

## Interview with Ben Kiningham

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Interviewer: Chris Reynolds

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Reynolds: My name is Chris Reynolds and I am interviewing Ben Kiningham today. This is an oral history interview of the Abraham Presidential Library and Museum Statecraft Program. We're going to talk to Ben a little bit about his biographical information today and then concentrate on Governor Walker's term, which was the first Governor that Ben covered from the statehouse here in Springfield.

Kiningham: Actually, it was the second.

Reynolds: Second? You actually covered Ogilvie for a while?

Kiningham: That's why I'm on the panel.

Reynolds: Okay. Good deal. So let's just get started here. We want to try to do the biographical stuff first.

Kiningham: Alright.

Reynolds: Could tell just a little bit about your family and your parents and where you are from and all that kind of information.

Kiningham: I was born in Fort Riley, Kansas, during World War II. Dad went to Japan after peace was reached with Japan and was one of the Occupational Forces. He was an officer and assorted stuff, and my mom brought me back to Illinois.

Her home was in Ivesdale. My dad was from Danville and when he came back out of the military he joined the Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association; it wasn't long until he was the Executive Director of that organization in Springfield. He's Ben D. Kiningham, Jr.. I'm Benny Kiningham who grew into Ben D. Kiningham, the Third. I went to school in Springfield, Springfield High School, graduate of 1960. Simply, in high school I learned photography. My dad was a good hobby photographer.

I set type at the Lung Association,(today it's called the American Lung Association) and Respiratory Disease Association. I learned to set type at Springfield High School. I went to California Job Case so I set type one summer, and I did photography with the Lung Association one summer. My cousin, Roger Curry, a year older than me, went to Cathedral Grade School and worked at WTAX as an engineer. We were all ham radio operators. I got my license as a freshman at Springfield High School in 1956 and learned electronics and loved electronics and got to know some of the chief engineers at WICS-TV which was in downtown Springfield at that time and learned that electronics was fun. When I went to SIU in Carbondale, Southern Illinois University, I wanted to be an engineer, but they didn't offer that in the curriculum. So I minored in Industrial Education Electronics and kind of another minor for a bachelor's degree and a major in Radio-Television.

Reynolds: And you went down to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale?

Kiningham: That's correct. While I was there, my freshman year I was the continuity director for WSIU, 91.9, the educational station, and by the time I was a Sophomore, I worked up to the student general manager who scheduled students and did that kind of stuff. And remotes; I did get to do remotes. I worked with the PA system. The unique thing while I was there is, I worked at WINI one summer and then they wanted me to do sales and I did on-the-air work on weekends. I wanted to do engineering and on-the-air work and so WRAJ in Anna-Jonesboro, south of Carbondale, offered me more money.

Reynolds: Now was this after you finished school, or during the time you were going to school?

Kiningham: No. This was all in the four years of SIU. I want to explain that when I was there, there was a presidential campaign, and I believe it was Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kennedy came to the campus and ...

Reynolds: 1960.

Kiningham: ...made campaign speeches. When I was at WRAJ, Mr. Kennedy was shot and killed in Dallas, Texas.

Reynolds: You were in college at this point, but were working.

Kiningham: I'm still in college, but I'm also an afternoon disc jockey, evening news reporter for WRAJ in Anna-Jonesboro, Illinois. The reason for sharing this is, I drove to Carbondale; they closed the university for the day. I went down to my job earlier in Anna-Jonesboro and Don Mitchell, the General Manager, was on the phone with the Dallas Police Department. When the captain came out after interviewing Lee Harvey Oswald, he shared the name with Don Mitchell and I was the second person in North America to find out who they had arrested. Don fed it to the United Press International and it went world wide.

Reynolds: Did you go on the air after that?

