

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with James Nowlan

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Illinois Statecraft – General Interest* Oral History project

Interview # IS-A-L-2020-024

James (Jim) Nowlan, a former state representative who spent the bulk of his career as an academic and journalist writing about Illinois state politics, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft – General Interest* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Mar 26, Apr 3, Apr 10, Apr 16 & Apr 20, 2020

Location: All sessions were done telephonically during the coronavirus lockdown, with Nowlan in his Toulon, Illinois residence and DePue at his residence in Springfield.

Interview Format: Digital audio

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

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

Transcript being  
processed

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Time: 2:24 + 2:10 + 2:15 + 2:02 + 2:01 / 2.4 + 2.17 + 2.25  
+ 2.03 + 2.02 = 10.87 hrs

Session 1: Early life and years in the Illinois legislature from 1969-1973

Session 2: Thompson administration, Percy and John Anderson campaigns and academic career

Session 3: Taxpayer Federation and Institute of Govt. and Public Affairs years

Session 4: Nowlan's books and discussion on pensions, corruption & redistricting

Session 5: Illinois's economic decline, demographic and journalistic changes

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on (2/11/2021).

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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## Abstract

### James Nowlan, *Illinois Statecraft*, IS-A-L-2020-024

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** James (Jim) Nowlan was born on March 26, 1941 in Kewanee, Illinois and grew up in tiny Toulon, Illinois, a farming community north of Peoria where his father ran the local newspaper. He earned a B.A. degree from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign in 1963, and an M.A. degree in 1965, also from UIUC. After a brief tour as an officer in the U.S. Army, Jim returned to Illinois and ran for the Illinois House unsuccessfully in 1966. He was successful in 1968 and served in the IL House until January 1973. After teaching political science for several years at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, he worked on the Jim Thompson gubernatorial campaign in 1976, and stayed on with the Thompson administration as a special assistant for education. Nowlan also helped U.S. Senator Charles Percy's reelection campaign in 1978, then served as executive director for Congressman John Anderson's unsuccessful bid for president as a moderate Republican. From 1980 to 1985 he returned to academia, serving as the Director of Graduate Programs in Public Administration at UIUC. From 1986-1991 he taught political science once again at Knox College, and followed this with four years as president for the Taxpayer's Federation of Illinois. From 1995-2013 he was Senior Fellow at the U. of I. Institute of Government and Public Affairs. In 1999 he moved back to Toulon and began publishing the *Stark County News*, the same weekly newspaper his father had published years before. Nowlan has traveled extensively and has taught Chinese students on government and politics both while teaching at UIUC, as well as in China itself.

During the course of the interview, Nowlan addressed many of the issues that have been a feature of the state's politics for the last fifty-five years. Those topics include the cumulative voting system and the cutback amendment, the state's growing pension crisis, budget fights and deficits, and the pervasive existence of corruption in Illinois. He also addressed demographic and economic changes the state has experienced in the last several decades, the changing nature of journalism in Illinois as well as how redistricting has been implemented in the state, and the role its courts have played in blocking citizen initiative petitions. Finally, he reflected on his experiences teaching Chinese students, both Communist party members as well as non-members, about American style politics and democracy

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Illinois politics, University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs; Illinois's pension crisis; political corruption in Illinois; cumulative voting system; Cutback Amendment of 1980; Toulon, Illinois; *Stark County News*; Senator Charles Percy; John Anderson for president campaign; teaching Chinese students; Taxpayer's Federation of Illinois

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

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