, they wanted to be a part of the process when all the spending took place and all that. They stayed at the table and negotiated all that in 2004. We just didn't want to be a part of it. I'd go to those meetings, and all I did was complain...not complain. My position was, "We can't do this. We can't do it." So they started having meetings without me, they being the Four Tops, instead of five.

Tom was a part of that, and that's okay. He was doing what he thought was best for his caucus; it might have been. I think my people in the senate, the Republican caucus, they supported what we were doing.

DePue: I guess I wasn't paying close enough attention. You weren't going very deliberately because of what reason again?

Watson: At that point in time, I wasn't invited. I'd go to these leaders meetings, and Blagojevich would throw all these programs out on the table, all this new spending, and doing all these things that I just didn't think were appropriate. We didn't have the money.

DePue: So you stopped getting invited?

Watson: I stopped getting invited, yep, because I walked out of a couple of meetings (both laugh). I'd storm out of them, take my notebook, slap it shut and say, "I'm done with this. This is crazy."

I wish we'd have had control, because I think, if the Republicans would have had control of the senate during that period of time, I think things would be different. I truly believe that, even today, economically speaking. We were

about paying our pensions, paying our obligations for that. We just didn't want any part of skipping payments. Even though maybe it had been done in previous years—we weren't necessarily privy to all that, of what was going on—but once I got in the room and realized what was happening, I know that our members would not have condoned what was going on. I just thought, Instead of sitting here, I'm going to get up and leave, and did walk out. And like I said, in time I was not included. That was 2003. Then, of course, in 2004, an altogether different scenario took place.

DePue: We're at a point in this where, from here on out, it's pretty much a lot about Rod Blagojevich and your relationship and what you know about what was going on with his circumstances, his time as governor and obviously, his arrest and impeachment as well. This might be a logical place to break, or we can go just a few more minutes if you'd like.

Watson: Why don't we break, and just pick that up when we get back.

DePue: Yeah. I think this is as logical place to do it as any. Thank you very much, Senator. It's been interesting today, and it's going to be even more interesting, perhaps, next time around.

Watson: All right, very good. Thanks, Mark.

(end of transcript #6)

Interview with Frank Watson

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Interview # 07: May 13, 2013
Interviewer: Mark DePue

DePue: Today is Monday, May 13, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. After this many sessions, Senator, (Watson laughs) you're probably tired of hearing me say that.

Watson: No, that's all right. No, not at all. I've kind of enjoyed this actually, rehashing my past.

DePue: We're with Senator Frank Watson. This is our seventh, and I think it's going to be our last session. There's only one governor to talk about, and that's Governor Rod Blagojevich.

Watson: The one and only.

DePue: Yeah. But, before we dive into that discussion, what I want to do is to ask your impressions, your memories of Speaker Mike Madigan, working the legislative floor. We were talking about that after our last session.

Watson: Well, it was always interesting to watch the speaker work the floor on an issue that was controversial, and he needed support. Members would be sitting in their seats, and of course, back then—I don't think it's that way now—they kept the board open for a while, after the roll call was actually taken. So people could switch their votes before the final vote was determined.

Anyway, it would be, let's say, White Sox Stadium, back when that was an issue, or maybe the Navy Pier, both of which were for Chicago. Of course, for downstaters, that was not a good vote, necessarily, for them in their districts, because they didn't want to be perceived as being owned by the speaker or owned by the City of Chicago, either one. Anyway, there would be this issue come up, and the votes were short. There weren't enough votes to get it done.

He'd start working the floor, and he'd go around and start looking at how you voted. Of course, we were on the other side, watching all this take place, because we were probably no on most of those issues where there was a problem. But he had to have some downstate support. So his downstate Democrats, he had to go through then. He'd start working the floor, and it was amazing to watch guys sitting in their seat, as they kind of turned around, just to see where he was. Is he going to get to me? Oh, no. They were looking at the board and seeing what the vote is and how much more is needed to pass. They're just hoping that all that takes places before they come down to their seat.

Finally, maybe this individual's vote was needed. The speaker would come up, and these guys are literally shaking, almost. It was funny to watch them. Anyway, the speaker would put his hand on their shoulder, and they knew that they were beholden to the speaker, either through the campaign

process, money for their campaign, or the speaker endorsed them, or they wanted something from the speaker. Well, now he wants something back.

They'd be sitting there, and all of a sudden, the speaker's hand would come on their shoulder. They'd slowly but surely put their finger on the appropriate button and push the button and change the vote. And, of course, the speaker would get what he wants. That happened quite a bit, mostly towards the end of the session. I'm sure somewhere in all your taping, you've read or seen or somebody's talked about how they stopped the clock. That did happen one time, while I was a member of the house. Jim McPike was in the chair, and they declared the vote passed at 11:59 p.m. when in fact it was like 12:13 a.m. Anyway, those were the times when the speaker really put his power to work and members were always a little bit leery of the speaker's power and what he could do to them if they didn't support him. So many times, most of them did.

DePue: Does that mean that occasionally, even somebody from the senate like yourself, would come over just to watch the show?

Watson: Oh, yeah, we did that quite a bit and vice versa. They'd come over and be sitting on the senate floor, or we'd go over and watch the house, especially when we were in control in the senate, the Republicans in the '90s, when we were in control. Then it had to pass the house with Democrat control. But that's back when people worked together. We don't have that necessarily now.

When one chamber was controlled by the house or by the Republicans or the Democrats, and the other chamber was controlled by the other party, then things had to be worked out, especially like even when the governor was a Republican. During Thompson's administration, he had to work with the Democrat majority on both sides. So all of us had to work together in some way or another, and things got done, and people were served because of the fact that we were compromising our...not necessarily our principles, but we had to compromise to get things done, as did they. It was a better time, maybe.

DePue: Are you suggesting: one, that the political process doesn't work well today; and two, that that's a factor of one party dominating both the governor's office and the house and the senate?

Watson: Yes. The answer to your question is yes. I think one-party domination is not good. If you'd ask the speaker, Speaker Madigan, or even President of the Senate, John Cullerton, I think they would say they would rather have a Republican as governor than a Democrat, because they can negotiate with him. He needs his projects or his initiatives; they need theirs, and everything can get done. When it's one party domination control, as it is today, it isn't necessarily a good thing.

DePue: And it was pretty much from 2002 on, wasn't it?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: Well, since we're talking about drama, this is a perfect segue now to start our discussion about Governor Rod Blagojevich. Now, we've already talked about that election, where he was elected, and you getting the role as the minority leader of the Republicans in the senate. That's at the same time. What were your initial impressions of Blagojevich?

Watson: Well, I didn't know him very well. He had served in the Illinois House. I wasn't there. He served for, I think, six or eight years, in the Illinois House, before he went to the U.S. Congress. So, I didn't really know him, but I knew he ran a very good primary campaign, because I didn't think he'd get nominated by the Democrats, but he did what he had to do and got a lot of downstate support, labor support, and ultimately won the primary.

We thought, with Jim Ryan as a candidate, we were in good shape, and we should have been. But unfortunately, his name was Ryan, and, of course, this was Jim Ryan, who was the…

DePue: Attorney general.

Watson: Yeah, attorney general, attorney general for the State of Illinois, from DuPage County. We thought he should have handily beaten Rod Blagojevich from Chicago, with a name like that and not really having much of a political pedigree in Illinois. But his name was Ryan, and I think that had a great deal to do with it [his losing the election]. George Ryan had just been our governor, and things had not gone well for George. I think that... Ultimately, we ended up with Rod Blagojevich.

DePue: Do you think it was strictly the name that sunk him?

Watson: That and Blagojevich's campaigning. He was a tireless campaigner. He loved to campaign, and he was very effective. I think people were tired of Ryan, for one thing, and then they were tired, maybe, of Republicans being governor. We had Thompson; we had Edgar, and we had George Ryan, so maybe they felt it was time for a change.

DePue: That's twenty-six years, I believe, for Republicans in the state capitol. One of the initial decisions that he made got a lot of buzz down here in Springfield. That was his decision not to live in the Governor's Mansion, not to move the family down here.

Watson: A huge decision, and it really ended the dominance of Springfield being the capital. For all previous governors, most of them... Thompson, of course, lives still in Chicago, but he spent a great deal of time down here in Springfield. Blagojevich spent no time. Even during session, he was always usually back in Chicago. He would even fly the plane back and forth on a daily basis, to be able to go home and didn't bring his family here.

I thought that was a real negative for Springfield. I thought that was a real negative for the state government in general and for the people of Illinois, who've come to recognize that Springfield is the capital, and this is where the business takes place. That all ended, and I think even today, being eleven years later, Pat Quinn, the governor, does not stay much in the mansion. I just think that's a real shame; I really do.

People come here to see the governor, see the mansion, see the Lincoln Museum and all the amenities of Springfield, and here our governor doesn't even live here.

DePue: One of the things that Blagojevich certainly stressed during the election campaign and he inherited was the budget deficit. I believe the figure being kicked around was $1 billion. Was that accurate? Was that a factor of the Ryan Administration and the legislature overspending at the end of his administration?

Watson: I think history will prove that to be correct. That's one thing. The senate Republicans, who were still the majority, we did not get along well with the Ryan Administration, George Ryan, not as on an individual basis, but we didn't support a lot of the spending and expansion that went on under his leadership. George was a very political person and took that out on a lot of our members, even though all of us were Republicans. He resented the fact that we didn't embrace everything that he wanted.

DePue: Was it essentially on fiscal issues that the friction was occurring?

Watson: It was fiscal issues; it was the Second Amendment. He wanted the assault weapon ban. It's still the same as what it was then. They're arguing now in congress; it's all about how do you define an assault weapon. You can't really do that without impacting, in many cases, just a sportsman's type of a gun. So he took total exception to that, and Pate Philip wouldn't allow the bill to be heard on the floor. That was the start of it, and then there was the whole Build Illinois or Illinois First?

DePue: Illinois First.

Watson: He was Illinois First. I supported Illinois First, but there were members of our caucus who didn't. He thought everybody should support it. He took it out on a lot of our individual members who didn't particularly support it.

DePue: I had mentioned this $1 billion deficit, because one of the first actions that Blagojevich took as governor was to place a hiring freeze for state employees, and in conjunction with that—I believe I've got this right—to centralize all new hiring decisions in the Governor's Office.

Watson: Well, first of all, back to the problem in the state being the budget and the fiscal problems. I don't think I've mentioned this to you. My first contact with

the governor, we were at the Capital Convention Center. We were there for the swearing in. Since I was already selected to be minority leader, I was part of the entourage that went up on the stage and listened to all the speeches and everything, of all the constitutional officers that were getting sworn in.

