

Interview with Emil Jones

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Williams: So, are you ready?

Jones: I guess I am.

Williams: This will be part of the oral history that will be housed in the Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, IL. I'm here talking with President Emil Jones. He's the president of the Illinois State Senate and has served in various capacities in the Illinois General Assembly since nineteen, what, seventy-?

Jones: Three.

Williams: Since '73. To get us started, I would like for you to talk about your background, in terms of your parents, your father, mother, how you got involved in politics. Did your family come from other parts of the country to Chicago? How did your family get here? And talk about your other siblings, then go on from there, leading up to where we are today, as far as President-Elect Barack Obama.

Jones: Okay. I grew up in Morgan Park, far, far south side of the city of Chicago. My parents migrated to Chicago in the teens, around 1917, somewhere along in that area. My mother was from Selma, Alabama; my father from Columbus, Georgia. We grew up in Morgan Park, as eight children. I was the fifth child. I had four older sisters. We grew up; we had our own home. We lived with our grandfather, Henry Jones.

My father worked, drove a truck. Then he became a bailiff to a judge in Cook County. He was actively involved in Democratic politics. I recall, as a little boy in grammar school, he was with the 19th Ward, regular Democrat organization. He was a precinct captain. So he was quite involved in politics himself. I didn't get involved in politics until I was watching the debate of John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in 1960. I became a volunteer in John F. Kennedy's campaign.

Williams: And how old were at that time?

Jones: Oh, in 1960, I guess I was about 25. So, I happened to like Kennedy and his style. That's how I got involved, you know.

Williams: Now, did you hear your father talk much about the values that Kennedy espoused at the time? What inspired you?

Jones: Well, it was John F. Kennedy. I used to help him [my father] stuffing envelopes and literature and stuff, but I wasn't involved in it. I didn't have the interest, more or less. It was John F. Kennedy that really gave me the interest.

I was in the insurance business at the time. I worked for Metropolitan Insurance. I was a debit manager, and I had a lot of reaction [interaction] with people, so getting in politics was rather simple, because I had that experience of talking to the public and everything. So, my insurance training helped me a long ways.

Williams: Now, was Irby Dickerson with Metropolitan Insurance at the time?

Jones: He could have possibly... Yes, one of the executives. I was just a debit person. I had a debit, and I go out and solicit business, collecting premiums. I learned the habit of people and everything. It was a good exchange. But growing up in Morgan Park, it still is today a very clannish community. Everyone knew everyone else, and in turn, it became easy for me, based on the reputation of my father, in that my father, people liked him; they knew him. So it was rather easy for me to get support, even when I ran for office. Everyone knew everyone. By growing up in Morgan Park, I know three and four generations in one family.

Williams: Oh really.

Jones: And they're scattered all out in Morgan Park and the surrounding communities.

Williams: Oh, so you really, really knew—

Jones: So, I have what you call a real good base. And I often wondered... Even after I was elected state representative in 1962. My father, we didn't have any money; it's a poor family. But I often wonder, how did he help me? How he helped me, basically, was that he had a good name. And it was the good name that enabled me to go out and garner the support that I needed to win my first election.

Williams: Now, what brought your father to Illinois?

Jones: I believe, in the case of my father—I found this out after he was deceased—some of my relatives had gotten together and said, “We’re going to have a family reunion, to bring the two families together.” I didn’t know what they were talking about.

Williams: You mean the family reunion?

Jones: Yes. That’s when I discovered that my father’s brother had to leave Columbus, Georgia in the middle of the night, because he jumped and supposedly had beat up a white man. And eventually the whole family left Columbus, Georgia.

He [Jones’ grandfather] came to Chicago and changed his name and everything. But it was never talked about in the family. We had no knowledge of such.

Williams: Which is not unusual, because a lot of us came from the South, not knowing why we came, and as you said, folks have to change their names—

Jones: Yes. I believe that happened in many, many families. Then I began looking at my father’s marriage certificate and other things. That’s when I discovered that there were certain discrepancies there, because I always thought he was from Phoenix, Alabama. And doing a genealogical search, I discovered that it’s right across the river from Columbus, Georgia. So my father always said he was from Phoenix.

But, he went to grammar school here on the south side of Chicago. He was born in 1908. So, I believe that happened in thousands of African-American families, leaving the South.

Williams: As you said, that’s a common pattern, in terms of the migration from the South.

Jones: Right. He came here as a youngster, a young boy, my grandfather and grandmother. And so, it’s very interesting, going back in history, looking at things like that...But they never talked about it.

Williams: But I’m assuming you talk about those experiences with your family now.

Jones: I talk about it, see, but what I’m saying is that, for reasons that they left, it was those reasons also why they wouldn’t talk about it, because they never knew... The long arm of the law, whatever, maybe may still come after them. I don’t know what really happened, but I never forgotten that.

Williams: Yeah, to this day, you don’t know what happened. Talk about your school life and growing up in Morgan Park. What was it like? Which grammar school you attended, high school—

Jones: I attended John D. Schoop Elementary School. And the teachers who taught us, most of them lived in the community. So, it had what you'd call checks and balances, in that, for discipline and things of those nature, the teachers are right there in the community. They knew your mother; they knew your father. So it sort of kept you in sort of check.

It was a closed community, wherein other parents, if you go out and you're doing something wrong, they would talk to your parents about stuff.

Williams: They would just check on you.

Jones: That's right. So, it had its checks and balances. All my sisters and brothers, we all graduated from John D. Schoop Elementary School. Now, all my sisters graduated [and] went to Morgan Park High School. And one of my brothers, my youngest brother, who is deceased now, Harold, he went to Morgan Park High School and graduated. But, I went to Tilden Technical High School.

Williams: And why is that? I mean, going so far out of the community—

Jones: Right, but it was a very, very good school. It was called a pre-engineering school. We had to take a test to get in that school. So I went to Tilden Technical High.

Williams: Like the Walter Payton and Whitney Young.

Jones: That's right. My brother next to me, he also went to Tilden Technical High School. It was a school designed for math and science and pre-engineering, more or less. We had drafting. I love math. So, we had math, algebra, trigonometry, drafting. They had shops, machine shops and all those different things. But it gave you a well-rounded education, and so I enjoyed high school. I enjoyed it, yes.

Williams: Now, who were some of your memorable friends who you graduated with from high school that are around today, some who perhaps are prominent and maybe not so prominent?

Jones: Well, actually I will go back to my grammar school class. We were very close, and we're still close. Amy Tate Billingsly, she's in Washington. Her former husband was president of...I forget the name of the university. They're still around, John Jenkins, Karen Keith, Earl Bryant. Earl and I both graduated Schoop School together. We both went to Tilden Technical High School. Most of my high school classmates, I knew them, but since they came from all parts (phone rings)—

Williams: Can you answer that? I can pause it.

Jones: Yeah, they came from all parts of the city. We didn't establish what you'd call a real close relationship and bond, like we did in grammar school. And when I graduated from John D. Schoop Elementary School and went to Tilden, most of my high school, my grammar school classmates who went to Morgan Park, I

didn't see them as much. My whole social life changed. And see, I would leave Morgan Park early in the morning, and I wouldn't get back until late in the evenings, see. So I didn't see them as much.

Williams: Yeah, so you didn't have the opportunity to establish that bond. So, Morgan Park was like a general high school at the time?

Jones: Yeah, Morgan Park was a general high school, and Schoop was one of the feeding schools to Morgan Park.

Williams: That's interesting. That's really interesting, because I guess I just assumed... We were trying to figure out, why did you go to Tilden High School versus Morgan Park? So that explains why, in terms of Tilden being, as you said, the gifted school, versus Morgan Park being the—

Jones: Morgan Park was a good high school. But Tilden Tech was a all-boys school, all boys. It was like, you had Lane Tech High School, which is located on the north side. Tilden Tech was located on the south side. And they both offered the same type of courses. My parents wanted me to go to Tilden, because of what it offered.

Williams: So, what was your goal at that time, the reason why? Were you on your way to aspiring to being an engineer or what? What were your career aspirations at that time?

Jones: When I was at Tilden, I thought perhaps I wanted to become an engineer and, with the math science, which I really enjoy, just to give me the education to actually pursue that type of a career. I have four years of architectural drafting and blueprints, which I still can read the blueprints and know how to design.

All the math and the science was required for us to have, in order to graduate from Tilden Tech. So, it was that reasoning, my parents sent me to that school. It was good, no girls there for distraction.

Williams: (laughs) Right, exactly. You got your homework done.

Jones: Yeah, that's right.

Williams: Right. So, what got you off the path, in terms of not pursuing the science and the math and getting really immersed in it? You mentioned getting into politics? But, at that point, what got you—

Jones: Well, one of the things, after I graduated I went to Roosevelt University. I was working. I went to Roosevelt University and then, after a couple of years there, I started working and got in to the insurance business. It was that exposure, more or less, to other avenues. In college, I was taking courses in business administration.

I recall—I forgot what company it was—I had a job for a junior accountant. But after looking at it and looking at it, I said, Hell, this is not for me, sitting in the office, crunching numbers—

Williams: Especially with you being a people person.

Jones: Right. So, I changed more or less. Even though I love business, and I love math. But I wanted to be more involved, interacting with people.

Williams: And with accounting, really—

Jones: A little too dull.

Williams: Uh-huh, almost like computers of today.

Jones: It was a rewarding experience. There were always fights at Tilden, racial fights and things of this nature. I recall, every fall when we come back to school, the whites had written on the building, “niggers go home.” Always fights and everything. But again, it offered a good, rounded education. One of my high school classmates, Karl McCormick, he and I left Tilden and went down to Roosevelt.

Williams: Is he any relation to McCormick, just curious?

Jones: Karl McCormick?

Williams: Uh-huh, I mean, to the McCormick—

Jones: Yeah, he became a judge. He went on to law school and became a judge. He’s retired now, but he’s still active in county politics. We stayed close, over the years.

Williams: And you were saying that you went on to Roosevelt with—

Jones: Yeah, he and I went to Roosevelt when we left Tilden.

Williams: So, you were saying that there were a lot of racial tensions.

Jones: Yeah, right, because right there in Canaryville, right next to Bridgeport, always had a little racial fights and everything.

Williams: Now, who was able to provide that balance, in terms of the racial fights? I mean, in terms of not allowing things to get out of hand. Just how did that transpire?

Jones: To tell you the truth, I really don’t know. I know our teachers at the school... We had fights in classrooms. After school, you got to be careful if you’re black in that neighborhood, after school. I guess, they do what they could possibly do, but it was just a way of life.

Williams: And you just dealt with it. Talk a little bit about your hobbies, what you did as extracurricular activities. Well, you mentioned that, once you finished... At that time, the school was far north, and then you'd be coming back south. How you were able to maintain any involvement in any extracurricular activities, hobbies or what have you?

Jones: Yeah, one of the things is that I always worked, always had part-time jobs, which took up my time. I had paper routes when I was in part of my high school career, in the morning, working for the Morgan Park news agency, delivered papers early in the morning. Then I had afternoon routes sometime, where I did the afternoon routes maybe a couple of years. So, my social involvement... We used to have teen nights at the high school. They would have teen dances. I would go to those things in Orgill Gardens. A good friend of mine lived in the Orgill, so I would spend quite a bit of time with them in Orgill Gardens. It was a nice, close community at the time. There wasn't any problems, as they have today.

In high school, I played on the inter... What do you call it, intramural? Just a basketball team, I was not on the team that played before the crowds, but—

Williams: Intramural.

Jones: Yeah, intramural, that's what it's called. I did that and so forth. But I always had part-time jobs to supplement my earnings. I never depended on the family to give me money.

Williams: Because they probably couldn't afford it, yeah, right.

Jones: We were poor, so all of my expenses, I paid for myself. I had to pay car fare. There was no subsidized car fare. So I had to pay that myself. But the money I earned from my part-time job enabled me to have sufficient funds to do the things I wanted to do.

Williams: I'm just curious. Do you have a lot of recollection, in terms of family life, related to holidays? Did you go to church, or what were some of the things that kind of kept the family—

Jones: Well, what kept us together on family life, we had to go to church. That was like mandatory. (chuckles) Yeah, we had to go to church. On holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas and things of that nature, we were always together as a family. My grandmother on my mother's side lived at 46th and South Park at the time, so sometime I would go there. She had a restaurant on 58th Street, and I would go there and work and help them out, as my sisters did.

Williams: So you're from a family of ownership?

Jones: Right, right. So, when my grandmother passed and my mother's brother took over the restaurant, I spent some time living with him and working the restaurant after school. I liked that. That was a new venture to me.

Williams: You're happy with people, right.