Kiningham: I, of course, did the evening news shift, but Don Mitchell wrote the stories, fed UPI (United Press International) and got credit for releasing the name, Lee Harvey Oswald. Because they had just got direct distance dialing in Anna-Jonesboro, southern Illinois, the direct distance dialed the police station, held the phone until the captain came out before the Secret Service tied everything down, and so he has credit for releasing Lee Harvey Oswald's name to the world. That's the first ingredient of news in my career. When I graduated I went in to the Air Force for a year, training in electronics, airborne navigation electronics, and came back and serviced F-84 jets at Springfield's Capitol Airport, and got a job at WTAX Radio under Bill Miller. Bill Miller worked covering state government news as well as local news and delegated a lot of the City Council and school boards to me initially in '66.

Reynolds: You were on the news track the whole time? In other words, did you spin records, did you do the disc jockey thing?

Kiningham: Oh, back in the college days. But when I went to work at WTAX on January 24, 1966, it was news and news only.

Reynolds: This is after you got out of military.

Kiningham: Except back in those days you worked a six-day work week and so every Sunday morning I did sign-on news and then played music to noon. So yes, I did a disc jockey trek of good music. Everything from Glenn Miller to you name it. Back in those days we didn't do rock and roll. But I will tell you that a lot of people listened to the music on Sundays because we didn't do church services. And they also got the news. I found out later that I would go to the police department, the county sheriff's office and the hospitals when I was doing local news and the morning sign-ons on Sunday. One of my competitors would listen to my 6:30 newscast and then they'd have all the stories on their seven o'clock newscast, so I learned to hold off some of my stories until seven, 7:06 after the national news, 7:10. We had three very good news people in Springfield, Rich Bradley, Bill Lawson, and Ben Kiningham and Bill Miller. Well Bill Miller, during my early career, decided to go over and start a

state-wide radio network at the Illinois capitol; he built a network of about twenty to thirty stations called Capitol Information Bureau.

Reynolds: What was the year on that, do you remember? Just to get this in context.

Kiningham: I don't know what the start-up year was.

Reynolds: So we're talking about the early '60s here?

Kiningham: We're talking about the mid-'60s by now.

Reynolds: Mid-'60s. Okay. So you'd been working at the radio station since about the early '60s here in Springfield.

Kiningham: Yes, well, January 24, 1966. Graduated from high school in '60 and I left SIU college campus in '64.

Reynolds: Okay. And you were in Springfield working at the local radio...

Kiningham: Ever since, for forty years.

Reynolds: Okay.

Kiningham: Now, because we're in the State Capitol, one of my first stories was to cover the demolition of the old county building which had been the State Capitol. There were two things that really set out in my mind that Otto Kerner did. He established junior colleges, senior colleges and Sangamon State was one of those. The reconstruction of the Old State Capitol, which was the county building. I did the story; Bill Miller liked the audio so much he went back and did the same story the next day and fed it to CBS nationwide, because I was a freshman reporter and he had the contacts with CBS. We were a CBS affiliate and we were an Associated Press affiliate. But I learned that audio is important, the voices of the news makers, the voices of the events, the crumbling of the concrete.

Ironically, by the time Dan Walker was elected Governor, I had already begun covering State Capitol events because when we had Richard Ogilvie as a Governor, we also had the Illinois Constitutional Convention for 1970. So in '69 and '70 things were moving forward and because Bill wanted to cover Con-Con, I spent a lot of time at the Illinois Capitol covering events, covering the Governor, Richard Ogilvie. I have a personal picture with him and, ironically, I'm on a deployment in Wisconsin when he came to visit and flew in the back of a jet airplane which I will share with conferees.

Reynolds: I've seen those pictures, yes.

Kiningham: I will be talking about my simple part-time coverage of Richard Ogilvie but the thing about it is, he hired some of the people, like the first Secretary of

Transportation that I knew personally from covering Springfield government. A lot of the people that were covered that you'd run into at city and county government and courts would end up in state service, so I had a foundation. That brings us to Dan Walker.