I'm down in this holding room with the governor and everybody else; there was a bunch of us down there. I went up to him, and I recognized that this state had a huge fiscal problem. I felt confident that our caucus would support him in trying to reign in the spending and kind of reduce some of the programs that needed to be reduced in order to make Illinois whole again.

DePue: Was that part of the platform he ran on as governor?

Watson: Oh, yeah, he talked about it a lot. But as you've just said, he was the biggest expansionist we've had in the state government, has been Rod Blagojevich. That's a big part of the problem today, is that we don't have the revenue to keep up with the spending that's going on, with all the programs he's created over his what, six years, I guess.

Anyway, I had told him. I said, "I think we can help you with this. Just give me a call; let me know." He appreciated that, and I was sincere. I wanted to work with the guy. Well, anyway, we went different directions. He totally went...that first year as governor, they just created all this spending, and they had all these revenue sources that were a one-time revenue, just here for today.

Now, again tomorrow or the next year, you had to have some kind of revenue to keep up with the spending you did the previous year. So, the one-time revenue sources would go away, and then they'd have to figure out some other way to pay for it, just like he wanted to sell the Thompson Center office building, a State of Illinois office building in Chicago. Sell it, and lease it back. But that would have been a one-time revenue. He would have spent that money, then the next year it wouldn't be available. That's how we got ourselves in this kind of problem. They skipped pension payments and do all those kind of things to create revenue to enhance their spending burst.

DePue: What did you think about his decision to centralize the hiring?

Watson: It was a centralization all right, because he could control it at that point. That was the whole idea, was to control hiring and know who's getting hired and make sure they had the stamp of approval from the administration before they were hired. That was what that was all about.

DePue: You mean the old classic Illinois patronage game?

Watson: Well, isn't that a shock? (both laugh) Yeah, that's exactly what it was. Before, there was always influence, political influence, but for both parties. People had input, not necessarily on who is being selected, but who would be considered. That's all we asked for in many cases, was just that people would be

considered and given an honest opportunity to get hired. If there was somebody better than them, so be it. But that wasn't the way Blagojevich worked.

DePue: What was the way Blagojevich worked?

Watson: They had to be party regulars. They had to be beholden to the administration for their job, and that's the way it worked.

DePue: How soon into his administration did you and others in the legislature start to hear about some of the allegations going on about what eventually would be known as pay to play?

Watson: I think we invented that. I believe the Illinois State Senate Republicans invented pay to play. I think we came up with that term.

DePue: You mean that term?

Watson: That term and also fiscal cliff. I think fiscal cliff was first used by us, the senate Republicans. I noticed that Peter Roskam, being a congressman in Washington, that's the buzz word out there, the fiscal cliff and pay to play. We witnessed it. The lobbyists who were beholden to Blagojevich, or they were fundraisers for Blagojevich, would be hired by companies, people wanting contracts with the state of Illinois. And they would be given more consideration than somebody who hadn't hired a lobbyist that was friendly with the administration.

DePue: And then turn around and make contributions to the campaign?

Watson: And turned around and make contributions to the campaign. He was all about raising money. He was just constantly focused on raising money and the next campaign.

DePue: So, raising money for his personal campaign coffers, not for the state government.

Watson: Right (laughs), right. There wasn't many donations going to the State of Illinois, Department of Revenue (DePue laughs). No, they were going into the Blagojevich for Governor or Blagojevich for whatever he wanted to do. And he had ambitions to be president.

DePue: Was that well known among all the members?

Watson: I think so. People would shake their head at the fact that he didn't have the capability of doing it, but who knows?

DePue: Why didn't you think early on that he had the capability of doing it?

Watson: Oh, he was just... He didn't focus on governing. He never really focused on it. Somebody else in his office would be asked to do whatever it was that had to be done. John Filan was his budget director, "John, you take care of this." It was always somebody else.

He was a big picture guy, and being governor, you can't be micromanaged. But Jim Edgar was, and I think Jim Edgar has been proven to be one of our better governors. Well, I think that Blagojevich was more about sustaining his…maybe his legacy or his ability to move forward, his next campaign. That was what he was all about.

DePue: We talked about pay to play, about the kind of patronage games that Blagojevich was playing. How was that different from...? I think this is a Thompson Administration term, "pinstripe patronage."

Watson: Well, there was patronage. There was a Patronage Office in the Governor's Office, and there was people that you'd call. But it didn't necessarily mean they had to be just Republicans. What happened in many cases, the governor would give a job away to a particular legislator, for influencing them on whatever issue the governor might have. That was common practice. People knew that; I would hope that they did.

DePue: Common practice within his administration or common practice in the way Illinois politics works?

Watson: Well, I think the way Illinois politics works, but it was a common practice; they had a patronage office. You went to the patronage chief if you had an issue, and they would keep score. They would keep track of what you wanted. Then ultimately, if an issue came up that maybe you didn't necessarily agree with the governor on, they'd trot out this list. People would know what pushed your button as a legislator.

DePue: Certainly George Ryan, his folks kept a very detailed list, because that was one of the things that broke towards the end of his administration, this huge list of favors that George Ryan had done for various people. You're shaking your head yes on that (both laugh). We're off the subject here. Go ahead.

Watson: No, go ahead. That's all right.

DePue: What I wanted to ask next was... I've learned from talking to governors and legislators that you guys can't keep track of one budget fight from another, that they all just kind of bleed together. Is that a fair statement?

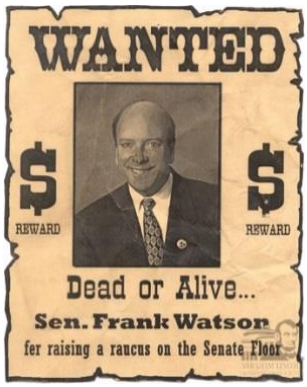
Watson: It would be certainly a fair statement for this individual, because looking back, I couldn't tell you one year from another.

DePue: I'm going to focus on some things that I think happened in 2004, but I'm sure your comments will be more generalized in nature. Anyway, was there

anything in particular during the first few budget battles with Blagojevich that you came to realize?

Watson: Well, we used to have the meeting of what they called the governor and the Four Tops or Five Tops. I was a participant in that, and once again, as I mentioned, the governor was going in a different direction than what I thought the state needed to be going. That was less spending and cutting back.

He was an expansionist. He was a huge expansionist. So, [in] those meetings, I was pretty outspoken. Sometimes, I even walked out. Twice, I think I walked out of the meeting. So, it got to the point where I guess they recognized that I wasn't going to be necessarily going along with all that they wanted to do. As a result of that, I wasn't invited to a lot of those meetings at the end of the budget cycle in 2003. We were not a participant.



In 2004 Watson received this wanted poster at a referencing to the fundraiser incident when he threw the state budget into the air in the Senate Chamber in 2003.

DePue: As I recall, at least for the first couple of budget battles, Lee Daniels was the minority leader in the house?

Watson: No. Tom Cross and I came in together as leaders.

DePue: Was Cross not as vocal as you were?

Watson: No, no he wasn't. Tom wanted to get along with the governor. I think his father, Tom's father, even might be married to a Blagojevich. I'm not positive about that, but Tom was one to get along and be part of the process. I too wanted to be part of the process, part of the solution; let's put it that way. I didn't think the direction the governor was taking this group was a solution at all. He was just creating more problems and more headaches for what we're seeing today, ten years later.

DePue: You mentioned the word expansionist, that Blagojevich was an expansionist. What were the programs, in what way was he an expansionist?

Watson: Oh, Medicaid. He made more Medicaid available to more people. He lowered the income level, so more people could be on Medicaid. All Kids was a program to provide insurance for all children of Illinois. As meaningful as that might have been, or as well intended as that might have been, we didn't have the money to pay for it. That was always the issue is, where are we going to pay for this? That never seemed to be a concern of his.

DePue: Were your concerns, your objections, primarily fiscal, or were there philosophical objections to some of this as well?

Watson: I'd say both. I mean, he caved to the union time and time again, AFSCME. If we had the money, it was one thing, but if we didn't, you couldn't spend money you didn't have. And he did, because he just delayed payments to insurance providers and providers of services to the state, like hospitals, nursing homes, doctors and drugstores. That's the way they balanced the budget, was just delay payments. And it's got to the point where it's prohibitive almost now. Towards the end of his administration, things, obviously, were not very good, from an economic point of view for this state.

DePue: Even in the first couple years of the administration though, what was the response that Blagojevich was getting from Emil Jones and the senate Democrats? Were they generally very supportive?

Watson: They were joined at the hip. Blagojevich, the Governor, and Emil Jones were very much in bed together, as we called it. Whatever the governor wanted, Emil delivered.

DePue: Well, I suspect it's fine to say that, but that the senate Republicans would have a why, that you would be able to explain why they were joined at the hip. What was the explanation that was given?

Watson: I think Blagojevich gave Emil Jones, who was the president of the senate, anything that he wanted. Whatever Emil asked for, he got, whether it was for the state university up there, Governors' State, I think it is, or Illinois State?

DePue: Chicago State.

Watson: Chicago State. Whatever Emil asked for, he got. He was well taken care of, is a term that's used here, by the governor. So they were in tandem; they were a pair.

DePue: How much of a majority did the Democrats have in the senate at the time?

Watson: We had twenty-six members.

DePue: We, the Republicans.

Watson: The Republicans in the senate had twenty-six members. So they had thirty-three.

DePue: Not a veto proof majority.

Watson: Not a veto proof majority, not at all.

DePue: The other house you're not directly observing, but certainly you're hearing things. What was the relationship with speaker Madigan and the governor the first year or two?

Watson: The first year they worked closely together. Madigan and Emil, they'd been working under Republican governors, so this was welcome to them, to have a Democrat governor, I would assume. So they all worked together that first year; that was 2003. Like I said, we were non-participants. That's the year I threw the amendment up into the air, the budget amendment, which was...

On May 22, 2003 Senator Watson threw the state budget into the air in protest to receiving it only minutes before they were expected to vote on it.

DePue: People remember that story.

Watson: That's my legacy here. "Oh, you were the guy that threw all that paper."

DePue: You need to explain that one in more detail.

Watson: What happened was, they just, boom, we got a budget on our desk. Then we had to vote on it within just minutes of when we received it. We had no idea what was in it. We hadn't been given the opportunity to read it, to create an analysis of what was going on. I just had my belly full and kind of exploded.

It was too bad, because what happened was, (laughs) I had this thing in my hand... I had no intention of doing this. I was a very emotional guy on the floor. Students who of what went on over there during my term would say that Frank would get upset. I did, and this was one of those times. I can remember picking up this amendment and just pitching it into the air.

The first thing I thought of when I threw it up—this was the budget amendment and it was, I don't know, 900 pages—was that, Oh my gosh, those chandeliers. They had beautiful chandeliers in the senate, and I thought, Oh, no, I'm going to... It went up, and I thought, Thank God; it didn't hit anything.