Jones: Yes. That's a new venture to me coming down here in the urban area. They always called Morgan Park country, you know. But I enjoyed working. He [Jones' uncle] lived right across from Washington Park on 51st Street. So, in the evening, when I got out of school, I would go to the restaurant, did all the cleaning, mopping the floors and doing all those different things, trying to keep the restaurant—

Williams: Appealing, so the people will...As you said, you, of course, worked in the restaurant. You worked; you went to school. How did you meet your first girlfriend, or do you have any recollection of meeting Pat? I guess that's what I'm trying to get to.

Jones: I remember my first wife, girlfriend, us going to those teen parties that they would have. All the high schools had them back then.

Williams: Which is so absent now.

Jones: Yes, so absent. So, it was like teen night. They would have a party, a dance, at the school. And so that's how I met my first wife, back then.

Williams: And what attracted you to your first wife?

Jones: I don't know. I guess I just liked her back then, I guess, my first wife. Then, years later, I met Pat. You see, I went back to school.

Williams: Roosevelt?

Jones: No. See, I hadn't finished it. I said, I got to get my education. When I got involved in politics, and I became secretary to Alderman Frost...He had offices right here on LaSalle Street, all the lawyers and their law. I said, Heck, I've got to get myself back together. So I went back to school. I went back to city colleges. I would go in the morning; I would go in the evening, aside from my responsibility as being a secretary to the alderman. I said, Heck, I want to get myself together. I saw how all these other guys were doing well. I said, "That's what I wanted to do."

My marriage, I guess it put a strain on my marriage, because I was gone, either in school or working, so we drifted apart. So, I ended up divorce, and during that course in time, that's when I met Pat.

Williams: That's always the concern, when we kind of focus on a lot of other things.

Jones: Pat was from New Orleans. She's very strong Catholic and what not. She encouraged me to continue to push on, to push on and everything. So we established that bond.

Williams: And out of that bond, you had little Emil.

Jones: Emil, my stepson, John, and I had my daughter, Rene, from my first marriage. So we stayed together until her [Patricia's] passing, yes.

Williams: Getting back to your political career, kind of talk about some of your philosophies and how you developed your way of thinking, politically?

Jones: Well, see, having gotten involved in 1960 as a volunteer and during the turbulent '60s—the Kennedy assassination, all the civil rights marches and moving, the assassination of Doctor King—I felt then that, to bring about some of the changes in life, that it was through government, as elected officials, who make a lot of the decisions.

So, when the opportunity came for me to run for state representative, I felt that was a means with which we could bring about changes that could impact the people who had been oppressed or locked out. That's why I ran for office. Seeing all of this, coming through all of this, the rights of people were determined by these elected officials. So, it's for that reason that I felt strongly that, if you are elected, you can bring about some of the changes that you so desire.

Williams: And at such a young age, you had that knowledge of how to bring about change through the political system.

Jones: Right.

Williams: I guess it's not surprising that you supported... Here we are with Barack Obama. With that whole knowledge of you bringing about change, here we are—what, almost forty years later? —being a kind of the same kind of concept, in terms of—

Jones: Yes.

Williams: ... You bring about change through government.

Jones: Through government. So government makes so many decisions on our lives and so forth. In an elected capacity, you could bring about some of those changes during the demonstrations and the marches and all of that, but it all got back to those government officials. That's what inspired me to become a elected official to try to—

Williams: Bring about change.

Jones: Yes.

Williams: And talk about some of the memorable legislation in which you attempted and also were successful at bringing about changes. Of course, you've always been number one on education. Just kind of talk about—

Jones: Well, see one of the things, when I worked with Wilson Frost, as his secretary, he was chairman of the Utilities Committee. You hear today about, during the winter months, where people are being... Their utilities are cut off; the gas or electric are cut off. It's a necessity, to live in the environment that we are in, the cold climate. So, therefore, you need heat; you need electricity.

I recall the calls that use to come to the office from consumers trying to get their utilities turned on. At that time, there was no one you could contact to get it done. So, when I got elected state representative, the first bills that I put in were bills to stop utilities from cutting off a customer for nonpayment, during the winter months. Those are the first bills that I put in.

As a result of those bills, the gas company and electric company set up a policy to discontinue that practice of cutting off one's utilities during winter months. Those are the first bills that I put in.

Williams: And who were some of the other legislatures who supported you in that?

Jones: The legislation did not pass, but it brought more attention to the issue. The powerful utility companies, they lobbied against doing that. They fought like heck against doing that. But it brought an awareness to them that this was a major concern. So, they themselves, stopped cutting off one's utilities in winter months, and it still exists to this day.

Now, one thing I learned was that, having experienced that, by working the city council utilities committee, everyone doesn't have the experience. So, a lawmaker's job is to help educate their fellow lawmakers. It was an education process that they had done to take for them to be aware, as to what the real problem is.

Williams: And who were some of the other members who, as you recall, kind of fought alongside with you to make certain that consumer friendly legislation was passed? Do you remember the coalition?

Jones: No, at that time, it was my job to try to educate them about the problems. See many were unaware of the problem, simply because it wasn't highlighted in the paper and so forth, things of this nature. Years later, it was more highlighted and focused on. But back then, it was not. And people were really hurting. So, in trying to educate them, so I could pass that legislation, it was very difficult, because the powerful lobbyists had more control than I did.

Williams: Right, especially, like you say, with the utility industry.

Jones: Right.

Williams: I guess, in today's world it would be the John Hookers of the world, pretty much?

Jones: Yeah, but back then...I forgot who heads of these companies were at the time. But people were hurting, and so that policy changed, by my attempt—

Williams: As a result of you.

Jones: Yeah, pushing, pushing. So it changed. Those are the first pieces of legislation I felt were necessary to how government can help people. And most of the people were poor people.

Williams: That's true. Whether rural or Chicago or what have you, yeah, because people have to understand the problems that we suffer. You have people downstate who are suffering similarly.

Jones: Oh, yeah. That's right.

Williams: And I guess, that's why you have to look into coalition building, in order to resolve and solve problems of government.

Jones: But my best mentor, when I was Springfield, was another legislator by the name of Raymond Ewell. He was more or less my mentor, in advising me as to how to be successful in that body.

Williams: So he was there before you, right?

Jones: Right, right. And he told me, "Get to know these downstate legislators. [When] you pick your seat, pick a seat next to a downstate legislator, not one from Chicago. I took his advice. He said, "Because by doing it that way, you help [in] building a coalition. You can garner support for things that you're trying to do. And you will find out that there's a common thread that runs through all cultures and communities. You strike that chord, you're going to be quite successful in the things that you do."

Williams: Now, do you have a recollection of who were some of the legislators you intentionally sat by and some of the things that you learned while—

Jones: Yeah, I learned from Bill Harris, a downstate legislator. There's another legislator from Rock Island, Clarence Darrell. They were my seatmates. Clarence Darrell had the best civil rights voting record, because he sat next to me.

Williams: Now, was he related to the Darrell—

Jones: I don't know whether he is or not. He was an attorney from the Rock Island, Moline community. Bill Harris was from down there in, I believe, Macoupin County. He's like a coal miner, problems and all those different things, but he was one who educated me about the plight of the people down in his community. In turn, I educated him about the plight of the people in the urban [communities]. Come to find out, they got the same problems. So, it was those relationships that enabled me to be successful in the legislative process.

Williams: And talk about some of the other pieces of legislation that you have memories of.

Jones: Ray Ewell told me, he said, "If you're a black legislator, they always try to stick you on the welfare committees." He said, "Don't get on the welfare committees," public aid, and all those things. He said, "Simply because there is much more you can do on other committees." So, I got involved in the Insurance Committee, and eventually became the chairman of the Insurance Committee.

In the black community, urban areas, there's a thing called redlining¹. So, I had legislation to stop the redlining, the rates, as far as automobile rates and everything, hearings for forcing those individuals to look at...Just because a house down the street from you may be boarded up, it shouldn't affect your insurance rates, and just because you drive a certain automobile...and just because you live in a certain community, your rates are much higher.

So, all those [are] things that I worked on and fought on, to bring about the change, to stop the redlining and so forth and make those insurance company get more agents. You go through our community now, the insurance company discriminate, as it relate to having black agents or those companies in your community. Right now, you see State Farm has agents all over our community. Well, back then, they didn't. So I **made** them do that.

Williams: Because, had you not been in the Illinois General Assembly, you would not have been able to accomplish that.

Jones: To force that issue to make them...They talk about, it's an open market. It's not open, if you do not have in your community those agenc[ies], offering those products.

So, through my being the chairman of the insurance commission and bringing those issues out with them, I saw a major, major change. And, that's why, today in our community, you see a State Farm company, Allstate. Those were the two biggies, but they were not in our communities. You understand what I'm saying? Therefore, you, as a consumer, how can you access the product? They said, "We don't see..." They were discriminating by not putting the agencies in your communities. And that's another form of redlining. They always said, "Let the open market decide." I'm for open market, but that was a subtle way of redlining.

Williams: Right. I guess I remember, growing up, I said, "It seems as if, when insurance people came by my house, they were never people of color."

¹ A practice whereby financial institutions make it extremely difficult or impossible for residents of poor inner-city neighborhoods to borrow money, gain approval for a mortgage, take out insurance or gain access to other financial services because of a history of high default rates.
(<http://www.investopedia.com/terms/r/redlining.asp>)

Jones: But see, the substandard companies would offer automobile insurance or homeowner's insurance in many African-American communities. The others were not there. These are some of the changes I was able to get taken care of by being involved as chairman of the Insurance Committee, because they was always how, "We don't discriminate, we don't redline."

Williams: Look at the actions and the rates, yeah. Now, do you recall getting involved with things such as the Equal Rights Amendment?

Jones: Yes, we were involved. We had traditionally supported the Equal Rights Amendment. That was in the '70s. But Cornell Davis, who was the dean of the legislators in Springfield, he was retiring. He was assistant majority leader.

Most of the black legislators had supported the Equal Rights Amendment. But when this spot opened up, individual black legislators, who had never supported it... All the supporters and proponents of the Equal Rights Amendment got behind and said, "We going to help you get the leadership spot, if you support the Equal Rights Amendment. That's where they crossed the line. So, when the Equal Rights Amendment came up that next time, five of us didn't vote for it. Myself, Gene Barnes, Caldwell... I forgot who else the other ones were. We didn't vote for it, because they said, "We not involved in selecting the leader." But they were not publicly, said they were not. So we didn't vote for it that time, and it did not pass.

Williams: Was that at the time when Phyllis Schaffly was around?

Jones: Yeah, but that had nothing to do with us. We had always voted for the session; we would vote for it again. But they got involved in the internal politics of leadership, and they crossed the line.

Williams: Which is a no-no. Tell me a little bit about the lottery, in terms of how it evolved into a conduit to support education, and what went wrong there.

Jones: Well, prior to the lottery, you had Lou Caldwell who was there, and you had the policy thing. Lou Caldwell had legislation, trying to legalize it, and [that] was never passed. There was, I believe, "Zeke" [Edolo J. "E. K.,"] Giorgi, your state representative.

Williams: Was he from Rockford?

Jones: Yeah, he was from Rockford. Zeke Giorgi is the one that came with the lottery bill, I believe it was. I think he was the one. It was sold as a means to support education. That's why many lawmakers voted for it. And it did go to education, but what happened was, the lottery money came in the front door, and it took the other money out the back door.

Williams: The other money, meaning what?

Jones: The other state aid for education.

Williams: The general revenue?

Jones: Yeah, see, the general revenue dollars... See, the lottery came in to support education. But, it should have been an addition to what was already being paid.

Williams: And not to replace.

Jones: What happened was, it all went to education, still does, but they had began taking the money, putting less general revenue dollars in. It's called supplanting. So, we eventually had to pass legislation to stop that practice. So now, all the general state aid, plus the lottery money, go into education.

Williams: So that's where that discussion kind of stopped, because of the legislation that you put forth in order to stop that practice. Was there any other legislation that you're proud of? I'm certain there are a lot other things that you're proud of, including the coalition that you developed to pass successful legislation, Chapter 1?

Jones: Well, I recognize also that, if you help people become decent wage earners, it solves lot of the social ills in our society. In education, we sent extra money to school districts for children from economically depressed families. So, therefore, if you are a student receiving like a free lunch, for example—All studies have indicated that children from poor families achieve less academically. So, therefore, we send extra money to the school district to compensate, to further their education. Now, the extra money that we send, most school districts were taking that money as general state aid, spending the money on everybody.

I felt strongly that the money should be spent on the children who generate the dollars. At that time, they were called Title I state dollars. So, I had to fight like heck to get legislation pass to have the money follow the children who generated the money. That became a major political issue. My whole political career was on the line, on that issue. But eventually, I passed that law, to state that the Title I money be spent on the children who generate the dollars.

