

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with John Cullerton

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Project Name Oral History project

Interview # ISL-A-L-2020-028

John J. Cullerton, who served in the Illinois House from 1979 to 1990, and in the Senate from 1991 to 2020 where he finished his career as the Senate President, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois statecraft - Legislators* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: May 7, 14, 21, 28, Jun 4, 10, 17, Jul 2, 15, 29, Aug 13, Sep 1, 17, 30, Oct 13, 22, Nov 18, Dec 2, Dec 10, Dec 15, 2020, Jan 12 & Jan 27, 2021

Locations: Telephonic interview on May 7, 14 and 21. Interviews at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library on May 28, Jun 4, 10

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript being
processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:05(1) + 0:51(2) + 0:53(3) + 1:20(4) + 1:18(5) + 1:13(6) + 1:19(7) + 1:19(8) + 1:30(9) + 1:21(10) + 1:06(11) + 1:09(12) + 1:12(13) + 1:20(14) + 1:13(15) + 1:20(16) + 1:19(17) + 1:32(18) + 1:25(19) + 1:28(20) + 1:06(21) + 1:53(22) / 1.08(1) + 0.85(2) + 0.88(3) + 1.33(4) + 1.3(5) + 1.22(6) + 1.32(7) + 1.32(8) + 1.5(9) + 1.35(10) + 1.1(11) + 1.15(12) + 1.2(13) + 1.33(14) + 1.22(15) + 1.33(16) + 1.32(17) + 1.55(18) + 1.42(19) + 1.47(20) + 1.1(21) + 1.88(22) = 28.22 hrs.

Session 1: Early life, college education and military experiences

Session 2: Law school, public defender experience, & 1976 Democratic Convention

Session 3: Cullerton's first campaign in 1978 for IL House and first term

Session 4: Cutback Amendment, ERA fight in IL House and IL House years to 1983

Session 5: Career in the IL House from 1983-1990, and appointment to IL Senate

- Session 6: Senate career from 1991 through 1995
- Session 7: Run for U.S. Congress in 1994 and IL Senate career through 1998
- Session 8: Senate career from 1999 to Gov. Blagojevich election in 2002
- Session 9: Cullerton's experiences with Barack Obama thru Obama election in 2008
- Session 10: Cullerton on President Obama and on Gov. Blagojevich's first term
- Session 11: Blagojevich administration & Sen. Emil Jones decision to step down
- Session 12: Election as Senate President and Blagojevich arrest and impeachment
- Session 13: Blagojevich Senate trial and early Quinn administration
- Session 14: The early years of the Gov. Quinn administration
- Session 15: Senate President experiences during Quinn administration, post 2010
- Session 16: Management of legislative & congressional redistricting
- Session 17: 2020 election & Quinn administration from 2011-2012 legislative year
- Session 18: Legislative years 2012 through 2014 & election of Bruce Rauner
- Session 19: First year of the Gov. Rauner administration & failure to pass a budget
- Session 20: Gov. Rauner administration thru 2018 election of J.B. Pritzker
- Session 21: Gov. Pritzker, budget negotiations, Fair Tax and revenue increases
- Session 22: 2019 legislation during Gov. Pritzker administration and retirement

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on May 19,

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in
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Abstract

John Cullerton, *IL Statecraft - Legislators*, # ISL-A-L-2020-028

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: John J. Cullerton was born on October 28, 1948 and grew up in Oak Park, Illinois until the family moved to Winfield in 2nd grade. The family was Catholic, and John graduated from St. Francis High School in Wheaton, Illinois in 1966, then enrolled in Loyola University, graduating in 1970, while also serving in the Illinois Army National Guard. He attended law school at Loyola University, earning his JD degree and passing the Illinois bar exam in 1974. He then worked as a public defender in Chicago from 1974 thru 1979.

In 1976 Cullerton attended the 1976 Democratic Convention as a delegate, and in 1977 began running for the Illinois House of Representatives for the 12th District, a lakefront district in Chicago. He won that election and served in the House from 1979 until he was appointed to Senator Dawn Clark Netsch's seat when she became Illinois' state treasurer in January 1991. He married Pamela Wilson in 1979 and also maintained a law practice. Cullerton continued to serve in the Illinois Senate until he announced his retirement in November 2019. In late 2008, Senate Democrats selected him to serve as Senate President, a position he held until his retirement. He began his tenure as President during Gov. Rod Blagojevich's Senate trail, and held that post through the Gov. Pat Quinn, Gov. Bruce Rauner and one year of the Gov. J.B. Pritzker administration. Senator Cullerton retired in January 2020.

During Cullerton's over forty years of service in the Illinois legislature he was a central figure some of the most consequential issues and events of Illinois's political history. During that time, the Illinois House was downsized following the Cutback Amendment, the legislature passed several capital bills, and he a central role in multiple budget negotiations. He worked closely with then state senator Barack Obama. Following the 2010 census, he played a central role in congressional and legislative redistricting. He is especially proud of his involvement in numerous driver safety initiatives, marriage equality legislation, abolishing the death penalty, pension reform, school funding reform and immigration reform.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Illinois Senate President; Speaker Mike Madigan; Barack Obama; Gov. Jim Thompson; Gov. Pat Quinn; Gov. Rod Blagojevich; pension reform; Gov. J.B. Pritzker; Gov. Jim Edgar; school funding; death penalty; marriage equality; driver safety legislation; Gov. George Ryan; Senator Christine Radogno; Senator James Pate Philip; Senator Emil Jones; Chicago public defense work; Cutback Amendment; reduction of press coverage of Illinois legislature; state income tax legislation; capital bills; Emil Jones; run for U.S. Congress in 1994

Notes to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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