Then I'm thinking, It's got to come down somewhere, because paper just didn't fly off. A lot of it did, but there was a pretty good sized bulk of it that came down, and it came right down on the desk next to Adeline Geo-Karis, who was in the front row. I was in the back row. So, it was a pretty good pitch when it went up pretty high and made all three rows (laughs). That's what people around here... "Frank, I remember when you threw that amendment." And that's what happened.

They have some pictures of it. I think Jay Barnard, our photographer, got... I don't know how he did it, but he was standing off to the right-hand side. He just started taking pictures. He's got about three of them of different positions of paper going up and me looking at it and throwing it.

DePue: You mentioned that you didn't really intend to do that, going into it. It was just a spontaneous thing, but did it have the desired effect?

Watson: I don't think so. No. It didn't have any effect. The budget passed, and our side all voted no. Maybe it had an effect on our side, but none on the Democrat side.

DePue: I think it was 2004, which was a much more memorable, legislative budget year for the members. So, Blagojevich got basically what he wanted the first year, from what you said. How did it go in 2004?

Watson: It didn't go well for him, him being the governor, Blagojevich. It did not go well for him. I think Madigan, the speaker, recognized that they couldn't sustain the spending that was going on, that he had created that first year. He was having some personal problems with the governor anyway. He just didn't get along with Blagojevich at all. He'd send people to meetings... He wouldn't show up; he'd send somebody else to a meeting.

DePue: He being Blagojevich?

Watson: No, being the speaker. He did that throughout Blagojevich's term. If the speaker didn't want to show up, he'd just send somebody else, another member of his leadership team, but it was the same. It was kind of a slap in the face to Blagojevich, that the speaker didn't attend a lot of those meetings. That not only happened in 2004, but it happened in some of the programs that the governor wanted later on.

But we—we being Tom Cross—who was the minority leader of the house, the speaker, and myself kind of formed a coalition just to stop what was going on and take a hard look at the spending and try to recognize the fact that we couldn't sustain the spending that was happening. So the budget was cut significantly.

DePue: You mean the three of you actually sat down in a private meeting and discussed all of this?

Watson: Several. We did it on a regular basis—we being the three of us and our staffs—working together. It was unique, very unique, and we recognized the ability of our staff for that particular time. I recognized the good work of the House Republicans and the speaker's staff, because I always felt—and still do—that we had the best staff in the building, back in those days.

They still looked to our people a lot of times. Whenever an issue or question got brought up, they turned to our staff people, our appropriations staff, primarily and Tim Nuding, who was the head of our staff at that point.

DePue: How about Emil Jones? He obviously wasn't part of this.

Watson: No he wasn't.

DePue: Were approaches made?

Watson: Yes. We tried to get Emil involved.

DePue: You or Madigan?

Watson: Probably more Madigan than anybody. But I wanted to see him involved too, because I wanted us to work as a unit, the legislature, the house and the senate, recognizing that the needs of the governor can't be continued; the spending can't be continued. Emil participated in a couple of meetings, but in the end, he was not part of it.

We were able to hold everything. We even had some Democrat senators come over and support, who Madigan primarily was able to influence, independent-minded senators, that come over and helped us on our side, the Republican side, holding up some of the initiatives the governor was wanting. That infuriated Emil, the fact that he couldn't keep all of his caucus together.

DePue: Were they downstate Democrats primarily?

Watson: No, a lot of them were Chicago. They were Madigan's senator, his own senator, another senator from a neighboring district of Madigan. Madigan had a lot of influence and, of course, still does, over who's elected in those senate districts.

DePue: You spent a lot of years in the Illinois Legislature. Anything like this ever happen before?

Watson: No, not at all. Like I said, it was very unique. It was almost refreshing that "Hey, we can't continue like this." This is the way I felt in '03, and I was glad that in '04, that Madigan felt the same way and was willing to work with us, Tom Cross and us, to try to stop the hemorrhaging that was going on.

DePue: The word in the street was that part of the breakdown between speaker Madigan and the governor was that Madigan got to the point he didn't believe he could trust Blagojevich, that Blagojevich would say one thing and do another, or that Blagojevich would perpetually be late to meetings or things like that. Do you recall anything specific about the breakdown of that relationship?

Watson: No, but you're right on, as far as he didn't trust him. He just had enough; that one year was enough for him anyway. They did get together in '05 and '06, but once again, things were never the same with the speaker and the governor, after '04.

DePue: I think it's this year, 2004...We'd be talking about the 2005 budget, correct, in the 2004 battle.

Watson: Right, yes.

DePue: I think it's 2004 that the discussion about the purchase of flu shots occurred. Was that part of the equation that year?

Watson: I don't remember if that was that year or not, but that was a total waste of money. They all...

DePue: Can you give us some background on that.

Watson: Well, the governor wanted to provide free flu shots. I don't know if it was just a certain population, like a Medicaid population. I don't recall that, but he ordered all this flu vaccine, and ultimately, it got outdated, went to waste. It was outrageous spending for no gain for anybody.

DePue: Did he have the authority to purchase the flu shots, without the legislature first approving it?

Watson: I don't know if he did. I would have thought, yeah, the Department of Public Health probably would do that. But then again, it should be budgeted. I can't answer that; I'm not sure.

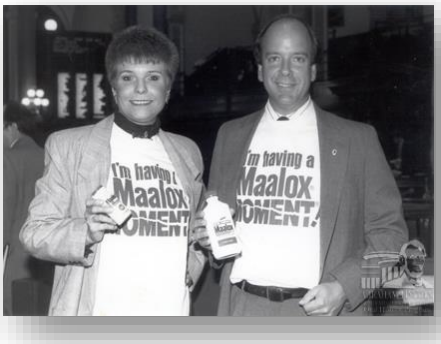
DePue: I think it was that and a couple other issues. You mentioned the Thompson building. He was even getting some flak from some of the other constitutional officers, Democratic constitutional officers. Lisa Madigan, who was the new attorney general and...

Watson: Dan Hynes.

DePue: Dan Hynes, the comptroller at the time.

Watson: The governor just kept sawing people off, people that would be supporting him. Dan Hynes was a good example. Dan Hynes would have probably towed the line, politically, with the governor, at least do his bidding for him, whatever he needed. But he got crossways with him, big time. There were several issues. I don't remember what they all were, but most of it was about paying bills.

He was the one who paid the bills, being Dan Hynes. If we don't have the revenue there, then what do you do? You don't print it, down at the capital. We don't do that here in Illinois. We have to spend what we've got. Dan, to his credit, he was very outspoken about the fact that maybe we're spending too much, and he got crossways with the governor, just as Lisa Madigan... The governor just severed a lot of his supportive people, throughout his terms of office.



Judy Barr Topinka with Senator Watson during an overtime session in July 1991.

DePue: How about the criticism that he was getting from the treasurer's office, Judy Baar Topinka?

Watson: I don't remember a specific criticism, but she would have, just politically, have been very critical of the governor, just because she was a Republican. [What] ultimately led to her running for governor was her frustration with the administration.

DePue: Two-thousand four, I believe, is the year that the budget timeline came... I know this has changed over time, but the budget was supposed to be done by the end of May, unless you went into a supermajority requirement. Then it had to be done by the end of June, because the fiscal year begins at the first of July. As I recall, I understand that all of that didn't happen.

Watson: No, it didn't. There were a lot of years that that didn't happen necessarily. Back in the early years, when the constitutional conclusion of the session was June 30 at midnight, then July 1 was the first day of the new year. There were times when we went several days, weeks, into the new fiscal year before we got resolved, got the budget resolved.

But this particular year, the constitution had changed. Now May 31 was the constitutional deadline to adjourn the legislature. So, we went on to.... I don't even know what the final date was, but it went on for a long time, just negotiating, talking, just nothing for... There was no negotiating. We knew what we wanted; the governor knew what he wanted. He was as unbending, as we were, and it went on until… What is the date you've got there?

A t-shirt from Senator Watson's collection, this one lampooning Governor Blagojevich and his penchant for calling the legislature into special sessions to force through his agenda.

DePue: Well, I'm looking at a couple pictures of t-shirts that you showed me. These are going to be pictures you can find with the collection itself. "'04 Internee at Camp Blago Pout. Summer of Special Sessions. If he doesn't get his way, you stay." You're going to have to explain that one.

Watson: Well, the governor was a pouty individual if he didn't get his way, so hence the statement there, because he felt like he was the governor "and how dare you not agree with me or not work with me in any way?" And we didn't, because we knew that what he was advocating wasn't in the best interest of the State of Illinois.

DePue: So what's this about the special sessions? Explain that.

Watson: Well, he kept calling special sessions.

DePue: Which means?

Watson: The governor can call a special session at any time during the year, on budgetary matters. He was calling special sessions week after week after week, to bring the legislature here, into Springfield, and negotiate, supposedly, the budget.

DePue: Was this after the May 31 deadline?

Watson: Yes. The special session would be a tool of the governor's, after the constitutional... You can call a special session during regular session. But after the regular session was over, this was a method by which the governor got everybody back here. They went after people actually. They had to send state police after some people, trying to get them here.

DePue: And when you showed up for the special session what happened?

Watson: Nothing. Nothing.

DePue: Was the governor there or the governor's people?

Watson: Sometimes the governor wasn't even here. He'd call a special session, and the governor would be somewhere else. He might be still in Chicago or doing some gubernatorial responsibility somewhere else or just nothing, just ignoring us, but trying to create a...for us to break and ultimately concur with his thinking.

DePue: Would it be fair to characterize this as a game of chicken?

Watson: Yeah, I guess it would. It was a stalemate. We were unbending. Our thoughts were, We can't go on as the governor wishes; we can't go on down this path of reckless spending. So we felt we were in the right, we, being the Speaker of the House, Mike Madigan, Tom Cross, Minority Leader, and myself.

So he was going to punish us. That's what it was; it was a punishment. He was big into punishment. If somebody didn't agree with him... I was on the end of that sword several times, where something would happen if Frank didn't agree.

DePue: Do you have any stories connected to that?

Watson: The Vandalia Correctional Center. Without even going down there and taking a look at it and knowing the condition of the Vandalia Correctional Center and the work camp, the governor just decided to take it out of the budget, one particular year.

It was aimed at me, and I felt bad for the people at Vandalia and the employees there, that they were being pawns used by this governor. To the speaker's credit, once again, he stepped up and said, "Look, this isn't right." He worked with us in the senate, as did Tom Cross, and we were able to keep the prison open. It just wasn't the three of us; there was a lot of people...

Senator Watson celebrates a victory on the Senate floor in 2005 after efforts to keep the Vandalia Correctional facility open were successful.