Williams: Which is one of your major accomplishments, yeah. Talk about some of the things you're disappointed in, while you served in the Illinois General Assembly.

Jones: See, where there have been times that I've been disappointed, one thing I did recognize early on, change comes slowly. It doesn't come as fast as you would like for it to come. It takes time, just for one to be educated.

In my role in the legislature, I felt education was key to solving many of the social ills that we have, is through education. But also I recognized that, if you develop wealth in your community, it also helps solve that problem. So, when I was chairman of the Insurance License and Pensions Committee, I recognized that many of the pension systems hire people to manage those dollars. And, I

discovered that minorities were not being given those opportunities to manage the pension dollars.

So, I held hearings on that issue, several hearings. And then I passed legislation to require them to hire emerging money managers—These are small firms that begin to grow—and to force them to hire these black firms. When you hire black firms, sure they hire whites; they hire blacks. But you hire the firms, they began to develop, have a business; they hire people. You're solving the economic problem in your community.

They've opened it up. And all across the country, other states look to Illinois to see how to solve this problem.

Williams: Oh, the pension manager—

Jones: Right, that's right. I'm talking about billions of dollars. People look at South Africa and Nelson Mandela. Illinois became the first state to divest its pension funds from doing business in South Africa, and I was the sponsor of that legislation. I took a bill that Carol Moseley Braun² had sent over. It didn't have anything to do with it. I put the divestment legislation on that bill.

Williams: When was that?

Jones: I forgot what years it was, but it's to divest pension funds from doing business in South Africa. And, eventually, the federal government filed a suit—I don't know if any other state [did]—but that it is what broke the back of that apartheid government, is the divestment of the money.

That's when I got my first glimpse at the big major banks who sit as the trustees of these funds and so forth. They didn't want that money coming out of South Africa, see, but, I got my first glimpse at how it actually worked, the money. But that eventually led to the crumbling of that government. Illinois became the first state—

Williams: An economic revolution.

Jones: Yeah, yeah. And I try to educate other lawmakers along those lines. I try to educate them [on] the importance of understanding the dollars and economics, rather than always looking at welfare as the main issue that you deal with in a legislative body. That type of issue is not a issue that you going to get a lot of publicity from. It's rather dull when you deal with crunching numbers and what not. But it's a means of which you can solve many, many other social ills, through that process.

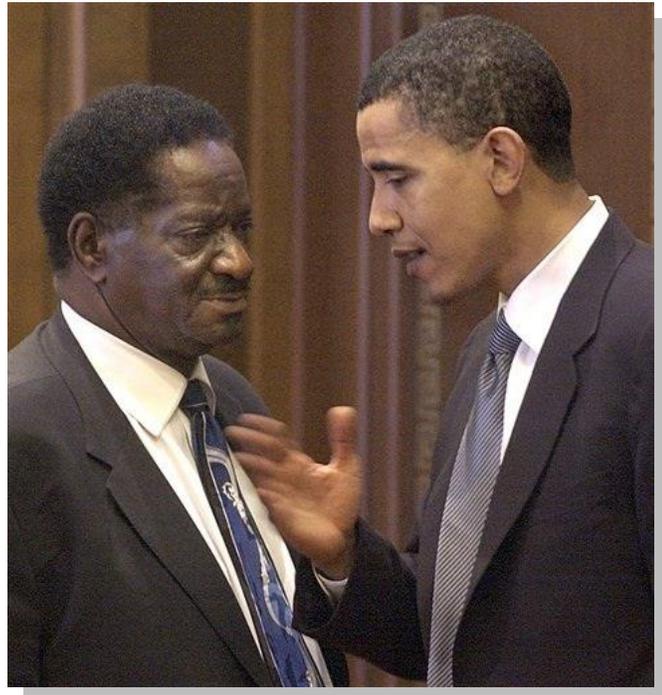
² An American politician and lawyer, who represented Illinois in the United States Senate from 1993 to 1999. She was the first female African-American senator, the first African-American U.S. senator for the Democratic Party, the first woman to defeat an incumbent U.S. senator in an election, and the first female senator from Illinois. She won election to the Illinois State House of Representatives in 1978.

When I became the minority leader, in 1993, of the Illinois Senate, I wanted someone else to take up that cause. It's a issue where you have to stay right on top of it. Every year I make them report to the legislature as to what they are doing. But you got to stay right on top of them, because they go back to their old ways. And I couldn't get another legislator to be that point person.

So when Barack [Obama] got elected, I said to him, "Barack" ... I told Barack, I said, "Now this is a issue that I've been trying to get someone to champion." And he took up the cause and began working on it.

Williams: Right, because he understood the whole numbers and the implication, as far as economic development.

Jones: Right, so he understood. You see a lot of these big buildings going up. They're financed by pension dollars. Barack understood, and he got involved and what not. Then I could go do my other duties, see, because being the leader, I didn't have time to stay focused on this piece.



Illinois Senate President Emil Jones, left, and then Illinois Sen. Barack Obama confer while on the Senate floor during a session at the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield, Ill., July 1, 2004.

Williams: Right, okay. So that was the one of the major pieces of legislation that you encouraged him to get on board.

Jones: Right.

Williams: Even some of the other lawmakers, like that Clayborne [Illinois State Senator, James F. Clayborne, Jr.], they didn't understand the—

Jones: Yeah, later on, but I needed somebody to be that point person, because I didn't have time to do it.

Williams: Someone who would have understood it, yeah.

Jones: Right. So Barack became that person.

Williams: And talk about how you worked for Barack and how you shaped Barack and some of the wisdom that you provided to him and vice versa.

Jones: Well, I knew Barack long before he came to the legislature. I met him when he first came to Chicago, when he took the job as a community organizer. And I saw he and a group of community folks. This is out on the corner, right down the street from my district office.

Williams: Was that Palmer Park?

Jones: No, no. It was right down the street from Fenger, around 111th and Wallace. I stopped to see why they were there. He told me he was concerned about the high dropout rate at Fenger High School. They felt government should do something about it. I said, "Well, you haven't got..." They were trying to organize a demonstration. I invited them to my office, which was right down the street. They all came in.

Williams: On 111th Street?

Jones: Yeah. And they, in turn, stated what the problem they felt we should be doing something about, trying to save these children. I felt it was a good idea. It's the type of group that most elected public officials shy away from, you know.

Williams: Because of what they were trying to do?

Jones: Yeah, in your face.

Williams: Protest in your face, kind of. Yeah, right.

Jones: I saw what shocked them by my willingness to work with them. So they not only stated the problem, but felt something should be done. They had the recommendations solutions. So I took that recommendations to the [Illinois] State Board of Education and got funding for a dropout prevention programs. Today, as a result of that, it evolved into alternative high schools.

We have alternative high schools in the city for those students who do not fit the traditional mode. For some reason they drop out. The alternative high school afford them the opportunity to complete their high school education, rather than end up in the juvenile—

Williams: In prison.

Jones: Right. What I discovered in the legislature is that many of your white legislators, the initiatives that they will be pushing in Springfield came from the community organized groups. All the research is done. All they have to do is introduce the legislation.

Williams: To implement it.

Jones: Right. In the African American community, that didn't happen. So I was glad to have this group, because it made me a better legislator. You understand what I'm saying?

Williams: Having all the research there and the solutions there, in terms of how they—

Jones: They come down in groups and testify, but not complaining against always. They had their complaints, but they have the recommended solutions to solve the problem. And that's what I enjoyed about it. That was our first encounter.

Only years later did I discover, when Barack became a state senator, he had written this book. And he talks about it, but he thought... He was naïve. He thought I was the ward committeeman, which I was not. Of Wilson Frost [former Chicago alderman of the 34th Ward]. We had offices together, and I guess they had planned to protest with me, but it didn't work that way.

Williams: Because he thought you were the ward committeeman.

Jones: Yeah. Since our offices were in the same building, they wanted to challenge the establishment, you know, and everything.

Williams: Which you were very much a part of. Talk a little bit about how you became involved with the organization, the political—

Jones: Well, again, when I became their volunteer, I said, "Heck, I like this." So I got involved in the organization. I began to assist in elections and everything. Eventually I became a precinct captain.

My training as an insurance agent enabled me to be a good captain, because dealing with folks that have us. It was a community that I grew up in; I knew all the families and the people. So I became one of the top precinct captains for getting the votes for candidates and doing all those different things. So, when we put together the organization and... Unlike most black organizations in the City of Chicago, they were hand-me-down type of organizations. We built our own organization from scratch.

Williams: That was with the 34th ward?

Jones: Right. Before that it was the 21st. But after redistricting, it became 34th. So we built this organization ourselves. It wasn't a handed down from a white organization because the community changed. We built our own organization, and Wilson Frost was the alderman, the committeeman.

That's how I really got really involved, really, really involved. I became that, what you call, the resource person, because everything politically I read. I read; I read. Candidates running for office, I read all the literature. I knew all... I read the election laws and how you do it. So we put this whole thing together, and

that's how we were able to elect many elected officials locally, out of our organization.

Williams: Do you have any recollections so you can pass that political wisdom on to other people?

Jones: Well, one of the things that one has to be willing to do is to involve themselves, not commence one to start at the top. When I say we built that organization, we built it by doing community service, doing the grunt work, if necessary. And, don't think you are above born knocking on doors and doing all those different things and helping someone. That's what we do. And we put together the organization; we worked hard; we elected... We had two state reps; we had a Cook County Commissioner; we had an alderman. Out of our own little organization, which created jealousies among some of the other organizations, [who said] they getting everything. It wasn't given to us. We did our homework. That's how we built the organization.

So, when Barack came as a community organizer, he saw this as the establishment, more or less. But the political powers that be didn't give us this. We put it together ourselves.

Williams: Yeah, almost like self-empowerment.

Jones: But when I met them, I happened to like the group. It gave me a great resource, of which I could go to Springfield to fight those issues. You understand? It was a great resource to me. And Barack, the organizer, we became good working friends because, see, he found that I was not... People usually say the politicians are against this, against that. But he saw that I was not. You understand? So we had a very good working relationship.

Williams: I guess, in some ways, you could see some of Barack in you.

Jones: Qualities.

Williams: Yeah, in you. You're working hard and—

Jones: And so he would sit down and talk with me, even dealing with issues that were not in my district, the environmental issues out at Augill(?), the dumps and everything. We would discuss those issues and suggest ways to address it.

Williams: Because he would more or less like problem solving.

Jones: Right, right.

Williams: Of which you would be, obviously, critical, going forward and running this country.

Jones: Yes. So, even dealing with the public officials, as relate to the dumping, I got involved in that piece and the environment. They all had all those dumps. Old Bill Goggins(??) built right close by there, and he had some other foundations that were involved, pushing the issue.

Williams: I guess, out in that area, at one time...I don't know if it still is considered a cancer, hot spot?

Jones: That's what they say, yes. See, like the Environmental Protection Agency, all that stuff is new. When you had industry out on the far south end and waste...They would just dump the waste. Then you had the landfills, where you had the garbage men dump and so forth. Well, that's long before you had the Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, people were unaware as to the health problems that this created.

So, after working one day, one day Barack came to me and he said, now talking, he said, "Man," he said, "I enjoy what I'm doing," but he said, "I always wanted to be a lawyer. I'm seriously thinking about going to law school." He asked me what did I think about it. I said, "Well, I enjoy working with you, but if you really want to become a lawyer, and that's something you really want to do, I suggest that you go ahead to law school." And so he left. I didn't see him anymore, until he completed law school.

So, when he came to the legislature, I didn't tell anyone—I don't know whether he did or not—that we already had a good working relationship, prior to his coming to the Illinois Senate. We already knew each other, see? So, when he first got there, he said, "Man, we knew each other. You know I like to work hard, get things done." So, he said to me, "Feel free to give me any tough, tough assignments." And, I did that.

I know, when he first got there, people were...Some of the black lawmakers were standoffish from him. Who's this guy? Blah, blah, blah.

Williams: In addition to the environmental stuff, the investment management stuff, what are some of the other issues that you kind of passed on to him to look at and take care of and monitor?

Jones: See, I always knew that he had a deep concern about those persons who are locked out, oppressed and whatnot and find means to deal with the problem. We were in the minority on many of the issues that relate to health. The Republican majority bottled up most of those issues and would not let them be heard, the earned income tax credit. He [Barack Obama] had that, and I made sure that the issue got passed and funded, see. Former Governor, George Ryan, stuck with me on that issue. That's how we were able to get that successfully funded.