Reynolds: Let's set the stage for it. So your career is, Dan Walker is running for Governor and he's about to get elected Governor.

Kiningham: Yes, I covered all of that.

Reynolds: Let's set the stage for you. You started working for the Illinois Radio...

Kiningham: Oh, no.

Reynolds: Network. Set the stage here.

Kiningham: Illinois Radio Network is an evolution of about five different owners.

Reynolds: Okay.

Kiningham: Which included WGN Radio and the intranet service that they had.

Reynolds: And that happened later?

Kiningham: But, Yes. Actually, Bill Miller had been my news director and went over to run a state radio network. Ironically, there was a competitor at the time called Illinois News Network and it was run by Rich Bradley who was also news director of WCVS. Well Bill went over full time and under Richard Ogilvie, the Lieutenant Governor at the time, a Democrat in a Republican administration, got to know very well...

Reynolds: Before the Constitution so that was...

Kiningham: That's right before the nine...well that's one of the things the 1970 Constitution changed, and that's going to be very interesting when we talk about Dan Walker because the issues of the 1970 Constitution had a great influence on Dan Walker's administration as well as a number of other factors we'll get in to during this chit chat. But I will just share with you the fact that Con-Con took a lot of Bill Miller's time as the administrator for the Capitol Information Bureau Radio Network which was an affiliate of daily news feeds to radio stations all across the state. Back in those days you could feed all of the stations in Chicago, you didn't have exclusivity. But I didn't take over that network until the mid-term of Dan Walker. I took it over on August first, 1974.

Reynolds: In the early '70s when his administration was going to merge to the election, were you still working for the local radio station?

Kiningham: I was the news director for the station and prior to that I was senior news reporter; because we picked up news directors before I was news director, I could go over to the State Capitol in the afternoon and cover the Illinois Senate. I got to cover some of the major events in Illinois history from the late '60s, early '70s simply because I would walk in with a reporter, recorder and was affiliated. My picture is in the 1970 Blue Book for WTAX, because we covered state government news., Let's face it, the citizenship of Springfield is over sixty per cent, probably fifty to sixty percent state government employees. Back in those days...

Reynolds: Tremendous interest in what was going on.

Kiningham: We had Allis-Chalmers, we had Sangamo Electric and some of those businesses were going out of business, which I also got to cover. But I got to cover the restoration of the Old State Capitol where, in 1969, '70, really, they met in 1970 to do the Constitutional Convention. That historic building was a product of one of my first news stories.

Reynolds: Did you cover the convention in any way?

Kiningham: I covered some of the Constitutional Convention, yes, because there was so much going on, but the real reporter for that event was the late Bill Miller, whose real name Alvin Astorias. But Bill Miller sounded a little better on the radio and thousands, if not millions of people knew Bill Miller.

Reynolds: Let's set the stage for the beginning of the Walker administration in terms of the media that's out there. You worked for radio. There was TV and there was print. What were the roles of those media at that time? How did the thing work in terms of reporting the news?

Kiningham: Let me just share with you an observation as I reflect back. You go back to the Richard Ogilvie years and they were unique because you had famous names like George Tagge and Robert Howard of the *Chicago Tribune*, John Elmer and Burnell Heinecke of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. You actually had five newspapers from Chicago covering news in state government. Simeon Osby was here with the *Chicago Daily Defender*. But Simeon, as I got to learn, was more of a minority recruiter for jobs in Springfield in state government as much as a reporter for a Chicago black newspaper. But there were some phenomenal people. Taylor Pensoneau was with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, but he also had a competitor, Marion Lynes was a well-known name with the *St. Louis Globe Democrat*; two papers in St. Louis. In the Ogilvie years, television, if it wasn't from Chicago, rarely ever did reports. We are on the eve of media change in Illinois government where a radio network comes in and has to do daily news reports to have affiliates, so you do state government news. Rich Bradley and Bill Miller, the competitors in the radio business, wanted voices of the newsmakers. We called it audio radiance for the radio audience. But the importance is, back in the Ogilvie administration when you

went in to a gubernatorial news conference with Richard Ogilvie, the electronic media was not allowed to ask questions at the outset.