The community of Vandalia in Fayette County just rallied around this whole thing. It was just amazing. The mayor of Vandalia was Ricky Gottman. He organized an effort by the community and the employees and just the whole region, in support of the Vandalia Correctional Center.

The governor always said, "It's an old, rundown prison." Well, they invited people down there, showed them... The work camp, for one, was opened in 1985, so it wasn't an old and rundown, dilapidated prison, not at all. The other prison, the older prison, it was well maintained. If you went there today, you'd say, "Wow, this is..." It's a unique facility and looks good from an architectural point of view.

The governor just… He'd never admit it; he'd never say, "Oh, yeah, I did that because of Frank Watson," or maybe something I did to his administration. He'd never admit that, but in the back of my mind, I've always felt that he was out to get me for something.

DePue: Any other examples you can think of?

Watson: The Prescription Drug Program, where he imported medicine from wherever, primarily Canada, prescription drugs, and made that available, supposedly at a lesser cost—and it probably was—to people of Illinois. Of course, that was diametrically opposed to anything that I believed, being a pharmacist.

The problem with Canadian drugs is that you don't know what you're getting, not necessarily the Canadian drug. But if you're importing drugs from Canada, that could be coming from India or Pakistan or some counterfeit corporation. You just didn't know.

I was really upset about that one, and he went ahead with it and did it. I don't know the ultimate outcome, but I know now, you don't do that. We don't have that available now, that program was ultimately eliminated after I left. But I think that was directed at me.

DePue: I would imagine though, that if he's going to be upset with anybody and want to mete out retribution on anybody, it would be the guy he would perceive as the traitor, Mike Madigan.

Watson: Oh, yeah. In other meetings that we had with him, when we agreed with something he wanted to do, like a capital program, which was all about building roads and bridges and school buildings and maintaining the state facilities... We believed that that needed to be done, as well as the governor. We met with the governor on many occasions, trying to create a capital program for the State of Illinois.

Madigan, that's when he'd send somebody from his leadership to meetings. He held the vote in support for him. He held it up, and it didn't ever happen. As a result, we never were able to get a capital program during a time

when it was needed. It was because of the governor, because there wasn't any trust between Madigan and the governor.

DePue: Madigan refused to support it because of a total lack of trust in the governor? Why? Was it retribution, getting back at the governor?

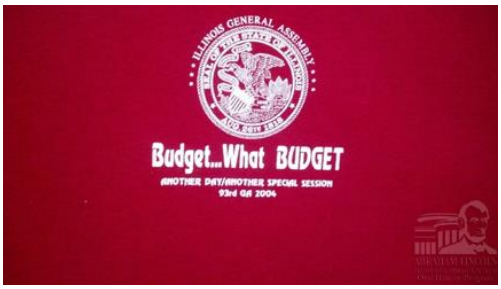
Watson: Yeah, I think it was. I don't know for sure, whatever happened to Madigan, whatever happened to his programs, his initiatives or his people that he had working for the state, if maybe the governor came in and had an impact on that, like he did me with Vandalia Correctional Center or the Prescription Drug Program. I don't know that; I really don't know. But I'm sure the governor tried to do something. If he wasn't successful, he at least tried.

DePue: Was there a core group of Democrats in the house that Madigan could count on to block Blagojevich's initiatives? I'm assuming that there were a lot of Democrats that would go along with the governor.

Watson: There were some, not many though. This was in 2004. The people that worked with us in the house were some of the most bitter enemies we had politically, [than at] any other time. But here we are working together and trying to stop the initiatives of the administration. That was a very unique experience, I think for Tom Cross and I both, to have that kind of relationship with the speaker and with his members, but not all. There were a few that went along with the governor, but I would say the vast minority.

DePue: I'm going to read another one of these t-shirts that were also produced that same year, in 2004. It's got the general assembly seal on the t-shirt, and underneath is says, "Budget. What budget? Another day, another special session, 93rd General Assembly, 2004." Any background story that goes along with the making of these two t-shirts?

Watson: We were always making some kind of statement by way of a t-shirt. It seemed like we did a lot of that through the years.



Another t-shirt from Senator Watson's collection, again referring to another Blagojevich special session.

DePue: So that wasn't unique to this year?

Watson: Well, oh yeah, this one created a lot of animosity, a lot of interest in what we were doing, very much so. T-shirts were a way of making a statement. Most of these came from staff; they were the ones; they were the creative ones; they came up with all this. But it was budget, what budget? We all just kind of stayed our own way and didn't really necessarily want to negotiate with the man, the governor. He didn't want to negotiate with us. He just thought he could force us into it in some way or another, and we didn't.

DePue: You've already touched on some of this, but after those first two years of your experiences, working with the Blagojevich Administration, how would you describe his personality and his leadership characteristics?

Watson: Well, his personality... He was, I'd say, a [dual] personality almost. He was saying one thing one time... He'd get really upset or... He could turn it on and turn it off, fast. He was always a politician; he was always political in what he did. But there would be times where you enjoyed being with him. If he came into a room—maybe it was a Democrat Roosevelt dinner or whatever they have—if he came in there, he would have that crowd in his hand, because he had the ability to speak. He always was on point with the message of whatever it would be, some social agenda or some program where he's going to spend money and do good for people. We all want to do good. But he was always a politician first.

I don't know about his leadership capabilities. The people that he had in and out of the administration were quite a few, and I would think that that had something to say for his lack of leadership, the fact that there was so many people that changed during his administration. If he wasn't happy with them, they're out the door. It would be...people just... His lack of trust just developed over the time.

DePue: Let's touch base with some of those. Lon Monk, I think, was his first chief of staff, and then it wasn't too much later that John Harris became his chief of staff. I'm just going to throw some names out to see if you have any reactions to some of these folks.

Watson: Well, Lon Monk and Bradley Tusk, they were the first term. Bradley Tusk came from outside.

DePue: I think he was the deputy governor.

Watson: Yeah, he was kind of a deputy governor. Lon Monk was the chief of staff. They controlled everything. Bradley was more of the hatchet man, at least what we felt. Lon tried to work with us. It was good cop, bad cop in many cases.

We liked Lon Monk, we being my staff and people that had to work with him in the administration. He always seemed to try to bring things together, and the governor then would tear it apart. But Lon Monk, to our way of thinking, was a pretty decent chief of staff.

The thing that irked a lot of people was he [the governor] brought in all these people from outside. We had people within Illinois that could have done this type of work, but these were confidants of the governor from his past, that he trusted. I think they knew what his ambitions might be and were supportive of it.

DePue: Is Bradley Tusk one of those that came from the outside?

Watson: Yes. He was, I think, from New York at the time. Chuck Schumer, Senator Schumer, I think, from New York, I believe he was a staff member for him. Blagojevich met him at the congressional level.

Lon Monk, I think, was a classmate of Blagojevich at Pepperdine University Law School. That's how they met; they came together. So he brought his own team from outside Illinois. They didn't know how things worked necessarily in Illinois. They were new to all of this, where he could have brought in somebody that might have had some experience.

DePue: So much of the drama in those early years in his administration dealt with the budget. You mentioned John Filan before. Do you think he was an effective budgeter for the governor?

Watson: He knew his business. There was a lot of times where his information, maybe, was contrary to what we had, but he was very astute at answering questions and concerns about what was going on. John Filan had a checkered past. He might have been in the Walker Administration, and anything that was associated with Dan Walker always raised a red flag with everybody, because there was another kind of independent Democrat that didn't really get along and go along with the system. Not to say that that's necessarily all bad, but the direction that these people seemed to take us is not necessarily best for Illinois.

DePue: Do you think that Filan recognized the numbers weren't adding up?

Watson: I'd like to think that he did, but I think the governor was such a domineering individual, over the budget and how things were going to be spent, he just left it up to John to juggle the numbers or the books and to make it work. Of course, as we know, it didn't necessarily.

DePue: I have a couple of other names. But maybe these weren't the kind of people in the administration your staff and yourself would have been working with. Chris Kelly.

Watson: I knew who Chris Kelly was. I just knew him politically as a fundraiser for the governor. In the administration, he was part of the big three or big four, whatever it was, that always seemed to be in the room when decisions were made, but I was never with him in that capacity.

DePue: And the last couple here are very much in the fundraising side, Tony Rezko and Stuart Levine.

Watson: Tony Rezko I never met, but his name was very prominent with a lot of individuals. Who was the second one?

DePue: Stuart Levine.

Watson: Stuart Levine, actually a Republican from DuPage County, I believe, and a friend of a lot of the people that were from that area. Why, how...Why those people get caught up with all the, I guess power, that comes with knowing the governor and getting things done through the Governor's Office, just catches up to you, and you unfortunately make some mistakes, big mistakes. You mentioned John Harris.

DePue: Yeah.

Watson: I worked with John Harris on the expansion of O'Hare Airport, because we wanted to show that we're for Chicago. We, being the Republicans, aren't anti-Chicago. We understand the importance of the city to our state and the economic well-being. So when that issue got brought up, I wanted to work with him. John Harris was the guy who put that together. He met with us and our caucus on several occasions to discuss the issue. And in many cases, we voted for it. Many members voted for that.

I think John Harris, his mannerisms during that, had a lot to do with that. I liked the guy; I felt good about him; I trusted him when he came in, talked to him. But then when he became chief of staff, he just... I think he got caught up in the power deal again, just that, "I can do this to you." "If you want this, then I can control you." Just the whole… It seemed the whole emphasis of the administration of Blagojevich was all about power. "What, power corrupts…?" What is the…

DePue: "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." [quote by John Dalberg-Acton]

Watson: That's right, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." That's what happened to some of these people, and they got themselves in trouble.

DePue: Was there talk among the legislators, maybe in your caucus, that there was something seriously unstable about Blagojevich?

Watson: Oh, yes. We all felt like… Because he could be the most charming guy… I could remember one time, after one of our negotiations that we had with him... I'm not sure what year it would have been, but it might even have been the first year, when we were so opposed to what they were doing. He called me on the phone.

He did that on a regular basis, he'd call. He called me when we were in Minneapolis, at the Republican National Convention. He called me about some issue, and I put him on speaker phone. We were in a bus, and everybody was listening to the conversation (laughs). I don't know if he knew it, but it was about some issue, the capital program.

Anyway, we're sitting in my office, and he's called, and we're still having some people in there from the leadership meeting. I said, "Why don't you just come on up here. Let's have a beer; let's talk about it." Sure enough,

he did. He came up, sat down, and very engaging but more personality than there was substance. Not much came of that, but idea was, the governor…

That was a big deal in the capitol, "My god, the governor went to Frank Watson's office. How would he stoop so low?" That was kind of the... You know how people are over there. That made the news, so to speak, and it was no big deal to him. He would do that, and we would welcome it actually, because we wanted, once again, to try to work with the guy.