Barack, he handled the major piece of ethics legislation [that] I assigned him as my point person, which was a hot potato, because they were beating the

hell out of him about that. But eventually, he learned how to compromise and work with—

Williams: The people who were... Now, who were some of the people who were on both sides of the issue, and why did that legislation come about?

Jones: Well, the recommendation, I forgot, had some commission that had recommended it, and the commission was formed. So, I put Barack in as the point person for the Senate. I believe former federal judge, Abner Mikva, called me and said he thought Barack would be a good person. I put Barack on there.

But it was a hot potato, because our members didn't want that just yet, having fundraisers while we're in session in Springfield. [They said] What can happen to your political campaigns? What are you going to use it for, especially the fundraising aspect? You're in session, and you got fundraisers and members who are opposed to that. But eventually they came around.

I used to feel sorry for him [Barack Obama], because he had to explain it to the members, because they were beating the hell out of him.

Williams: Oh, really, so he was tough back then, yeah. Do you want to stop now?

Jones: Yeah, okay.

Williams: I'm going to have to spare you a little bit more, in terms of some other discussions we got to have.

Jones: Yeah, okay, all right. We will.

(end of interview #1)

Interview with Emil Jones

IS-A-L-2008-105

Interview # 2: November 24, 2008

Interviewers: Dr. Erma Brooks-Williams, Volunteer – ALPL Oral History Program

[identified as "Williams"]

Paul Williams [identified as "Paul"]

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Williams: Last time, we talked about your family history and a little bit about the politics of what was going on at that time. I think this time we're going to start talking about some of the...Paul Williams is going to be assisting me with this effort, in terms of the different eras, going back to when you initially started serving in the Illinois General Assembly. So, Paul, you're going to kind of help me out with this.

Paul: I want to identify, probably starting around the years 1965 to about 1980, [that] we're going to try to cover in that general time period.

Jones: Okay.

Paul: So, just think about, at that time, what ward were you involved with, and who was the leader of the ward at the time, and what was going on in about late 1960, early '70s, when you—

Jones: Well, in the late '60s, around '67, it was the 21st Ward. We elected Wilson Frost the alderman of that ward, and I became his secretary. In that capacity, I served as secretary until I was elected to state representative in 1972.

The 21st Ward was a new ward, as far as blacks were concerned. So, we had put together an organization and elected Wilson Frost. It was not one of those Wards, like in the city, the 3rd Ward, the 5th Ward, 8th Ward. It wasn't a hand-me-down ward. It was not a ward that the whites moved out, the blacks took over. We built that ward organization on our own.

So, in 1972, when I was first elected, Wilson Frost had become the committeeman of the ward and, Gene Bond was the state representative. So, right after redistricting, Gene didn't believe he could win in the new state representative's seat, so he decided to run in the seat further north. So, the 19th Ward, the 21st Ward and 9th Ward, Wilson Frost and I sat down with the 19th Ward. They decided to slate me for State Representative in that district.

There were many who believed that I could not win this seat, because Gene Bond felt he could not win it. But what I had going for me is that I grew up in the Ward. I grew up in the Morgan Park community, and my father had been active in 19th Ward politics. So I had (coughs) a strong political base. Matter of fact, Jerry Shea was then the Democratic leader in the Illinois House of Representative, and they tried to get me off the ballot.

Paul: Was this still when they had the three member system?

Jones: Three members, right. They tried to get me off the ballot. They didn't want me to run, because they wanted to be sure two Democrats won.

Paul: Who was the other Democrat in that district with you, at that time?

Jones: Houlihan, Dan Houlihan. Dan Houlihan was my running mate. The only incumbent in the district was a Republican, named Ted Meyer. His running mate was Bob Dunn. So, know that in a three member district, they had bullet voting. In the Beverly Hills area, Dunn, Meyer and Houlihan lived within three blocks of each other. So, I knew if I could solidify the base of black voters in the district... We had what you called bullet voting. That mean a voter could vote one, two or three votes to one candidate.

Paul: This was the first time that the district had been drawn as the first—

Jones: Yeah.

Paul: They just drew this district, right?

Jones: They just drew it.

Paul: And when they drew it, I would assume [they were] trying to maximize the blacks. They were starting the concept of putting in a few blacks, to make it Democrats, and then they take in some suburban areas. So, you were the first black running in that whole area.

Jones: I was the first black. Gene Barnes could have ran in the district, but he chose not to run in the district, because he felt a black could not get elected. So, I ran, and I won. I won by more than 10,000 votes. Houlihan was bullet voting in the 19th Ward, and I bullet voted in, it was then the 34th Ward.

Paul: By bullet voting, what do you mean?

Jones: Getting all three votes, have a voter vote and give you all three votes.

Jones: A bullet vote would give you all three votes. And I won overwhelmingly, 10,000 votes. The incumbent, Ted Meyer, felt so sure of his victory that he reached back to help his running mate, and his running mate beat him out.

Williams: Oh, and who was his running mate?

Jones: Bob Dunn. Bob Dunn won, and he lost. That was my first election, but I had a strong base from which to run from.

Paul: Now at that time, you had risen in the 21st. What was the 34th?

Jones: It was created when...After redistricting, they created the 34th Ward.

Paul: And then that Ward...Because then Wilson switched from the 21st to the 34th.

Jones: To 34th, right.

Paul: So you basically were part of the creation, in one sense, of both wards?

Jones: Yes, I recall the telephone call that came in. Jerry Shea had gone to Mayor Daley to try to change the nomination process. It's because the committeemen, Tom Fitzpatrick in the 9th Ward and Wilson Frost, they had the most votes. So the two got together; they slated Dan Hynes, and they slated Emil Jones. And Mayor Daley called Wilson Frost in. Wilson Frost said, "No, we've gotten our petitions out. We're sticking with our candidate, and we're going to win." And, we did win.

Some of the other black committeemen in the city—Sawyer in the 6th Ward, Benny Stewart, the committeeman and alderman of the 21st Ward—they were upset that we had two state representatives coming out of our 34th Ward.

Paul: Was that you and Gene?

Jones: Gene Barnes. They ran to the mayor, trying to say, "They got two." But we built this on our arm. That's how we ended up having two elected state representatives out of our organization. They, the Stewarts and others, were waiting on orders from Mayor Daley, who was the party chair. And we, out there, says, "We've been waiting on the orders; we just went ahead and took it." That's how I ended up winning.

Williams: Now, was Gene Barnes always from the 34th Ward?

Jones: Yes. Yeah, see he got elected in 1970. And then, right after his election, during that period, they redistricted. He felt that running in my own parts of Evergreen Park—Cayman(?), Blue Island—that the district was too overwhelmingly white. So, when I ran, it was only about 23 percent black in the district. They felt a black Democrat couldn't win. But what Houlihan did was, he took all the votes out of the 19th Ward. He needed—

Paul: He didn't leave any for a split with Meyers or anybody else.

Jones: Right. I didn't mind that. I didn't mind that, because as long as he got the votes, it didn't bother me. So I took all the votes in the 34th Ward, and we split the 9th Ward. That's how I was able to win.

Paul: Now, back when you mentioned that Mayor Daley was the Mayor at the time, when you went to Springfield, what was your relationship, or what was the relationship with the mayor's office at that time?

Jones: Well, the mayor at that time... The Democrats who were based out of Chicago and some in Cook County, but mostly Chicago, they took their directions from the

Mayor Daley. He would call, tell them what issues, how he would like the vote to be, and that's the way it was. I was a little different, in that I was new. And even though I belonged to the organization, I was not an integral part of that. We were more or less, I'd say, mavericks to a certain degree. Even though I supported the organization, most of the issues and things that impacted the City, but theirs were all on orders from the boss.

Paul: Now, when you first went there, who were some of the... Like you said, Mayor Daley... At that time, who were some of the official leaders for the city, like Jerry Shea and all?

Jones: Yeah, Jerry Shea there, Mike Madigan was in the House, leader. Then you had the deacon, Corneal Davis; he was there; Ray Ewell was there; Harold Washington was there. They were all there, in the House, when I first got there.

Williams: As well as people like Caldwell, was he—

Jones: Yeah, Louie Caldwell was there.

Williams: Was Neuhaus, was he—

Jones: Yeah, he was, Neuhaus was in the Senate. And in the House, they had formed a group, Black Caucus, together. Corneal Davis was considered the leader, and I came in to all that with experience in working in city government, so I knew how city government and state government meshed together. So, it was not a situation where I was naïve about the operations of government. But, on various issues and things that came down, they generally took their orders from City Hall.

Paul: Now, you said you were with the city. You had been with the city prior to that?

Jones: Yeah, I was the secretary to Alderman Wilson Frost. And I ran the political organization when it became the 34th Ward. I was the organization's secretary as well. So, I ran the political operation for the 34th Ward back then.

Williams: A secretary had that much—

Jones: Yeah, you had patronage back then, jobs and that. I handled all of that for the 34th Ward. I gave it up when I became a State Representative, but I knew how it all worked.

Paul: When you got there, what were your impressions of... You talked about the Corneal Davises and the Fred Smiths. What was your impressions of the... I won't call them the Black Caucus, but just as the black members, in relationship to the overall operation?

Jones: Well, number one, most of them relegated themselves to the social issues and welfare and public aid, at that time. The best advice I had when I first got there came from Raymond Ewell, State Representative. He told me, he said, "Since you

pick your seats in the House,” he said, “pick your seat next to a downstate legislator, not those from Chicago and those who look like you. But when you do that, it will enable you to establish a relationship with someone from a different region, which can help you, down the road, and also help them.”

And that’s what I did. I sat next to a guy named Bill Harris from Marion, Illinois and Clarence Darrell from Rock Island. And we became good, good friends. But I learned about their communities. Clarence Darrell ended up having the best civil rights voting record, because he sat next to me.

Williams: Um-hmm, because he understood what you were going through, yeah.

Jones: Right. And so, I learned all about the coal mines down in southern Illinois, the farms from Bill Harris. We became very, very close. So, when you establish those type relationships, then you find some things you have in common. They were all concerned about employment, education, the families and things of that nature. And that’s what I did, basically. I hung with them.

Ray [Ewell had] said, “Don’t let them stick you on those welfare committees.” They always draw all the blacks on welfare and everything. And so I got on committees that dealt with insurance and pensions and things of that nature. It broadened my perspective about government and government’s role and everything like that.

Paul: Who was the Speaker when you first—

Jones: Well, the first Speaker was a Republican named Bob Blair. The downstate coalition, when the Democrats took over, they wanted Clyde Choate to be the Speaker. He was something like a leader down there. But after going through several ballots...I believe that was after the Democrat had a big sweep in 1974, the Democrats elected 100 members, 101 members.

Paul: Also, you had 177 back then.

Williams: That was before redistricting.

Jones: So, after many, many ballots, Choate could not make it, couldn’t get enough votes. So, the orders came from City Hall to switch. And they switched their allegiance from Clyde Choate to Bill Redmond.

But some of the downstaters and all, where a couple of the blacks—Ray Ewell was one of them—they stuck with Clyde Choate. That’s when they cut a deal with the Republicans, to come over and give the Democrats enough votes to elect the Speaker. But the orders came from on high.

Paul: That was what’s his name, actually...Lee Daniels got in trouble, because he switched.

Jones: Lee Daniels was the first one...He and Redmond were from DuPage County, so Lee Daniels was the first person to switch. But he was not part of the deal, so he threw them off guard. But all the loyalty and votes, coming down for Clyde Choate changed, just like that. One telephone call and all the votes changed.

Paul: So, back then, Clyde had been, like you said, the downstate leader. I guess Jerry [Gerald W.] Shea was sort of the city leader.

Jones: Right.

Paul: How was Jerry Shea as a—

Jones: Jerry Shea was a very knowledgeable leader. There were times, during that period, that he and I had our differences on certain issues, and you had a governor by the name of Dan Walker, whom the city was against. The city was against him. I recall, he had legislation for the governor's action office, and no one, no one down there would sponsor it. I took the sponsorship of it, because, in my opinion, there was a lack of leadership for the blacks. So that legislation gave me a chance, I felt, to assume the leadership.

And I recall trying to pass that bill, and it came up a few votes short. I put it on postponed consideration. I had some personal problems back home, so I had to leave. When I came back, then the mayor himself and his operatives began to call a lot of the Chicago legislators, to pull them off the bill. I recall sitting in my seat, and Corneal Davis came by and said to me, he said, "Please don't call that bill, because if you call it, I'm going to have to get up and speak against you and vote against it."

Then there were other legislators from Chicago area, they were almost ignoring me. They'd pass by me. This one says, "I call a couple of them over." I said, "Did you get a call? They said, "Yes, I got a call." So, they followed the orders. Eventually the bill did not pass. So when session was over with, I also had a job working for the city, and I had to go in and see Mayor Daley.