In all our attempts of what we felt were doing good for the state and the people of Illinois, we felt like he was not a part of that. He had his own agenda, which [he felt] was doing good for the state and the people of Illinois, but in the long run, it was a disaster.

DePue: Do you have any stories that would illustrate the other side of Rod Blagojevich and how he dealt with people?

Watson: (pause) No, not necessarily. I mean, the punitive side of him was... I guess you felt that, personally.

DePue: But was it because of direct conversations with him?

Watson: No, no, he'd do it through the back door, but you knew it was coming from him. That was his way of saying, "I am the governor; you are just the minority leader of the senate, and what you say doesn't necessarily carry a lot of water around here, and I'll show you." That's kind of the way I took him.

I don't know if I told you this about the capital program, when he came to Greenville?

DePue: I don't think so.

Watson: I can't remember what year this would have been, but he wanted to talk to me about the capital program and what we could do to move it forward. He said, "I'll fly down to Greenville." And he did. We met him out at the airport, and here he had his entourage of vehicles out there waiting for him, when he came in on a plane and got off. That was a big buzz out there at the airport, "Oh my gosh the governor is coming!" (both laugh)

So, we're out there, Dave Luechtefeld and I, then the governor and Jay Hoffman. We get in his vehicle and the driver. Our staffs were in another vehicle. I wanted to take the governor around Greenville and just show him the sites. There's not a whole lot to see in Greenville (both laugh)—you've been there—Anyway, I wanted to show him our industrial park, and I wanted to show him our new high school that we built in 1957; that was our new high school, but it was still in good shape, well maintained.

Then I took him by the old high school, which was our junior high, and it was condemned then, later, after that. We had a college program that Greenville College was trying to get money to build Hogue Hall, which is the icon of the college that had been condemned structurally, and the college was trying to get... So I took him by the college, and he met the president and just things that we wanted to see get done for Greenville.

We proceeded up College Avenue, and we stopped, met the president of the college, Jim Mannoia, when we talked with him. The governor made him feel good. We drive on up, and we stop right on the square, a four-way stop. A guy walks across the street, two guys and a woman. And I told him, I said, "You see that guy over there?" He had an oxygen tank; he was carrying an oxygen tank. He's had health issues, and he's walking across the street. I said, "That guy won the lottery." He won about, I don't know, $250,000, $300,000. And I said, "He's a Democrat too, by the way." I said, "The other guy's a Democrat, with him and his wife."

Gov. Blagojevich and Senator Watson stop for a picture inside Senator Watson's Drug Store during Blagojevich's visit to Greenville in August 2006.

The governor stopped the car; we stopped. He got out of the car; he goes up and just starts shaking hands and everything, with these people. We're holding up traffic, if you can imagine traffic in Greenville (both laugh); it isn't a major problem, but there was traffic behind us. Anyway, he's talking to them.

We're in the car still, and he comes back in, "Oh, thanks, Frank. Thanks, Frank," and I said, "Well, what about?" He said, "I think I'm going to get a donation out of those people." (both laugh) Truly, that was where he excelled, in raising money, and of course, that was his ultimate demise.

Then, we traveled down, take him around the square, show him Watson's Drugstore. He'd been actually in there, in Watson's Drugstore. Went down the street, Fourth Street, and then we go out and went by DeMoulin Brothers, the band uniform company that made uniforms for the correctional officers. I wanted him to see that.

Then we went by another prison, and I told him, I said, "Governor, this is a prison you cannot close," because he tried to close Vandalia, the state prison. He said, "Why is that?" I said, "Well, this is a federal prison." And so he asked me, he says, "Frank, do they have a workout room in there?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, do they have weights?" I said, "Yeah, they've got a weight room, and they've got weights outside and in the summer; they have them all out." He said, "Well, you never know, I may end up out here." Can you believe it? He said that.

Jay Hoffman was beside himself. Dave Luechtefeld and I just kind of looked at each other. Well, you grew to expect anything to come out of the mouth of the governor. That was a long story there; sorry about that. I kind of got going. But that was the way he was, and you would like being with him.

Another time, when we were with the governor; we're in his office; all the press is outside waiting, can't wait to see somebody come out and question them about what's going on in the governor's office. I'm in there; it was just he and I and our staff; maybe Tom Cross was there.

The whole discussion that took place in his office was about who was the best third baseman in the '50s and '60s? Was it Kenny Boyer from the Cardinals? I said Kenny Boyer, and he was all about Ron Santo from the Cubs. That was our discussion that went on during this important meeting in the governor's office.

So finally, we walk out; we leave. I go outside, and here's all the media out there, "Frank, what went on?" TVs are on, everything. "What were you guys talking about in there?" I said, "Well, who was the best third baseman in baseball in the '50s and '60s, Kenny Boyer or Ron Santo?" They looked, and I said, "That's what it was; that was the conversation." (both laugh) So those were the kind of meetings we had on occasion.

DePue: Those are the stories we always love to hear when we do these interviews. How about his reputation for being late?

Watson: He was always late, always late.

DePue: What was that about?

Watson: Well, he was just very unorganized. Promptness didn't mean anything to him; responsibility didn't mean anything to him. What others thought about him, about him being late, didn't bother him. Yeah, I'd leave meetings that he wouldn't show up. I'd walk out. I wouldn't be necessarily alone. He was terrible about that. To me, that's a slap in the face to those who are sitting there that could be doing something more important than sitting around waiting for him to show up. I think it even embarrassed his own people.

DePue: I don't know that I have the specific year for this, but All Kids Program and Family Care, some of these other initiatives that he was pushing hard for... Let me put it this way, were there some programs where he just wasn't getting the

legislative support, but he would try to find other ways to get them implemented?[50, 51]

Watson: Well, he passed All Kids. If we'd have had the money, that's one thing. We become these hardened, conservative, crusty old Republicans when we vote "no" on things like that. But we do it for a reason, and that reason is we don't have the revenue to pay for it. So, we didn't support him on a lot of those expansions of Medicaid and the All Kids Program.

DePue: But it did pass.

Watson: It did pass.

DePue: How about the allegations or the practice of doing funds sweep? Can you discuss that at all?

Watson: Well, what that was... Everybody that pays into the State of Illinois, besides their taxes; there's licenses; there's bingo. If you pay into the State of Illinois in some way or another, there is an account that is established to take that money into. In many cases, money stays there to administer the programs that are necessary for your payment of a pharmacy license. You'd have inspectors that go out and inspect pharmacies. They were paid for out of that fund.

Medical, doctors' licenses... We were the most licensed state in the country. We had all these funds out there that had revenue in it, but the revenue was intended for something. It wasn't like it was just sitting there. He [the governor] would come in and sweep those accounts—it still goes on today, I believe—and take money out of them that was designated for a specific purpose and use it on general revenue. These were the ways in which he tried to balance the budget, and these were like one-time revenue sources that went away.

DePue: Were these things he took on his own initiative, or he had the legislature to back him up in these decisions?

Watson: In some cases, it was his own. In many cases, the legislature.

DePue: Did he have the power on his own initiative to do this?

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[50] The All Kids program offers many Illinois children comprehensive healthcare that includes doctors' visits, hospital stays, prescription drugs, vision care, dental care and medical devices like eyeglasses and asthma inhalers. Some families pay monthly premiums for the coverage, but rates for middle-income families are significantly lower than they are on the private market. (https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/MedicalPrograms/AllKids/Pages/default.aspx)

[51] FamilyCare offers healthcare coverage to parents living with their children 18 years old or younger. FamilyCare also covers relatives who are caring for children in place of their parents. (https://www.illinois.gov/hfs/MedicalPrograms/AllKids/Pages/FamilyCare.aspx)

Watson: That was always a question. We didn't think he did. We thought he should go through the legislature. But in some cases... I'll have to say, even I supported some of the sweeps at some point or another. There was an unbelievable amount of money that was sitting in these accounts, and some of it was being used, some of it wasn't. We identified accounts that were dormant or were stagnant or not necessarily being used, and we might have taken money out of that account, agreed to it anyway.

DePue: That conversation though, kind of opens up another allegation that you heard, that he was exceeding his constitutional powers. Would you agree with that?

Watson: Totally, yes. In many cases, he would create an order of some means, by which an action would be taken by the state that I felt belonged in the legislature.

DePue: Did those of you in the legislature ever try to challenge him in that respect?

Watson: I'm sure we did, but I can't think of a specific… Have you got something there that will nudge my memory a little bit?

DePue: No, not necessarily. I think it would have happened later on. Eventually, he's going to be impeached because of his abuse of power, not necessarily because of things he's going to be convicted of in a court of law.

Watson: Well, abuse of power was rampant in his administration.

DePue: Does anything come to mind specifically in that respect?

Watson: A specific issue? I'm sure there are, but I can't at this point.

DePue: I think this is something you've mentioned to me yourself. Cynthia Canary, Cindy Canary and the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, does that ring a bell?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: What's the background to that?

Watson: Well, she was a big part of bringing the administration down, ultimately. But my dealings with Cindy dealt with the Supreme Court race in Southern Illinois. Is that what you're talking about?

DePue: Well, I don't know. I think you might have mentioned this, that there was something we needed to pursue on this particular subject.

Watson: Well, the only thing with Cindy Canary was that she was really upset, and rightfully so, with all the spending that went on and all the negative politics that went on in the Southern Illinois Supreme Court race in the 5th Judicial District.

DePue: Before you go on, the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, what was this? Is this a private organization?

Watson: Yeah, they were outside of state government.

DePue: Kind of a watchdog group?

Watson: Yes, very much a watchdog group, and she was very good at what she did. I remember when she came into my office. She was complaining about what all went on. I said, "The issue I have with this is the Republican won this election." And I said, "We've seen abuses go on in other races that I don't know that you've necessarily expressed a concern [about]."

There was another judicial race in the central part of the state that the Democrat won because Mike Madigan put in a lot of money at the end of the race, beat our candidate, Carl Hawkinson. A boatload of money came in for advertising and doing all of the things at the end to elect this guy, and nothing was ever said about that. My exception with Cindy—I don't know if she would remember it—but my conversation within my office was, "Well, just because it's now a Republican, it's wrong; it's bad; what happened? A lot of money was spent. It was a nationally focused election, because it was over medical malpractice, and we were losing doctors out of Southern Illinois.

DePue: Madison County.

Watson: Madison County, the judicial hell hole, the national judicial hell hole. Lloyd Karmeier, who was our candidate, has been a good jurist. He's done an outstanding job and was an outstanding candidate. He didn't necessarily control all of what was going on. But he was the candidate. Ultimately, he has to answer to it, but no one will take exception to him now. He's done a great job as a supreme court justice here in Illinois.

DePue: I think this one might be another thing that you mentioned to me earlier. The Joint Committee on Administrative Rules and the governor's decision to ignore some of their findings.