When I went to see Mayor Daley, Wilson Frost was with me. And Daley had a list of bills, by number, on his desk. And he began to question me, as to why I voted certain way on some of those bills. He knew what each of those bills did for the City of Chicago, as well as each bill on the political side. He knew by number. And he talked with me.

He asked about the governor's action office bill. He said, "Why did you vote?" I said, I sponsored the bill. I got to vote for my own bill. And he said, "Don't you know that guy's against us?" I said, "Well, in my opinion, he's not really, because he's got a lot of folks in my community working in the governor's action office and so forth. We had a long discussion. And then, he said to me...I said, "No one told me that." He asked me, "How long you been in politics?" (all laugh)

Jones: And I told him. He said, "Well, you know." (all laugh) He was right on that point. But what happened is that it was either Jerry Shea or Mike Madigan who gave him that information. I found out; it turned out to be Mike Madigan was the one that give that information to how I was voting on issues down there. So, that's how they played the game.

Paul: Oh, wow. They mentioned [Dan] Walker. What was your overall...because, like you said, it was very contentious between Walker and—

Jones: See, Walker beat [Michael] Howlett out for the Democratic nomination to run for governor.

Williams: And where was Walker from?

Jones: I don't recall, suburbia.

Williams: He wasn't from Chicago.

Jones: He had written that report on the riots, the Democrat convention, Walker. So, he was a populist governor. He got elected governor, but there was conflict between the governor's office and city hall. They didn't get along. And so they're doing everything they could possibly to screw the governor.

The governor's action office had a lot of blacks in the office, working there, doing different things. The action office had offices in other wards in the city, not to be political, but to just help people with community problems and so forth. And a lot of folks didn't like that. But it didn't bother me, basically. But on the political side, they didn't like that. I saw the lack of leadership, and I felt that was a means to seize the leadership of moving that direction, see. That's what happened.

Paul: What was your impression of some of the other people that you were serving with, like Corneal Davis or that sort of—

Jones: Well, Corneal Davis was a good leader, but he was more of this on the social issue in the civil rights era, back then. But having real power, they did not have. I saw that they did not have, because I challenged the leadership about blacks working on staff. And I soon saw how they operated, other blacks. I brought a black down to be hired and sent him over to the Senate to work, then I would call. Jim Taylor found out about it. He jumped up and blocked; he wanted to put his own there. That's where Gary McCants came from.

See, Gary McCants. So I called Tom Hynes. He was my senator in my district. I challenged them about blacks working in the clerk's office and challenged the way others would not. They would not speak out on those issues. But I questioned them about how come you haven't got school kids coming down here from my district? You look up here, and everything is really white. So, that's the problem I had in dealing with them. They felt I shouldn't say those things.

Paul: That was around the mid-'70s. I remember that. I came down; I'm one of the kids you—

Williams: Was it Frank Williams was down here too?

Paul: Frank Williams came back to—

Jones: I brought Frank Williams on.

Paul: Frank Williams was one of the earliest ones who came down. I was there as an intern. I got through the school. Gene Barnes helped me come, and Frank was there. He came... He was from the 34th or 19th Ward, Frank Williams. Now, speaking of that, at that time, what about [Cecil] Partee? He was over in the Senate. But he was around during those years. He was probably the most prominent of—

Jones: He was the most prominent of the black lawmakers in Springfield. I didn't have that much interaction with him. But, I knew he was the president of the Senate. He got to that position by default, more or less.

Williams: And how was that?

Jones: Because the nominee to be the president, the supposed, was a guy by the name of... I think his name was Bob Sherry(?). But Dick Neuhaus held out and wouldn't support Sherry. So, you had Senator Chew, Senator Fred Smith, Kenny Hall, and Partee. By Neuhaus holding out, the Democrats couldn't put together enough votes, because there was the Republicans. Then the Republican would be in. You had people like Charlie Chew, who may cut a deal.

So, then the orders again came [from] on high and told the Democrats to get behind Partee. That's how Partee became president of the Senate, see.

Paul: What about Charlie Chew? He was a flamboyant—

Jones: Charlie Chew was flamboyant; Charlie Chew had the nerve of steel; Charlie Chew would say and do things, and Charlie Chew had to break down other racial barriers down in Springfield back then, by his actions and his association with his women friends and so forth. So, Charlie was one who would speak his mind, speak openly, wouldn't be ashamed, and he was respected.

There were other lawmakers. I give a lot of credit to Raymond Ewell. He was more progressive, and he understood the process, how it worked, more or less and how you can be effective in that body. There was always internal fights, between like Jim Taylor and Harold Washington.

Williams: Yeah, talk about Harold a little bit.

Jones: Harold liked to serve together with them in the House. But, when I mentioned the bullet voting, see Harold Washington and Jim ran in the same district. So, what happened is... What caused the feud between the two of them is that Jim Taylor lost that primary election to a woman by the name of Peggy Smith Martin.

The reason why he lost is because you have agreements between your running mate that you would split the vote, one and a half each. But Harold Washington bulletted, got all three votes out of the 20th Ward. And Jim Taylor was not bulletting, so he lost to Peggy Smith Martin. Jim was hot about that, and that's when Jim ran as a independent and got elected. The two never got along; they never got along.

Paul: There was classic, even when I was there. When you're staff, you had to be... Back then, you was with Harold or with Jim T. You had —

Jones: And so, when Cecil Partee—

Paul: He left to run for attorney general.

Jones: He ran for attorney general and lost, but his Senate seat was open. And Harold Washington went to the Senate. But the two still feuded, see. So, in politics, as it goes, Harold Washington ran and went on to Congress. But Harold Washington didn't want Jim Taylor to succeed him in the Senate. And Harold Washington, when he ran for election for the state Senate, Jim Taylor ran a unknown. I forget the person's name... Clarence Berry.

Paul: Oh, yeah, I remember that.

Jones: Now, Clarence Berry came within less than 200 votes of beating Harold Washington for the Senate. The person that saved Harold Washington in the Senate run was Cecil Partee, from the 20th Ward. But Clarence Berry nearly won.

After serving in the Senate, then Harold went on to run for Congress. But that fight between the two [Washington and Taylor] was so intense. When, in 1979, when Jane Byrne ran for mayor, Jim Taylor was with the organization, and [Michael] Bilandic lost to Jane Bryne. Jim Taylor became deputy mayor and so forth and things like this.

Paul: Jim Taylor moved over to the Senate, because after Harold went to Congress. Harold—

Jones: Yeah, Jim went to—

Paul: Harold then left... But it was the committee man's pick, and Harold couldn't stop it because he had control of the 16th Ward.

Jones: So, that's how Jim went to the Senate. But in 1983, when Harold ran for mayor, of course Jim's going to be with Byrne. For many of the black lawmakers, Jim

called a meeting, and he put out a press release, saying the black members are with Jane Byrne. He used all our names or what not. Of course, Harold Washington won the election, and Jim ended up being on the outs. That's all the internal politics, amongst the blacks down there.

We had our fights in the House too. I had my fight with Jim Taylor... not Jim Taylor, but you had the Equal Rights Amendment in the 70's. Some of the advocates for the Equal Rights Amendment... Jim Taylor had never voted for ERA. And to get his vote, they said they were going to help get him the leadership spot of Corneal Davis, who was retiring. Corneal was assistant majority leader. We felt that was wrong, but they would not publicly say they were not doing that. Therefore, when the Equal Rights Bill came up, five of us did not vote. It was myself, Gene Barnes... I don't know who else. [It] may have been Carl Weatherfield(?). We did not vote for it.

Williams: Was Kenny Hall in the House at the time?

Jones: No, he was in the Senate. So, we had banded together, and the organization was pushing the ERA amendment hard, local politician, Mayor Daley and all the folks—

Paul: I remember that fired me up. I think Louie was. Wasn't Ray one?

Jones: Ray may have been one, too.

Paul: I thought it was Ray because—

Jones: And, we were not fighting over the spot. We were fighting over their interference in the internal politics. It went beyond when they got involved in who was going to be the leader for the black. We pick our own leader.

Paul: So you were the one who basically started that everybody got to pick their own leader then.

Jones: Yeah, that's where that came from. But the white media [was] try to say we fighting over a spot. No, we weren't fighting over the spot. We were fighting over the right to choose our leader, and you have no right to come in and try to pick our leaders for us. So, that fight went on. Even though I was part of the organization, I did not agree always with the organization. And we built a political ward organization. We elected state representative; we had a county commissioner; we had Wilson Frost as alderman, and we built that on our own. We didn't wait for the organization [to say], "Okay, you going to get this spot." We went out and took it.

Williams: Almost like self-empowerment at that time, yeah.

Paul: At that time, I guess, they was just starting some degree of independence, because I guess you had Judge Cousins over and got him elected. Charlie Chew got elected as an alderman.

Jones: They were independents back then, see. But Chew became a great organization man afterwards. And Cousin was an alderman here. But in Springfield, most of the state representatives came out of the political organization. So, Harold Washington was a organization guy. He came out of the 20th Ward and 3rd Ward. He was a organization guy; he was no Independent.

Paul: He didn't even describe himself as an independent.

Jones: And so that's how he... Had it not been for the organization, he would never been a State Senator, and he would never have gotten the position where he could for Congress. So, there's the organization that helped Harold Washington.

Williams: Although he had the perception he was an independent and—

Jones: No. No, that was not true. He broke with the organization, but he was not an independent.

Paul: What about guys like Louie Caldwell and Jesse Madison?

Jones: Well, Jesse Madison was more independent. Louie Caldwell was somewhat independent, because he grew up to represent the area over there.

Williams: On the south shore?

Jones: Right.

Paul: South shore, Hyde Park almost, right?

Jones: Yeah, so he was somewhat, sort of independent in his thinking and everything. And, uh, Ray Ewell came out of the 17th Ward, but Ray Ewell was part of the organization. But then too, like myself, [Ray Ewell] was outspoken on many issues and things that we advocated for and we fought for. You could be part of the organization, but you had to be a lapdog, and we went through all of that, yes.

Paul: What about some of the other men, some of the other people that was prominent during that time, like Mayor [Michael] Bilandic, because I don't really remember a whole lot about Bilandic

Jones: He was just... See, at the time of Mike, alderman committed Wilson Frost as president pro tem of City Council. So, if you recall, when Richard J. Daley died, there was those touting him as the black mayor. But the law, as it relates to succession, was unclear. It didn't say who the person shall be.

So, he ended up not getting to be mayor. It was a great lesson to observe what really went down, because I was involved in that. Tom Donovan, who was the mayor's chief of staff... When Daley died, those alderman had been so accustomed to taking orders that Tom Donovan was able to call those alderman and tell them who to vote for. You understand?

Jones: They had not been accustomed to acting and thinking on their own. Because the structure of local government in the City of Chicago is strong council, weak mayor. What Daley had done, he had usurped it, the power of the council, where he became strong, and they became weak. So, when he died, they had all the power. But they didn't know they had the power. So Tom Donovan could easily tell them who to vote for. That's how Bilandic ended up being mayor.

When Harold Washington died, the alderman realized they had the power.

Williams: They had an eye opener, huh?

Jones: That's right. And so, when late Mayor Washington staff tried to call the alderman together for a meeting, they wouldn't appear, because they had the power.

Williams: Um-hmm and knew it.

Jones: And knew they had the power. But one thing is a good lesson, in that you always treat people nice. I'm talking about the staff. The staff, when late Mayor Daley was in power, Tom Donovan, they treated the alderman nice. So, when the mayor died, it was easy for him, because he'd been kind to them all along.

It was just the opposite, under Harold Washington. The staff treated the alderman like they were nothing. So, they couldn't talk to the alderman when Harold Washington died.

Paul: I remember the big fights going on.

Jones: So, when I said treat, especially the black aldermen, the black aldermen in the eyes of staff were nothing. So that's what happened.

Williams: Um-hmm, a lot of friction.

Jones: Yes, see. So I recall when the [William] Grimshaws and them, trying to call those alderman. They just ignored them, because they were treated bad by her when the mayor was alive. But, had they been real kind to them, treated well, got what they wanted, then it'd been more easier for them to have bring about transition and so forth. But that was the key reason why.

Paul: I was going to say, what about Mayor Byrne? What was your impression of her?

Jones: Well, she was a flash in the pan, more or less, confrontational, did a lot of things that caused... Now had she, had Mayor Byrne solidified her base... But the big

mistake that she made, she went for a very narrow vote. You had Betty Bono and some other woman that are fighting school desegregation. And she ended up going with that group, over the masses of blacks who helped elect her. She put some of them...I think she put one on the school board.