Watson: Well, that was a commission. What it did is it reviewed how a bill was interpreted. How did the governor interpret the bill, and how did they ultimately enact what was in the legislation? That went to the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. If they felt—they being the members of the commission—felt like the governor's direction wasn't really as he's taken it, the legislation was different than what the governor interpreted, then they would take exception to it, and there would be a report written with recommendations to the governor.

DePue: And what would the governor do with the recommendations?

Watson: He'd probably throw it in the round file. It wasn't very effective during his term, but it's one of the better commissions that we have.

DePue: Let's get to the 2006 gubernatorial election then. By that time, in your mind, would it be fair to say that you're thinking, We've got to get rid of this guy; we've got to find somebody else?

Watson: Well, yes. The answer to that is yes. There wasn't a lot of candidates that really surfaced. Judy Topinka finally, who was a constitutional officer, a credible candidate, surfaced, a lady, electable, likeable, and she became the candidate. But it was kind of a reluctancy. We didn't have somebody just rush to the front to take this guy on. We didn't have a good farm [feeder] system.

DePue: Did you think she was a strong enough candidate going in, or did you have some doubts at the beginning of the campaign season?

Watson: Well, I felt she was a strong candidate from several points of view. I felt she could raise money. She's been elected statewide and served in the general assembly, both in the house and the senate, well regarded, well respected, a woman—we were having trouble with the women's vote, so she might neutralize that—from Cook County. I thought she was a good candidate.

DePue: How much discussion was there in the news media by that time, about the allegations of corruption within the administration?

Watson: There were hints of it, but I don't think it was anything necessarily... The electorate should have taken notice of what was going on. But the governor—once again to his credit—being a campaigner, he was able to give a message that the people of Illinois bought and supported him.

DePue: Now, certainly the Democrats in the house of representatives—and many people would say that Mike Madigan was the most powerful politician in the state at that time—weren't willing to give him a pass. Do you think the news media, in 2006, was giving him a pass?

Watson: I think they did, many of them, maybe not all. He was endorsed by a considerable number of papers. I think they just turned a [blind eye] to it and felt like... In some cases, it's, "Who's going to get elected?" I hate to say that about the news media, but they might fall on the side of who's the most popular candidate and endorse them. Not all, but...

DePue: How disappointed were you in the election results that year?

Watson: It was a major disappointment. Judy worked hard. She was, like I said, a very credible candidate. I can't think... Who was his lieutenant governor candidate? Quinn, sure, Pat Quinn. They never got along either, although, of course, Quinn was a strong advocate for the governor, since that was who was leading his ticket. But they weren't necessarily close.

DePue: I think, to a certain extent, Quinn tried to distance himself as much as he could after that second election; didn't he?

Watson: Very much so. He was out doing his own thing. He was the lieutenant governor. The lieutenant governor has responsibilities, and he created another responsibility of the lieutenant governor's office, being the spokesman for the veterans. He went out to funerals of...to his credit. He did a good job of that, as lieutenant governor. He was everywhere. Whenever there was a need for a veteran, you'd find Pat Quinn.

DePue: Was there any difference, significant difference, in Blagojevich's second term versus his first?

Watson: Well, we got medical malpractice done. That was very significant, and for him to support that was monumental. I think that was in his second term. He was a trial lawyer himself, and of course, the trial lawyers were the mother's milk of the Democrat Party. They were vehemently opposed to the legislation, but it ultimately passed.

That is a lesson in grassroots politics, what happened with medical malpractice. The people of Southwestern Illinois, primarily Madison, St. Clair County and the surrounding counties, they were seeing their doctors leave. In Greenville, we saw two young men leave Greenville, who were from Greenville, went to Greenville College, left Illinois. One went to Indiana; the other one went to Kansas. So I lived that. The medical malpractice costs of those physicians were driving them out of the state and all the frivolous lawsuits and the masses of awards that were being given, primarily by the Madison County Courts were a big part of that.

So, the people within Madison, St. Clair County and the surrounding area, just rallied around the fact that something has got to be done. We can't see these doctors leaving Illinois at such a rapid rate. They came to Springfield; they made the issue statewide. Even though it was a problem statewide, it was more focused in the Southwestern Illinois area.

That truly was a lesson on how to get something done in Springfield, without the legislature taking the initiative. But we felt like—we being representatives and senators from that area—felt like it was a big problem and that something needed to be done. We were very supportive of them, but they took the initiative.

DePue: Do you recall the Preschool for All initiative that Blagojevich was pushing in his second administration?

Watson: We'd been making preschool for at risk students available for a long time, and we were continually adding money to it, to expand the program. Of course, preschool is an excellent program, and one that, if we can afford it, should be enhanced. But once again, he was spending money we didn't have.

DePue: Another one of the things he was able to do, I think, in most of the budget years during his administration, was increase money earmarked for education. Does that sound accurate?

Watson: Not higher education. He began what I call the demise of state support for higher education. We always had a system by which, when you funded education at the elementary and secondary level, you also increased funding at a certain rate, a similar rate, for higher education. That went on until Blagojevich. He continued funding of elementary and secondary, but higher education took the hit for that. That's when all this rapid growth of tuition. It's got to a point where student loans... When you leave college now, you've got a quarter million dollars in debt.

We were able to hold down tuition by increasing state support and state funding for colleges and universities. That became the means by which to hold down the necessary need for tuition increases. But as Blagojevich shrunk the support for higher education, the only thing they had available to them—they being the boards of trustees or the people that make the decisions in the colleges and universities of the state—had to go to the students with higher tuition. He felt like people going to college, that was a premium, and they ought to take care of it themselves. He felt they should have to pay for it.

DePue: But did he increase funding levels to primary and secondary education?

Watson: I would say he probably did. He was always about that, trying to do more for education.

DePue: Then let's talk about pension payments.

Watson: Another way by which he was able to do all these things.

DePue: Which was just flat out not paying the state's share?

Watson: There were two years there, '05 and '06, I believe, that there was no payment. There was very little, if any. Once again, we weren't participating those two years, but they just went on a holiday, a pension holiday, and not paid the obligation. So you know that, sooner or later, something has to be made up for that, and they ignored that.

Politics for them was today. Anything that happened tomorrow was somebody else's problem. That's the way he operated. In fact, that went on for a long time and still, in some ways, goes on, that people only worry about today. They worry about the next election instead [of] about the next generation. That's something I've always said. I use that term a lot. They worry about the next election and to heck with the next generation. Somebody else is going to have to deal with the problem we've created today.

DePue: Well, today, Illinois still hasn't solved its pension problem, and we rank fiftieth out of fifty states in terms of how…

Watson: Underfunded liability. And you know what? The press... I saw an article; I don't know if it was in the *Chicago Tribune* or... Somebody wrote an article that blamed the Edgar Administration and some legislation that was passed during his eight years [for] some of the problems of the pension. That is totally erroneous. I felt bad for Jim Edgar to even be mentioned in the same light as the pension underfunded liability.

What he did was, he established a floor, and we all supported it. The legislature, I believe, unanimously, both the house and the senate, supported ramping up the contributions of pensions so it will be ultimately back in some year in the future, which could even be today, if we'd have kept on it, if we had kept doing it. But we did it for I don't know how many years, eight to ten years. It was going along fine.

Then Blagojevich came in, and that's when it all stopped. For some reason, somebody's decided that that legislation might have a negative impact on our pension underfunded liability. [That] is beyond me, but that was said in an article. I felt bad for Governor Edgar because he was trying to solve a problem, not create one, where I think Blagojevich's administration, and anybody else who forgave pensions—which that was a legislative approval—had more to do with this problem than anybody ever had done prior to that particular time.

DePue: Earlier you said that trial lawyers were the mother's milk of the Democrat Party. The same thing sometimes has been suggested, if not outright said, about labor unions. I'm thinking about AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employee] in particular and other unions for state employees. Were you getting heat from AFSCME or other labor leaders because you weren't paying the pension payments, the governor wasn't paying the pension payments?

Watson: No. I believe they probably supported the budgets that went on the pension holiday.

DePue: How do you explain that?

Watson: The administration, the powers that be in AFSCME and other public employee unions has got to explain that. Once again, they're worrying about today and not tomorrow. They felt like, at some point in time, you've got to make the payment, or you've got to live up to the obligations that you've created. By supporting pension increases, the legislature has to live up to it, so somewhere the money is going to come from. I think that was their attitude. I think it's still today their attitude. It's wrong.

DePue: Let's get to 2008 and the discussions that year. I think the issue at that time, one of the things that Blagojevich was pushing, was the typical scenario of other things he'd been pushing for a long time, but also put in free bus passes for the elderly.

Watson: Always the politician. It didn't matter whether you could afford it or not. He got bus passes and I think even the train. I think the mass transit in Cook County was free. Totally irresponsible, the cost of that was astronomical, big ticket. He was popular back home in Chicago, but irresponsible. He was just always wanting to do something for the people, which is fine, but you can't afford it.

And why single out seniors necessarily? I'm a senior. I don't know that seniors necessarily always have to have what we always get. It seems like we're always... Well, you know why we do, it's because we vote. Senior citizens vote in a bigger plurality than any other age group. So the politician always thinks that they've got to take care of the senior citizens. Well, I think that's gone a little bit overboard, myself. I think we could do with less.

DePue: By the time you get into 2008, how much were you and other legislators hearing about the FBI investigation?

Watson: I can't put the years together. I know we were aware of it, but I'm not sure at what point in time, if it was that soon.

DePue: Were any investigators talking to the various legislators about what you knew? Were you ever questioned?

Watson: No, I never was. I was actually surprised that I wasn't.

DePue: Would you have had some stories to tell if you were?

Watson: Well, it depends on what they asked.

DePue: Illegalities.

Watson: No, I couldn't really identify that with any sense of knowing what I was talking about, no. It had to be people on the inside, and I wasn't on the inside (laughs).

DePue: But I would think, just knowing that Patrick Fitzgerald is on the case... He probably had the reputation for being the most rigorous and dogged…

Watson: Had to put the fear of God in those people. I can't imagine going forward, knowing they had this investigation and then all these tapes and everything that come up at a later date of conversations that the governor had with various people on the phone. When you hear those tapes—and I didn't hear them all,

but I heard enough of them—they just curl your hair, not that I have anything to curl (both laugh). Curl my beard.

DePue: Let's get to you personally in October of 2008. I think that was when you had a stroke. Let's start with this. Did you have any inkling that you had some health issues going into that?

Watson: No. I checked up regularly. I didn't work out like I work out today, but I felt like I was in decent shape. No, I had no idea. The only thing I did know was my father had a stroke at a relatively young age and my aunt. It was in my family, very prevalent.

DePue: Tell me the scenario, the story that's attached to your stroke, if you can.

Watson: Well, I was in Southern Illinois, in Benton actually, campaigning for [Illinois State Senate candidate, Ken] Burzynski. I want to say Brad but that's his brother. I can see him. Well, that's one of the residuals of a stroke. Anyway, down in Southern Illinois, in Benton, we had a race in the 59th District that we thought we could win. I was down there campaigning with the candidate, and we were doing what you do as a candidate; we were putting flyers out, making sure he was being seen.

DePue: Frank, were you not up for reelection that year?

Watson: I was up for reelection, but I didn't have any opponent. I was free to do whatever I wanted, and as a leader, I wanted to try to elect as many Republicans as I could. I wanted to increase the caucus numbers. That is what we did or what I tried to do.

On October 17, it was very hot. I can remember going out. I was putting brochures on a car. He was meeting people at the shopping center, just going around. Wherever there were groups of people, he would just go up. I can remember how bright it was. I just couldn't believe how bright the sun was, and I felt unusual at the time. That, I understand, is a significant means by which you recognize stroke, but I didn't know that. Anyway, we went on.

We went to lunch. Ken—Ken Burzynski, golly—Ken says to me, "You're slurring your speech, and your mouth is drooped a little bit." He said, "Maybe we ought to see a doctor." I said, "No, let's continue on; let's do what we got to do," and we did. We went to the Pepsi distributor down there, went through the plant. I remember going through a threshold, a door, and I couldn't get my foot over it. I thought, Well, I'll wait outside here. "You guys go ahead; I'll wait outside."

Well, while I was out there, Ken Burzynski called his local physician and said, "We're bringing this senator from Greenville, Illinois over to your office (laughs). So, we went on to another place, and then we stopped for a

little bit. I said, “Okay, let’s go on back.” He said, “No, I’m taking you to a doctor.”

So, we went to the doctor. He came in and said, “You need medical attention.” I said, “Well, I’m here.” He said, “You need to be in the hospital. You’re having a stroke.” I probably should have gone to the Benton Hospital, because there is a injection they can give you, a shot they can give you that kind that breaks up the clot. But we didn’t know whether it was a hemorrhage, or it was a clot. You only use a shot when you have a clot, because you want to break it up. You don’t use it for a hemorrhage. So, anyway, “Okay, thank you very much,” and I drove home.

DePue: It sounds like you’re pretty much in denial of all of this.

Watson: Yeah, I probably was. You know, I was indestructible (laughs). I can remember driving back on Interstate 64 and talking to Dave Luechtefeld on the phone. Dave later told me, he turned to his wife and he said, “Either Frank’s been drinking, or he’s having a stroke.” So I guess my voice over the phone... He could sense something was wrong.

Then Patty Shiu, who was kind of a press secretary, she was, really, my right hand in Springfield. I talked to her, and she said later that she knew there was some issue. But anyway, I kept driving. I’ll tell you; I don’t know how much you want to go into this, but I can remember driving on the interstate, and I just had both hands on the wheel. I was scared to death.

I was going like sixty miles an hour. I had no confidence in my ability to drive, and I was just holding on for dear life, and cars were flying by me. It’s a weird experience. Then I got off on 127, which is a two-lane highway. When cars were coming at me, I’d pull off the road. I’d keep going, but I’d pull off the road, because I was afraid somebody was going to hit me. It’s a weird sensation.

Then I called my wife and told her what was going on. I said, “I’m going out to the hospital.” She met me out there, and there was a lot of concern about what was happening. I walked into the emergency room, and I couldn’t fill out the forms, couldn’t write, things that... They started checking me out, doing the finger touch on your nose and all that. They thought I was okay, but they knew that there was an issue.

So, I laid there for a while, and the emergency room doctor said, “We’re going to send you to wherever you want to go. Do you want to go to Springfield, St. John’s, Memorial, or do you want to go to St. Luke’s in St. Louis? Do you want to go to Barnes Hospital in St. Louis?” Well, Barnes Hospital is one of the best hospitals in the country, and I said, “Okay, I want to go there.” But that was a mistake; I really shouldn’t have done that. Why do you say that?

Well, I remember going down in the ambulance from Greenville, they took me down, and we were listening to the Greenville High School/Litchfield football game on the radio. They asked me, "What do you want to hear, Frank?" I said, "Well, the Comets are playing." It was a Friday night; the Comets were playing football, and they were ahead forty to nothing at halftime. We have a good football at the high school.

Anyway, I got down there, and of course, Barnes Hospital is a trauma hospital in the middle of St. Louis. On a Friday night, that's not the best time, the best night, to get sick or need hospital attention, because you are considered certainly less critical than somebody with a gunshot wound or whatever happened out on the street, some knifing, whatever. You take a side seat.

That's what I did, until 3:00 in the morning, my wife and I. I'm laying on a little gurney; my wife was with me. Of course, people kept coming in but as soon as they recognized, "Oh he's okay; he's not bleeding," they would go to somebody else. When I left Barnes Hospital, they asked, "Can we do an interview with you on the quality of care?" I said, "No, I don't think you want to do that." The only thing was, it was a bad night to go into an emergency room at a trauma hospital like Barnes that everybody's trying to get into. I should have gone up here. I should have come to St. John's or Memorial or St. Luke's in St. Louis. But anyway, that's what I did.

DePue: At what point in all of this did it occur to you, "This is going to have a serious impact on my career and what I do for a living?"

Watson: Oh, I immediately knew. They have TIAs [Transient Ischemic Attack], in fact that's what they thought I was having. That's kind of a mini stroke. Your blood vessels are maybe breaking or whatever sometimes, and it's temporary. A lot of people have these at advanced age, but they recover and live a normal life, maybe take some medication. That's what they thought I was having at Barnes Hospital.

Then the next day, they finally recognized that, yeah, he's had a stroke. They did a CAT scan, and MRIs and things like that, that determined the fact that I had a brain stem stroke.

For people that are going to listen to this in whatever year or whenever, the thing that saved my life—because they told me that 90 percent of brain stem strokes are fatal. It's the kind of stroke that just boom, you're dead, fall on your face; that's it, die in your boots—is because I was taking aspirin every day. I had been for twenty-five years, baby aspirin, and that thinned my blood enough that the stroke was minimal.

DePue: What were you taking aspirin for?

Watson: Just baby aspirin. I've always had cholesterol issues, and I was just trying to thin the blood out a little bit. That dated back to my years in the Jaycees, when they did a blood test of mine. They said," Wow, your cholesterol is up there, and your lipid count is up. You need to watch what you're eating." So I started taking baby aspirin at that time.

DePue: That's just the kind of thing you would expect a pharmacist to do. But you would also expect a pharmacist to pay attention to the signs (laughs).

Watson: Not to drive home. That was just ludicrous. If somebody would have got hurt because of my mistake, my whole issue of not taking care and recognizing my problems… But anyway, take a baby aspirin. It doesn't hurt you, Mark. Take a baby aspirin every day, and you never know what some doctor might tell you. Like they told me, they said, "Your blood was thin enough, you didn't have a fatal stroke."

My dad, when he had his... My dad had his within seventeen days of when I had mine, at the same age. He was sixty-two years old, and he had it September 30, and I can remember where I was, obviously. I had it October 17, my sixty-second birthday, so it's genetic. I had controlled my cholesterol pretty good. I didn't smoke. I had low blood pressure. I did all the right things. I worked out some, but not like I should be. I was in decent shape, and it's all heredity, which you have no control over.

DePue: At what point in time did you decide that you wouldn't continue on in the legislature?

Watson: I'd say it was probably about the third day or fourth day, when I knew that I was going to have significant rehab. Being leader, I couldn't do that. So that was my first step, was I called Brian McFadden, my chief of staff, and he came down to St. Louis. We talked, and I told him, "I'm not going to run for leader. I'm going to get out of that; I can't do it. I want to focus on rehab." That was the right decision.

DePue: But keep your name on the ticket for that fall's election?

Watson: Right. Well, it was within a couple of weeks, three weeks, the election was. So I stayed on the ballot and got reelected. Of course nobody [was] running against me. That's the best way to run, by the way, Mark, is unopposed (both laugh). I could have served another four years in the legislature, but it wouldn't have been fair to the people because, like I said, I was focusing on rehab.

As a senator, I was a very active senator, constituent minded, where I wanted to meet with people if they had problems, try to help them. I couldn't have done that and do what I needed to do in rehab. I just felt my best choice is to ultimately resign, which I did in, I think, the middle of February.

DePue: How was your successor determined?

Watson: The county chairman of the district in which I served. All the county chairmen had a weighted vote, based on how much of the county was in the district. Then they met and selected him. He's still there today.

DePue: Who is that?

Watson: Kyle McCarter.

DePue: A Republican?

Watson: Oh, yeah (laughs). There was no choice in that. I guess they could have selected a Democrat. But from what I understand... I don't know this to be fact, but I was told by somebody on the committee that Craig Virgin, who ran against me in 1992 as a Democrat, put his name in the hat, asked to be considered for my replacement. Now, I probably shouldn't have said that, but this is a friend of mine who told me that.

So, they could have selected Craig Virgin, I guess, a Democrat. But Republican county chairmen are going to select a Republican. I didn't get involved in that because I didn't think... That was not my place to name my successor. That was their job.

DePue: If you were from a district that, let's say, leaned Democrat versus Republican, would you have as readily resigned?

Watson: My district leaned Democrat. My district, it always was a Democrat leaning district, sometimes more than not. I was lucky.

DePue: But you had confidence that the successor would end up being a Republican?

Watson: You have to be elected; you mean the next election. I knew that the successor who was going to be selected would be a Republican, and that was Kyle.

DePue: Why did you know that?

Watson: The Republican county chairmen... Only the Republican county chairmen met to determine who my successor would be.

DePue: So that's a factor of state law then, how that is determined.

Watson: Yes. And there's a step-by-step process.

DePue: Was there a special election or not?

Watson: No. He was seated until the next election, the next state election. I would have had a four-year term, so I wouldn't have been up in 2010. I would have gone to 2012. I think that's right. Yeah, my next election would have been 2012, but

since he succeeded me and was selected to replace me, then his election came in 2010.

DePue: You had your stroke in October. You've got the general election in November. That's 2008, so that's a presidential year. Barack Obama won that. We've talked about that a little bit. December 9, Rod Blagojevich is arrested in Chicago. What were your thoughts when you heard that news?

Watson: Well, kind of finally, but I think it was premature. They probably should have waited a little bit to do that. I think some of the concern might have been to where this was going to lead. Of course, Barack Obama's name was very prominent in this because it was his seat that he had vacated when he got elected president. It was his seat that was going to be…

DePue: Blagojevich gets to pick Obama's successor.

Watson: The governor does that.

DePue: And so you've got those quotes about Blagojevich, his comments on the telephone that are being wiretapped.