Williams: Right. Yeah, I remember that.

Jones: And then she took that [Angeline P.] Caruso woman from the school and put her over CHA [Chicago Housing Authority]. That angered the black constituency. She went after a narrow vote and blew her base vote. Had not she done that, there would have been no way for Harold Washington to beat her. So, she actually solidified the black community for Harold Washington.

Paul: That three vote, because it was Harold and, I think, Daley and Byrne. They would split the white vote, and Harold won that primary.

Jones: Yeah.

Paul: You two talked about your early years in Springfield. What was it like, being in those days just an African American involved with a process that really wasn't that open to you guys?

Jones: It wasn't that open, but you have to make your own way in getting things accomplish. I learned quickly, once I got there, is that the things you are trying to push, you have to make your own way and get it done.

Williams: Did this require a lot of coalition building in order to get that?

Jones: Yes, you had to build coalition. I had great support of most downstate legislators, and you had the liberal wing of the Democrat Party and just being an effective member of the body. When we put Gene Burns in as chairman of the Appropriation Committee, we felt that was a means of which we could begin to funnel resources to our community. That's when we made a vow to adopt Chicago State University and make sure it gets its fair share of the funding and things. We did that way back then. That started the process, moving us in that direction. As chairman of the Appropriation Committee, you have control of the process and the money; you know where it's going. So that's what we used that for.

Williams: Is this, what, in the '70s?



The Emil and Patricia Jones Convocation Center at Chicago State is unique among Illinois university athletic projects because funding for the building was allocated from the State of Illinois treasury by then Senate President Emil Jones.

Jones: It began in the '70s. All the things that we've done for the University, the genesis of it, goes way back to when we sat down one day and adopted the University and began to work toward help, get the resources necessary to make that a University. But we learned, from what other legislators had done, particularly those legislated from the southern region of the state. They always banded together.

On issues around SIU [Southern Illinois] University. And every session, they came in with something for that University. They didn't always get what they came for, but they got something. That's how SIU became the university it is today, because of the work of the legislators.

Williams: Um-hmm, people like what, [Sam M.] Vadalabene [1994 chairman of the Democratic caucus in the Illinois Senate] and folks like—

Jones: Yeah, Vadalabene, Clyde Choate and Hart(?). You name them, all those downstate guys.

Paul: You mentioned a number of staff people and things that are particularly African-American, here in Illinois, but a lot of this started with the minority internship program, which I'm certain you had played a role in. Can you tell us a little bit about how that all got going?

Jones: I noticed that, in the government, there were interns, but I didn't see any black interns. They worked in the executive branch of government. We got interns. So, one day I said, "Let's us put together a minority internship program." The Board of Higher Education was opposed to it.

At that time, you had the Board of Governors, and they ran five of the universities in the state. They were opposed to it, because they were told to be opposed to it. [That's] because, what we were doing, when it came down to policy, we were getting involved in policy. They didn't want the legislature setting policy. So, I recall, when we put forth the legislation to get it done, they vowed they going to get the governor...[James R.] Thompson became governor. They were vowing he was going to veto it.

So, when I say relationships, a Republican legislator, who became good friends of mine—whom I helped him on some things dealing with state police—he was friends with Governor Thompson. [There was] a Republican party at the Hyatt Regency in Chicago. Now, we had passed that legislation. But the governor always can veto it. The Board of Governors, the Board of Higher Education was urging the governor to veto it.

So, this Republican legislator told me to meet him at the Hyatt Regency. I met him there, because he said, "The governor's going to be here." And right there, in the lobby of the Hyatt Regency, Governor Thompson and I talked. He said, "Okay, I'm going to sign this. I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this here." And he went ahead and signed the legislation for the minority internship program. It's relationships.

After it passed that first year, then the Board of Governor's thought it was a great program. All of a sudden it became a great, great program. They came in with stronger support, supported more money for the program, which include more students. The student receive a stipend. That's how the program came into its existence and being what it is. But that was all based on the fact that myself—I think Bill Showy(?) got in there at the end—we didn't see any minorities in internship programs.



Emil Jones sponsored legislation that resulted in Illinois' Minority Internship Program.

We wanted to have more minorities at these universities being offered internship programs. You move on; you do what you got to do. I didn't realize, until Rosalind Brown from CSU [Chicago State University] was doing her dissertation on that... That's when I discovered that it was a program that was 100 percent successful. Every student that went through the internship program graduated.

It came about, based on discrimination. I didn't see black folks in a lot of positions. When I was in the House, I made them hire a black in the clerk's office. I'd say, "I want the black to be visible, not working up there, but down there, on the floor of the House, so that, when students from these schools come down, they will see blacks down there working. These are things you have to fight for and so forth.

When I became the leader in the Senate, there was not enough diversity on staff. A lot of my friends, with their sons and daughters graduating from college, and so I went out, I told the black lawmakers, "Don't you recruit. Help me with the recruiting." But they wanted someone on staff that were going to be **their** person. I didn't want that. So, I went out and recruited myself.

Williams: For the internship program?

Jones: No, no. This was staff. That's how a lot of young blacks ended up being on staff in Springfield. I went out and recruited young blacks and brought them to Springfield to show them that they can... Many of them went on to do many, many great things. And, the professional staff, those who do the research, writing on bills, working on the budget, working on issues. It's a wonderful experience for one to get.

But I didn't want persons on staff, who was the sponsor of a legislator, because when you work on staff, you work for all the members. That's where you really learn. I did the same with them as I did with the interns because I felt there was not enough diversity. You always had to fight for some staff. Even before I became the leader of the Senate—Phil Rock was president—I challenged his chief of staff for Phil. I said, "You got no blacks on staff, not enough blacks. You got a Chicago office, no blacks." I ended up putting certain blacks on staff, getting them in position and so forth like that.

Williams: Was it Pete Halpin(??) and Judy Erwin, at the time?

Paul: This was back in the mid-'70s. What were some of the big issues back then? I can only remember ERA.

Jones: ERA was the big, big issue. Funding of education is always been issues. [It was] the issue when I first came to the legislature in 1973. But ERA was a big, big issue back then.

Paul: Putting the blood on the governor's door.

Jones: All that, yeah, all the advocates down there, fighting for that.

Paul: What about...I remember the creation of the Human Rights Department.

Jones: Yeah, the Human Rights Department. When Thompson became governor, he said he going to make human rights, bring it up to cabinet level status. But that was a split amongst the blacks for that. Corneal Davis was the father of the Fair Employment Practice Commission.

Williams: The FEPC.

Jones: Right. And the FEPC, [Corneal] explained to us that the bill, when he originally passed it, wasn't as strong as he wanted it to be. But he knew, once he got the law on the books, he could work toward amending it every year. That's what he did, see. Sometime in the process you cannot always get the full meal the first time, and you take a sandwich. So he took a sandwich. If you continue to get enough sandwich, you have a—

Williams: You get the whole piece.

Jones: And so, that's what he did with the Fair Employment Practice Commission. It, in turn, had the power. It had initiatory powers and was independent of the Office of the Governor and the legislature and so forth. Being in government or in the private sector, it could bring discrimination charges. They could do all those things. So, in making the Human Rights Department, it took away all those powers. The director of the Department of Human Rights is a gubernatorial appointment.

So, discrimination within state government, you cannot have a director going against the governor or even discrimination within the private sector. Say this major, big corporation is good friends with the chief executive of the state, you're not going to get anything accomplished.

Williams: This department went beyond state government.

Jones: Oh yeah, human rights. But what I'm saying is that when the Fair Employment Practice Commission, FEPC, it could bring those charges on its own, independent. A lot of folks didn't like that. So, making a cabinet department actually hurt more than it helped. It give the illusion that you have a big office cabinet staff, but that director's not going against the governor or any other government department heads. You understand that? That's on the political side.

So, back then you had the Urban League and everybody; Harold Washington sponsored...So we split on the issue. That was a big split and a big fight over making that thing a cabinet position. Those who didn't understand the depths of it were on the wrong side. And right now they end up being a cabinet office. I called it a toothless tiger. It doesn't really have any power. It's got status as a cabinet but—

- Paul: Now, I'm just curious, Senator. How many years were you in the House?
- Jones: I spent ten years in the House. After ten years in the House, I became the assistant majority leader, and after ten years, I left and ran for the Senate.
- Paul: Now when did you win, and what prompted your move to the Senate? Was it redistricting, or what happened?
- Jones: Redistricting in 1982, and it created a new Senate seat. So I decided to run for the Senate and leave the House.
- Paul: So that was the focus. So that was the Senate seat that they created at the time.
- Jones: Right.
- Paul: That was basically... When they created it, I guess you had the far south side, Morgan Park. Did you go out in the south suburbs?
- Jones: Yeah, I won the south suburbs. I've always ran in the south suburbs. A new senate seat, and so I left the House and ran for the Senate.
- Paul: When you went to the Senate, who was the—
- Jones: Phil Rock was president of the Senate, when I got there. And he had Charlie Chew was there. You had—Harold Washington was gone—Dick Neuhaus, Earlene Collins, Kenny Hall.
- Paul: What was some of your impression of some, even like some of the ones like... I remember back then the power of the Senate Approp [Appropriations Committee], was going on there. You had like Howie Carroll.
- Jones: Howie Carroll was the chairman of the Approp Committee. I knew that the decisions, at that point, were not made within the Appropriation Committee. It made at a higher level. Yeah, the committee does all the hearings and everything, but things that began to evolve and shifted upward to, more to less, toward the presidency and the Speaker of the House.
- Williams: Senate president, okay.
- Jones: And they would make decisions on the Appropriations. I didn't like sitting on Appropriation Committee, because the decision really was not made there. And so, it was a great experience. I became chairman of the Insurance, Pensions and License Activity Committee.

In that process, I was chairman of the Insurance Committee in the House, redlining and discrimination in the insurance business. I always fought against that, to open up, break up that redlining by insurance companies. You have to live in a certain zip code, your insurance premiums are higher and all of this stuff.

And redlining, as relates to... They said, "We don't redline." But they were redlining, because they would not give agents agency contracts. So I forced them to give more blacks agency contracts, which, in turn, you got State Farm, black agents now. And they, in turn, can offer the product to their constituencies. But they didn't give you agency contract, and no office is located in the community. That's a form of redlining.

I became chairman of the Insurance Pensions and License Committee in the Senate. So all license, occupation, nurses or doctors, architects, engineers, I handled all of that, their licensure. Each profession has their own boards, realtors... I give it the black organizations, and get one of their members to sit on those boards. I did it with the nurses; I did it with the realtors and just opened the process to give more representation.

All the pension folks, be it state or local pensions, they hire money managers to manage the pensions. Again, there's a lot of discrimination in that area, because they wouldn't hire black money managers. So, I even passed legislation to open that process up and make them hire black money managers.

Williams: Even today, we don't have that many black money managers.

Jones: But Illinois has become the model of the nation. It's the model of the nation, because of the work I did in shedding light, opened that process up, where minority money managers can have access to managing state and local pension dollars.

Paul: Now, back then, as chairman of the Insurance Committee, you were known as a pretty powerful chairman back then—

Jones: Yes.

Paul: ...as chairman of pension and things. How did you use of that committee to help you to vote and establish relationships with downstater's, businesses. It seemed that, from chairmanship, you managed to—how would I say? You earlier talked about how you didn't allow yourself to get branded with welfare issues and other stuff. But it seemed like, out of that chairmanship, you kind of grew it in stature because, at the time, there were a number of people—like you say, Howie Carroll, Billy Marovitz—there were some other prominent Democrats. But, you managed it in a time when not many African-Americans actually were achieving that kind of status, in terms of both raising money and doing things that were necessary to move up in leadership. It seems as if, from that committee, itself, you seemed to take it to a different, higher level. You seem to utilize it. Could you just expound a little bit on that.

Jones: Well, one of the things is that when I was dealing with insurance, that impacted all the people of the State of Illinois, which involved the legislators from their respective regions, dealing with license activities, all the occupations and

professions, all across the entire state. So I established those relationships with them. They all had to come to me to get things done.

But knowing the process, what happened was this is that, even though the rules have changed, I changed them myself. By that time, lawmakers could amend bills; they could do those things. So I always had a number of what you call vehicle bills, which caused other legislators to have to come to me to look for an amendment on a bill or want to use a bill. That's how I was able to do all those things.

And with that committee handling all the pensions, individuals would constantly be coming to me. They want something in this pension bill; they want this in a pension bill. And through the regulatory process for all the professions, they would all have to come to me to get certain items in various bills.