Watson: Oh, man, just amazing. The language is one thing, but just to be saying it or implying it or knowing full well that somebody out there could be listening and the disregard for that. The guy thought he was bulletproof.

DePue: What did you think of the media circus that happened afterwards?

Watson: That was a circus. I felt bad for his family, felt bad for his wife and two daughters. I think kind of the whole thing was in disregard for them. He'd take exception to that I know, because he felt very strongly about his daughters. But I just felt like all the things he...all the things that he did, and to think he's going to miss possibly fourteen years of their life while he's sitting in Colorado or someplace else, unless he gets a pardon.[52] I just... I don't know what drove the man to do that.

DePue: The controversy started, in part, because of having control over that [Barack Obama's] senate seat. He ends up appointing Roland Burris. What was your feeling about that appointment?

Watson: Roland Burris was a friend of mine. He was actually from Centralia, Illinois originally. I thought he would be a decent member, a decent appointment. I didn't object to his appointment.

[52] Rod Blagojevich was convicted on one of the 24 federal charges, and ultimately sentenced to 14 years at the Federal Correctional Institution, Englewood, Colorado. After an appeal for his release, U.S. President Donald Trump formally commuted his sentence in 2020. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_Blagojevich)

DePue: How did you find out about the impeachment, the intent by the legislature to impeach the governor?

Watson: Chief of staff, Brian McFadden, kept me up-to-date. By that time, I was home. I had spent considerable time in a rehab facility, but the first of December, I was home. Then, we went to Florida. We had a place in Florida, and it felt like the rehab would be better there. As it turned out it's right, because weather impacts a stroke. Cold weather, it draws you up. So Florida was the place for me, where I should be. That even told me further to realize that I couldn't fulfill my obligations as a senator.

DePue: But at that time you still are a senator?

Watson: I'm still a senator.

DePue: Did you participate in the impeachment?

Watson: I did.

DePue: I know that this is something that Bernie Sieracki has talked to you about as well, but can you just quickly walk through that scenario of your involvement with the impeachment?[53]

Watson: Well, I was in Florida for a good part of it. The last week, in which the vote was taken I was here; I came here.

DePue: For that purpose?

Watson: Yes, oh yeah. I wanted to be here for that. It was a sad day; it was a bizarre day. The governor comes out and gives a political speech, trying to defend himself about what went on, and all he talked about were all the good things he did for the people of Illinois.

And he'd been campaigning, through the media, through the TV, with all his escapades, and his wife, for that matter too. They'd been trying to set up a jury to not impeach him or not to convict him, but that was later. That was after our impeachment. It was the first time ever that we'd experienced anything like this, and it was a very historic time for us in Illinois. It wasn't a good time for Illinois at all.

[53] Bernie Sieracki spent a lifetime as a lobbyist in the Illinois state legislature before starting his own lobbying firm, Business Government Relations. Following the impeachment of Gov. Rod Blagojevich in 2009, he was perfectly suited to write the definitive book on the impeachment process, entitled *A Just Cause: The Impeachment and Removal of Governor Rod Blagojevich.* You can find Sieracki's oral history interview at https://www2.illinois.gov/alplm/library/collections/OralHistory/illinoisstatecraft/general/Pages/Sieracki,-Bernard-H.aspx)

DePue: And practically everybody did. Let's see, the house impeached him, and then the senate had to try...?

Watson: Try him and convict him.

DePue: And did you make any comments?

Watson: I did. They're on the Internet still today, I understand. I got pretty emotional about it all, which I did on a regular basis. That wasn't anything new in Springfield, for me to get emotional. Yeah, I gave a speech and talked about my feelings about the whole thing and how disappointed I was in him and his administration and even the people around him, who let this go on, knowing that there was problems and should have been more responsive to stop, "Whoa, wait a minute!"

But they didn't do that. They let him go on. I don't know whether it was his dominance over them or what, but people that [were] around him could have stopped all this, and they didn't. I think that's a shame too.

DePue: You mentioned earlier in this interview that he and Senate President Emil Jones were joined at the hip. I think that's the phrase you used. What was Jones's reaction to the move toward impeachment?

Watson: I'm not sure. He wasn't a member then, when he [Blagojevich] got impeached. John Cullerton was now the president of the senate. But I'm sure that he was very supportive of the governor, until maybe he couldn't do it any longer and realized that there was a problem here.

DePue: So the impeachment would have been in 2009. You're right; John Cullerton's the brand new senate president.

Watson: Yes.

DePue: How about your replacement? Were you involved at all in helping to select the new senate minority leader?

Watson: I was. I was actively involved in Christine Radogno's succession. She was the deputy leader at the time. She was involved in a lot of things that we were doing, wanting to do. So she was privy to what was important to our caucus.

Senator Watson walks into the Senate chamber with Senator Christine Radogno, the Deputy Minority Leader, behind him.

DePue: Was that who you were supporting from the beginning?

Watson: Yes.

DePue: But I think, earlier in our conversation, you said that she wasn't necessarily the same kind of Republican that you were (Watson laughs).

Watson: She may not be, but that doesn't necessarily mean she wouldn't be a good leader. It was obvious to me that she was leadership quality and recognized the needs of the caucus and the members. We may have differed on issues but not on budget matters.

She was right on on the budget, economics, the importance of the business climate in Illinois, those kinds of issues. We were in lockstep. We may have differed on some social issues, but that's not necessarily important to me as to be a quality leader.

DePue: I think the impeachment trial itself was in January. At that time, had you already made your decision to step down?

Watson: Yes. I don't know that I'd announced it yet, but I... I might have announced it right after the vote to impeach, on the floor. I might have, the next week, announced it, that I was going to get out in March. Actually, I think it was the 17th of February. That sticks in my mind.

DePue: I've got the 16th of February.

Watson: The 16th, okay, the 16th.

DePue: That's when you announced?

Watson: That's when I resigned.

DePue: Was there any reason why you wanted to announce after the impeachment, rather than before?

Watson: I wanted to be a part of that. I was at the forefront of all the issues. Here was a guy who had taken us on all those years and now was going to exit state government in a manner that is not very… To leave as he did, the embarrassment, all that comes with that, it was a sad day, but I wanted to be a part of it.

DePue: What were your emotions... What was your feeling then, after he is impeached? How would you describe that?

Watson: I wasn't elated, not at all, because it was just a black eye for our state. Anywhere I go or anywhere I went after his arrest, "Oh, you're from Illinois. You're from..." They never could pronounce his name, but, "You're from there." We were known for him, and I felt that was not good for our state, obviously not good. I wasn't elated to see this kind of process take place, but it was necessary. We removed a cancer from our administration, and we're better for it.

DePue: We're about at the end.

Watson: How are we doing on time?

DePue: We do need to close up, then. Let me just ask you a couple questions. Looking back at your career, what's the thing you are most proud of having accomplished?

Watson: I've always said the issue—what's going to go on my tombstone—would be the School Construction Grant program. I was a sponsor of that during Edgar's administration. That helped a lot of schools and communities build new schools or upgrade their school. The state had a bonding program that we participated [in] and it helped many schools throughout Illinois. That was one of the bills that I really felt strong about, that I sponsored.

A lot of them had to do with education, the higher education initiatives that create the savings program for kids to go to college, the Chicago School Reform, I was involved in that. There were three of us, but I was one of the principals involved, Dan Cronin, Pat O'Malley and myself. Dan was the chairman of the education committee. I had just been the minority spokesman. No, I had been the chairman the year before, and Pat was the assistant chairman, vice chairman. So that was a big initiative.

DePue: How about the flipside, something that you were disappointed didn't happen, or something that did happen?

Watson: The bonding program that we wanted to do for capital. There were a lot of needs in the state for roads and bridges. That was during Blagojevich's administration, and of course, his inability to work with the speaker and get his support from the speaker ultimately created the demise of that whole effort.

That was a time when we needed work; we needed higher education, needed buildings; schools were included in that, part of the school construction program that I started. It was actually started back in the '60s, and then it ended. Then we reinvented it, so to speak, in the Edgar Administration.

DePue: But the way you described it earlier, it sounds like the blame, if you want to use that word, would be just as much or more on Madigan as it would on Blagojevich?

Watson: Very much so, but it was Blagojevich's inability to bring Madigan into the fold, into the tent, and it was Madigan's mistrust for the governor and his...

DePue: But what would otherwise be something that I would think the Democratic leader of the House of Representatives would support.

Watson: You'd think so. And organized labor was for it. There were a lot of constituencies that were Madigan's were for something to be done, and he

didn't do it. It was primarily because of his relationship or lack of relationship, with the governor or trust.

DePue: Two more questions. One, is there some way out of our pension and fiscal problems that we're experiencing today?

Watson: Well, discipline. The leadership here doesn't seem to be willing to face it. There's no urgency; there doesn't seem to be any kind of, "This has got to get done, and we've got to do it now." That attitude doesn't seem to be prevalent.

DePue: Are you saying both from the governor's office and in the legislature?

Watson: Yes. Nobody wants to accept the responsibility of making the tough decisions to do what needs to be done in the state to create a lot of things that could help. Certainly the pension payment is one of those issues that nobody is wanting to face. Talk about it, a lot of talk. Bills are passed. Now, in the next couple of weeks we'll find out, but in the end, it's probably going to be some watered down piece of legislation that won't really have the real intent of what they want to do. And they won't get done what is needed to be done.

DePue: Is that a factor of what you kind of alluded to before, always looking at the next election, rather than the next generation?

Watson: Absolutely. It just goes back to that whole...that people here today, their attitude is that somebody else is going to take care of it. The speaker, he's the only constant in this, for thirty-some years and probably pushing onto forty. He's been at the helm of the... If not at the helm, he certainly was an influential member, back in the early or late '70s.

He's had to agree with a lot of this stuff that's gone on and the mismanagement and spending and all that's happening. He could have been one constant in there that said, "No, let's hold back; let's not do what we're going to do." It only happened in '04, as far as I know. Otherwise it is expansion.

DePue: Well, Senator, how would you like to finish this series up? What final comments do you have for us?

Watson: I've enjoyed this. I wish it was fresher on my mind for some of this, because I don't think that I really gave it justice, that maybe future generations, if anybody listens to this. I can't imagine, Mark, anybody going through all of this and listening to it, but I enjoyed my time in state government. I really did. I enjoyed the people aspect of it. (pause)

I enjoyed the people aspect of it more than anything, whether it be people here in Springfield or my constituents back home, and I felt like I served their needs (emotional). That's part of my problem (laughs).

DePue: Senator, you just told us about this aspect of your character, so it's fitting that we finish that way. It has been thoroughly enjoyable for me to have the experience, and I thank you very much for taking part and putting up with all my questions.

Watson: It was my pleasure; believe me.

(end of transcript #7)