And the Medical Practice Act, which we operate under today, was one of my chief, major piece of legislation. Yeah, the current medical practice. The guy writes a story about that. That's why I was so keen, or very sensitive, to the reporting of news. I understand how we, as African-Americans, were written out of history. We were all about accomplishments and things that we did in the past to help build this nation, that wasn't even written about.

I recall the Medical Practice Act of 1987. In the House, you had Al Ronan. And I handled this stuff in the Senate. Once we got all parties to agree, so a bill it started in the House. And this reporter writes about this, "Al Ronan say he's not taking any amendments, because he promised all the party there would be no amendment and kept the bill clean and it passed out of the House." He said, "A similar thing happened in the Senate, with different results." He said, "The Medical Practice Act ended up being put on a shell bill³. And the shell bill was called at the last minute, when all the proponents and opponents had left the room. It was amended onto the shell bill and it passed out, with very little debate. And it ended up being the Medical Practice Act." And he said, "A long practitioner of the legislative process said, 'That was the slickest use he ever seen of a shell bill in all his history.'"

But, he writes this story. In the House, he mentioned the sponsor. In the Senate, he would not mention the sponsor, who sponsored the amendment; who sponsored the shell bill; who chaired the committee? Never mentioned a name.

Paul: Right. He didn't want to give you credit for being politically astute.

Jones: Yeah. That's what happens. And so, during the course of my tenure in Springfield, I have a moreover appreciation for Ralph Ellison, the invisible man, you know. I understand the depths of where he come from. I passed legislation to

³ A legislative bill, typically, with no substantive provisions, that is introduced for purposes of later being amended to include the actual legislative proposals advanced by the introducer. (https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=define+a+%22shell+bill%22&spf=1497553948445)

create, to require, the school districts in Chicago teach a unit of history for the contributions African-Americans and women made to building this society.

When I had the bill up in the Senate, Senator [Arthur] Berman came to me, and he said, “Would you mind accepting an amendment that would include the teaching of the Holocaust?” I said, “No, I have no problem with that. I’ll do that.” So we amended my Bill to require the teaching of the past. I recall coming back to Chicago. I ran in to some militant blacks. They were death on that piece about. “Why you got to have the Jews in here and all this?”

I explained to them. I said, “What happened in Germany happened in modern times, and what happened in Germany, happened with the sanction of the German government, because Hitler had taken over the government.” And I said, “You better learn what happened there, because what happened there can happen to you.” If you are ignorant of history, you’re doomed to repeat it, as Frederick Douglass said. I said, “I can look across the street, and I can’t tell you whether that’s a Swede, a Finn or not. But I can look across the street and tell whether you’re black,” So I say.

Those are things that you learn, that you walk through life. But it’s a rewarding experience, really. And you mentioned about the power... See, when I became chairman of that committee, I did not want a position as assistant leader. I felt that chairmanship was more powerful than being an assistant leader. I kept that, rather than trying to get into a leadership role.

Williams: Talk about your leadership. Talk about how you kind of rose to the leader, as the Senate minority leader and then ascended to the presidency.

Jones: Here’s what happened. When I chaired the committee, I always had a great knowledge about how to raise funds. I always had the ability to raise money, and most politicians must raise money for the election. So I could do that.

When Phil Rock announced he was not running again—which meant that the Democrat leadership in the Senate would be open for a new leader—it was assumed that a lot of his, Phil Rock’s, leadership team, one of them would ascend to that role. Number one, it would have been Howie Carroll, who ran the Appropriation Committee for years, a very knowledgeable person, Senator Vince Demuzio from down in southern Illinois, Dick Luft, who was part of the click, more or less, oh boy. It was assumed that it would come from that grouping. Earlene Collins thought she could possibly be, as a black. I knew I had a reasonable chance, as well, even though I was not part of the leadership team.

So, when we started to move toward getting the leader, I knew if I could solidify the blacks, I had a good chance. And I recall a article, written in the *Chicago Tribune* by Rick Pearson. He said, “Senator Jones does not have a chance to become the leader, because the blacks were split.” It **was** split, between

myself and Earlene Collins. You had Alice Palmer, maybe. I think Miguel del Valle was without a caucus then. They were with Earlene Collins.

I knew, if I could solidify the blacks, I had a good chance. But what that reporter did not write was, so were the whites split. They were split in three distinct groups. You had the downstaters, some downstaters. The downstaters was split; it was ten downstate. They was split between Vince Demuzio and Dick Luft. He (Luft) had Howie Carroll with his little faction of white ethnics from Chicago. I knew, if I could solidify the blacks, I had a chance of winning. One thing is important in this business, you got to know the relationships and what impacting people.

The downstaters was split for one reason. If you recall, Vince Demuzio was the state party chair. And Dick Luft, Senator Luft, was the state central committeeman. So, when the chairmanship was up, Luft went with Mike Madigan against Vince Demuzio and knocked Vince Demuzio out of the chairmanship. So, I knew those two groups would not come together.

And then you had the Chicago faction. So you got three distinct groups, with the blacks, [it] made four. I knew, if each of the groups... The whites had five in their group. I knew, if I could solidify the blacks, I got a chance. So, once I got Earlene to realize that she could not possibly be, and I unified the blacks and Hispanics, all I need was one of the group of whites.

I made one telephone call; I called Vince Demuzio. And Vince Demuzio joined with me, which gave me the majority of the caucus to elect me the minority leader. Even though Vince and I were close, we were friends, I know why Vince, he supported me, which meant that he would still be a leader. I'll look out for him. And the other two groups, left out in the cold. That's how I become the leader.

Vince was smart enough to recognize that, if he could join with me, he would still be in, because, if one of the other five groups that went with me, he would have been out. So he made his move wisely, and that's how I became the minority leader. I built on that.

And when they're redistricting, in the year 2000, and we drew a map that would allow us to elect more Democrats, that's how I become president.



Emil Jones, Illinois Senate President.

But some time the media is so misleading, in that, the politics of underestimation. For that guy to write that story, as though I had... He didn't say that about Dick Luft, Demuzio or Howie Carroll, because they were split. But he felt I could not win because the blacks were split.

Williams: Um-hmm, so you're used to this.

Jones: Yeah, but that's how it all came in to being.

Williams: Being minimized by the media.

Jones: Yeah, they do it deliberately, try to control folks way of thinking. But you have to be sophisticated enough to see through all of that. But relationships are so important. Obviously, I established relationships with enough folks that enabled me to ascend to the top.

Even after I became a leader, you always had those in the caucus who still felt they should be... You used to read, talk about, individuals going to take control; they going lock me out. That's all expected, but I learned that, if you are kind to folks and do what you suppose to do, you never have to worry about individual pulling the coup. You heard all of that, in that he's having a coup. Even when I elected majority, [you heard], "Jones cannot be president because he's got members of the caucus don't like him."

See, what they didn't realize is that I was not going to put myself in a position that I would just have the bare minimum of thirty votes. I went out and elected me more than thirty. I think I elected me thirty-two, so that no one individual could hold out or hold up my being elected president.

Williams: What a coup. I think we're going to call it quits today and then pick up, probably, next what?...a couple of weeks or so?

Jones: Okay.

(end of interview #2)

Interview with Emil Jones

IS-A-L-2008-105

Interview # 3: January 6, 2009

Interviewer: Dr. Erma Brooks-Williams, Volunteer – ALPL Oral History Program

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Williams: The last time we talked about how you ascended to leadership in Springfield and the coalition that you kind of developed while you were in Springfield and the split that occurred among the downstaters.

Jones: Well, okay. How I ascended was, back then there were four distinct groups. One was the black and Hispanic group. The downstate was split into two groups of five each. Then you had the group out of Chicago. At one point, the blacks were divided too. But I unified the blacks we have [during] my candidacy, and I needed only one of the other groups. I had nine votes; I needed fourteen. So, I was able to get the five in one of the downstate caucus, because those two groups would never come together.

One group was headed by Vince Demuzio. Another group was headed by Dick Luft. Now, Dick Luft... At one point in time, Vince Demuzio was the state Democratic Party chairman. Dick Luft voted against his reelection and voted for the person that Speaker Madigan wanted to put in, which was Gary Lapaille. So, Demuzio was strongly against him being Dick Luft's appointment.

So, all I needed was one of the three groups; all I needed was one of them. And I was able to get the group that Demuzio had, which gave me the five additional votes I needed to become the minority leader. That's how I basically ascended into the leadership role for the Senate Democrats.

Williams: Now, wasn't Earlene Collins—

Jones: Yeah, Earlene Collins had her name out there as a possible leader, but she could get only maybe three or four of the blacks to support her. She saw she didn't have the votes, so she decided for us to be unified, and she supported my candidacy.

Williams: Who were some of the blacks who supported Earlene Collins, initially?

Jones: Well, she had herself. You had Ellis Palmer, and we had two Hispanics, Devalia(??) and Chuy [Jesus] Garcia. That what she had in her group.

Williams: Now, at that time, who were some of the members who supported you specifically?

Jones: I had Senator Hinden(?). I had Senator [Donne] Trotter. What other senators was there at the time? Hinden, Trotter—

Williams: Was Senator [William] Shaw—

Jones: Senator Shaw. There's one other.

Williams: Talk about your relationship with Senator Shaw. Particularly talk about how the Shaw brothers [William and Robert] kind of transitioned from their leadership on the west side to the south side of Chicago, in terms of becoming a powerhouse.

Jones: Well, see the Shaw brothers were very active on the west side politics. And they were pro-blacks. They constantly fought against the establishment on the west side, which brought a lot of heat on them. They were for black representation, black folks represented. They had the white political ward bosses on the west side. They had the white precinct captains. So they wanted to see a change in, both of those communities mostly black, and they felt we should have black representation.

Williams: In the south suburbs?

Jones: No, no, on the west side of Chicago. He know Alderman Ben Lewis, from the 24th Ward, became alderman over there. They [the Shaw brothers] were very active and involved in that. Then, eventually, he got assassinated. They killed him.

Soon thereafter, the Shaw brothers left and came to the south side. But they have always been for empowering the black community. That's how we became very close and working together.

So Shaw and I, we worked together in the 21st Ward many years ago, when he came to the south side. And then eventually, he got elected State Representative after redistricting in 1982.

Williams: Now, you were saying that you worked closely with the Shaw brothers. What were some of the prominent issues that you recall working on with the Shaw brothers?

Jones: See, Shaw and I, when he got elected, we collaborated together, and we passed a bill into law that would require the teaching a unit of history that blacks and women made to the society. He and I collaborated together. We got that passed into law. Rather than have a once a year black history month, we felt it should be incorporated in the curriculum on a year-round basis.

Williams: That's probably why—what's the name, Richardson—that videotape that she did on black lawmakers... So that's probably the rationale, in terms of why that was done?

Jones: Right. That was part of the reason, because I felt that the contributions that black lawmakers made to this state, it wasn't actually recorded. So that's how Julie Ann Richardson came to play. I was looking for a vehicle to prominently show the contributions that African-Americans made to the State of Illinois, and I ran in to Julie Ann Richardson. She said she can do it. So, she soon began to interview current, sitting legislators, as well as those who had left the General Assembly. That's how that came into being.

Williams: Which is a significant contribution, in terms of making certain that our history passes on and remains alive.

Jones: That's right; that was very important. So, we worked on many good things. He was in the House and I was in the Senate. Even the internship program, Shaw handled it in the House, and I handled it in the Senate. That's how the current internship program came into being.

Williams: And speaking of the internship program, because the funding is flat. How would you envision making that program grow?

Jones: Maybe the grow would mean that the university, through the Board of Higher Education, would have to—when they do those budgets—request additional funding. They have to request additional funding. I know you said it's flat. They're only flat because the request hasn't come in to the Board of Higher Education.

Williams: In fact, I'm working with Donne Trotter to see that we can get more slots, because we're finding that students, as you said, they are staying in school. And that's a great benefit to them, in terms of exposing them to careers that they normally wouldn't have the opportunity to do so, especially like working in Springfield, because a lot our kids just don't get those opportunities.

Jones: See, when the budget is submitted, the increase should be submitted in there. Then, sit down with the Board of Higher Education and make sure that it's part of the budget, increased as necessary.

Williams: Like I said, I'm working on that right now. In talking about other kinds of relationships that you've had and have with other wards in the city, what has been your relationship with the 19th Ward?

Jones: Well, the 19th Ward, when I originally got elected, I ran in the 19th Ward, all the 19th Ward. So, I had that political relationship for a number of years. But prior to my even being elected to public office, the 19th Ward used to cover the community I grew up in, Morgan Park.

Williams: You mean it went all the way, what, east?

Jones: East, yes. See my father was involved in the 19th Ward politics, going back many years. So I've always had that relationship. Most of the elected officials that came out of the 19th Ward, I knew them, and I've always had the relationship with them.

Williams: Oh, the 19th, like the Sheehans [Michael and Timothy] and [Thomas] Hynes and [George] Joyce.

Jones: Long before they even came about, I had relationships. [Thomas F.] Fitzpatrick was the Alderman at one time. One time, you had [John J.] Duffy, who was the Cook County Board president. It had a long, long history. Many of the city department heads and so forth came out of the 19th Ward. So, it was a powerhouse many, many years ago, long before Tom Hynes and George came along.

Williams: Talk about your relationship with Wilson Frost. Now, he wasn't part of the 19th Ward.

Jones: No, he was part of the old 21st Ward and the 34th Ward. After redistricting to make the wards for equal representation, they created the new 34th Ward out there. He was the alderman and committeeman, and I was his administrative assistant. He became chairman of the Finance Committee. When the late Richard J. Daley died, he was City Council pro tem. (Unintelligible name) felt that he should be the mayor, but there was nothing statutorily set forth to say who would secede, in the event of death. So, we eventually changed that in the legislature. He was the insider more or less.

Williams: And talk about your relationship with the late Mayor Daley.

Jones: The late Mayor Daley was also chairman of the Cook County Democrat Party, and the Cook County Democrat Party is what ran... Most of the ward committeemen belonged to the Cook County Democrat organization. And he was the one that was calling most of the shots and (unintelligible, static) to elected officials.

But see, we built our own organization out there, Wilson Frost and myself. It was not what you call a hand-me-down type of organization. We built it

ourselves, through getting people involved and so forth and everything like that. But Richard J. Daley was the boss. He was the boss, but again, we still had our independence, because we developed our own power base; it was not given to us.

Williams: And when you say, we, you mentioned Wilson Frost. Who were some of the other individuals who were part of that “we”?

Jones: Gene Barnes was a part of that and the late Sam Vaughn, who became a county commissioner, he was part of that. That’s how we built it up over the years. We had a power base from which we could get many things accomplished.

Williams: What was your relationship with like the late Mayor [Jane] Byrne, [Michael] Bilandic—

Jones: I knew them, but I didn’t interact with them as much. When I say interact with them, was that they were the mayor; I was in the legislature. So, we all knew each other. But I was not one who had to interact with them directly.

Williams: Now, who were some of the folks, in term of Africa-Americans or blacks, who had to interact with them?

Jones: Right, usually your local folks, your local alderman, committeemen’s, they are the ones who were involved. Wilson Frost, Benny Stewart, most of your black alderman, committeemen had to interact with them, because that was the mayor of the city at the time.

Williams: But they didn’t really interact with legislators, huh?

Jones: No, not directly, as the local alderman did. But the mayor had his representatives in the legislature, who spoke for the city on issues that impacted the city. He had his leadership, and usually the leaders being in the House or the Senate were the ones who would interact more with the mayor of the City of Chicago.

Williams: And has that changed any?

Jones: It has changed somewhat, because at that time, most of the state reps and senators out of Chicago were elected through the ward organizations. But that has changed. Most of them now are not elected through ward organizations. Therefore, the clout that the mayor had over them doesn’t exist like it did thirty years ago.

Williams: Oh, that’s interesting, because some of the local alderman still say that they are responsible for legislators.

Jones: Well, yeah. Some of the local alderman, if they helped individuals elected to office, then they have some allegiance there, but not like it was in the past. So many of the local state reps and state senators are elected within their own right

now, outside the ward organization, even though some have an affiliation with these organizations.

Williams: Right, probably they have their separate organizations now. You served in the General Assembly when Harold Washington was a member?

Jones: Yeah, Harold Washington was there when I first got to Springfield in 1973. He had been there for several years. Harold was a great, great debater. And he loved to read a lot, so when we would have meetings, Harold Washington was in the forefront on various issues. And he was a great floor debater, so we relied on Harold Washington, because he was very thorough in his works, whereas he could easily present the issues to the floor and argue them for us and everything. He'd go to reading. It was a good working relationship.

Williams: Yes, it sounds familiar, doesn't it, in terms of Barack [Obama]. He similarly, didn't get engaged with a lot of the social elements in Springfield, from what I understand. He was kind of off to himself and read and studied. He sounds similar to Harold Washington, and having the law degree and all.

Jones: It was quite interesting back then, during that period of time. People talk about Harold Washington; Harold Washington came out [of], I think, was it the 20th or 3rd Ward, Democrat organization. And Daffel(?), he was in...No, he was not.

Williams: He was not independent. (laughs)

Jones: He came out of one of those organizations. When he ran for the Senate, he barely won that Senate seat. Had it not been for the 20th Ward Democrat organization, headed by [Cecil A.] Partee, Harold Washington would not have won.

Williams: I had a chance to talk with the late Margaret Smith, before she passed. She talked about how Harold Washington was really a part of the Democratic organization; he was not an independent.

Jones: That's right. It was only years later, after he went to Congress and come back, that he had the separation. But he was a organizational guy. Like most legislators coming out of Chicago, they were tied to the ward organization. It was the Ward organization that helped them get elected. They all came out. Ray Ewell came out of the 17th Ward organization. One [that] had a little more independence than most of them was Louie Caldwell, who came out of the Hyde Park, south shore area.

Williams: And talk about your relationships with both Louie Caldwell, as well as Ray Ewell. How did they influence you? What was your working relationship with them?

Jones: Well, Ray Ewell was very good at giving you good advice. It was he who told me, don't let those leadership, because you're black, put you on the welfare committees. And get to know legislators from downstate, and pick your seat with

someone downstate. You can have influence over that individual, and that individual can help you.

That's what I basically did, and I never served on one of those welfare committees. But I got to know the downstate legislators. They make you more effective in the body, see. Instead of just hanging, sitting next to somebody from Chicago, like yourself, you not going to learn anything.

Williams: No, you don't learn about their issues and what makes them tick or what have you. Now, was Ray Ewell an intricate part of the black caucus, in term of shaping the black caucus.

Jones: Yeah, I believe Ray Ewell was the one who helped organize the first black caucus. Yes, he was definitely involved, even though he came out of a ward organization.

Williams: Did you say the 17th?

Jones: 17th Ward. That was Shannon, at the time. Even though he came out of the organization, but he still had enough foresight and forethought that we as a group should come together. So that's what happened.

And Louie Caldwell was from the more independent Hyde Park community.

Williams: In the south shore?

Jones: In the south shore. So, he was more independent. I believe he's the one that talked with Harold Washington, and Harold Washington changed a lot of his views on things. But we all had a good working relationship.

Williams: Talk about some of your accomplishments and things that you're proud of, as an outgoing member of the Illinois General Assembly.

Jones: Well, there were a few great accomplishments for our legislation. My Title I legislation, to require the schools to...for poor students, that we give additional money in the budget for it to require them to spend that money on the students who generate the money. That was quite an accomplishment.

Another accomplishment was to actually get the resources of state government back to your community. That is the capital money spent for new construction and buildings, what I've done for the Dusable Museum; Little Black Pearl⁴; Muntu Dance Theatre; the Beverly Arts Center; Little League building; the Mt. Vernon Park; Chicago State University, all the new construction there; the Harris Dance Theater in Millennium Park; Fernwood Park, a brand new

⁴ A cultural arts center that provides opportunities in art, culture and entrepreneurship to youth, adults and families across Chicago.

swimming pool, state of the art. I'm proud of the fact that I was able to get those resources back to our community, so it could make the quality of life better for the people that live there.

Williams: Now, with you moving on and transitioning on, how will those initiatives and projects be sustained? What's your advice?

Jones: Those who are there, they got to pick up the mantle and begin to lead for issues like that, in the future.

Williams: Talk about some of your most painful experiences in Springfield, during your political career.

Jones: There have been some painful experiences. I thought for a long time I wanted to run for Congress and did run twice and not successful. But usually, as it has been said in the past, one door closes and another one always open up. But you must have the vision to see the doors opening up. So I never dwelled on the unfortunate situations. I just took it as a grain of salt and moved on to the next project. For you to sit there and dwell on it, then you have nothing accomplished, in life as well. I just moved on.

Williams: So, that's one experience. Any others, in terms of painful experiences that you—

Jones: Not that I can recall, but I try not to dwell on it.

Williams: You're a very positive person.

Jones: There have been times when things didn't go my way. I've lost legislation, but I always take my loss as a grain of salt. It's a learning experience. There is more than one way to skin a cat. I always use that as a means for which I could improve and become successful. You asked the question, and I can't think of any. I never spent that much time on being worried about or disappointed in something that I did not achieve.

Williams: And talk about some of your most exhilarating moments.

Jones: It was great, really, truly an exhilarating feeling to be in position to help someone that is talented as Barack Obama. And our relationship goes back, long before he became a public official. To meet a person who is genuine and sincere and impressive, to have the opportunity to work and help shape their career, as well.

Williams: Yes, and now this country.

Jones: Yeah, now see, he was a very idealistic young man when I first met him. I had to teach him the pragmatic views and trying to be successful and get things done.

Williams: Moving on to the present moment, I don't know if you want to comment or give your thoughts on the impeachment process and this whole situation with Roland Burris, as we sit here.

Jones: It's a situation that, for lawmakers, is a very difficult situation they find themselves in. Any articles of impeachment must generate and come from the House. The Senate sits as the judge and the jury. You have a lynch mob atmosphere here, as relates to the governor [Rod Blagojevich]. So more than likely, the House will vote articles of impeachment. They'll do so, simply because the average citizen does not understand what (unintelligible, static on the recording). Even though the governor has been arrested, where he hasn't been indicted for any charges, but just the allegations alone, that put the legislators in a position, how do we vote on impeachment? You have to be very careful, simply because they do not have all the facts, and they can't get the facts, because you have a criminal investigation going on. But, they have to be very careful. Anything they do now sets precedent for the future.

Williams: I guess, given that Hispanics and blacks will be the majority by 2042, and I guess the concern that some have is that it basically will set a precedent, whereby it will be easier to get rid of blacks and Hispanics when they eventually gain power.

Jones: Yes. They have to be very careful. It cannot be for any frivolous act or thing of that nature, because what they do today can happen to someone else in the future. Now, we do have due process that we must adhere to. And our system of justice in this country is not the presumption of guilt, but the presumption of innocence. But for the lawmakers, in eyes of the public, he's guilty.

Williams: I'm not certain that everyone feels that way.

Jones: Yeah, but this is what they are faced with.

Williams: Like I said, because you're talking about taking away somebody's rights, as you said, before they are convicted. And that's the whole idea. Is there anything else you want to add?

Jones: So the situation, as relates to Roland Burris, Roland Burris had an exemplary career as a comptroller and attorney general for the State of Illinois. He has impeccable credentials, and he's done nothing wrong. Just because the governor—who had the power to do the appointment—just because the governor is under a cloud, does not mean that he still does...He still has that power. So, they really should have seated him [Burris]. There's no reason to (static drowns out speech) because the seat (static drowns out), not what someone else did, but where do you stand? And Burris hasn't done anything wrong, other than accept the appointment.

Williams: I guess, I'm just curious how other states are viewing Illinois, with respect to...Because on the U.S. Constitution, from what I understand, the governor has a right to appoint someone to fill the vacancy. Well, in the case of Caroline

Kennedy...And I'm just curious as to whether what has happened here in Illinois will set a precedent for other states and take that right from the governor, because wouldn't the Constitution have to be changed?

Jones: Yes.

Williams: I don't know if you want to comment on this. What type of leadership style do you think your successor—

Jones: Well, a successor must always think of a caucus as a group. And, the Senate Democrat Caucus is a very diverse group of individuals. You got upstate, downstate; you got blacks; you got Hispanics; you got conservative; you got liberal, but the leadership is one who must bring all those forces together to get it to work as one. And that's a difficult (static drowns out speech).

Williams: So, a big challenge.

Jones: It is a challenge, which will require him to be at constant, constant meetings with the various factions in that caucus.

Williams: So, in closing, where does Emil Jones go? What's your—

Jones: I will still be involved politically, but I will also still be involved in consulting, and bill work. I'll be involved, as far as the empowerment of people. So, I will still be involved. Just because I'm leaving the Senate does not mean that I won't be around. I intend to be around.

Williams: So, we all know you will be around. Is there anything else?

Jones: That's it. It has been a wonderful career. Springfield, as I often said, is a great, great university. You learn so much there. All you have to do is avail yourself, and you will learn a whole lot. I've learned all about the State of Illinois and all about the members. A leader must know each of his members so thoroughly that he know before they act on what they'll do in a given situation. He must know that.

Williams: I really want to thank you.

(end of interview #3)