Reynolds: Really?

Kiningham: Only the big newspapers from Chicago could ask the big story questions.

Reynolds: And the TV stations from Chicago and St. Louis didn't even have people here?

Kiningham: Well, you always had some, some key people. WGN always had a presence; it was a very influencing factor at that time, and Steve Schickel was the big name. You had Alan Crane come in when WBBM went all-news radio 78. But they're only forty years old so we're a little early.

Reynolds: That wasn't the TV side of WBBM?

Kiningham: Yeah, that's radio. But that came a little later into the Walker and Thompson years. But what I'm saying is, we were dominated by newspapers, big newspapers. They ran the press corps, they set the rules...

Reynolds: They asked the questions...

Kiningham: At the outset. And they got a little frustrated with a kid like me from WTAX who could also provide stories for the radio network, CIB Radio—Capitol Information Bureau—run by Bill Miller. If I asked the question that was of newsworthy value, it could be the top news story of the day because I had footwork friends and feelers in Springfield because I lived here. A lot of the electronics media people didn't. Now Rich Bradley lived in Springfield. The Chicago crews would come in; rarely would you ever see a St. Louis crew in the 1960's come in. Reynolds: So the TV crews weren't here like you see today with all the trucks and stuff.

Kiningham: That's right. And also, what good would a truck do when you have to shoot 16 millimeter film and get it processed and then ship it back on the Amtrak to Chicago. Back in those days it was Gulf, Mobile and Ohio and the Illinois Central Railroad. You had to get it back to Chicago and then get it processed. We were in a whole different time frame of media. Now we've come full scale in the forty-some years.

Reynolds: They won't be able to talk about that down the line here.

Kiningham: Let me just say, moving if I may from the "Bob Howards" who weren't here when we picked up the new governor.

Reynolds: The sense of it at this point was that the print media was really the driving force in terms of coverage of governors, but radio was starting to have an impact...

Kiningham: Yes, very much.

Reynolds: And TV hadn't quite gotten into the scene yet.

Kiningham: And, of course, we didn't have internet, we didn't have a lot of this other kinds of news we have today which has changed it even more. We'll get into that later. But I will just share with you that newspapers were in control. It wasn't until the Walker administration and a different attitude about media that Dan Walker opened up a little more. When we'd have a news conference—let me just reflect on this one point because it's important—the big newspapers got to ask the first questions and do follow-up questions...

Reynolds: Even during the Walker years we're talking about?

Kiningham: Well, at the very beginning; it didn't last long. But what I'm saying is, we saw a trend change where electronic media was a friend of Dan Walker, whereas the Chicago papers were big machine papers. And I'm talking party, partisan politics machine. When you have...

Reynolds: The *Tribune* being the Republican paper, the *Sun-Times* being the Democrat paper...

Kiningham: Oh, you had the *Chicago Daily News*, you had the *Sun-Times*, you had *Chicago Today*, the *Daily Defender*, you had all of these special focuses and they had clout and the politicians knew it. And you have to remember, we were 177 house members; we had three representatives...

Reynolds: ...cut back amendment

Kiningham: That's right. Three representatives for each house district so we had a big conglomeration of Chicago Democrats on both sides of the aisles; even the Republicans were really Democrats in disguise in Chicago. I'm not going to keep going on that, but I wanted to lay the groundwork for the Ogilvie administration as we get into the Dan Walker administration. Here's a man who walked the State in southern Illinois and got an amazing amount of electronic media; he opened the door to newspaper media.

Reynolds: We'll get into that, but let me ask you, since you had been covering the Ogilvie administration and had been around for a while, what were your impressions of Dan Walker before you heard he was running for Governor?

Kiningham: I didn't really know Dan Walker until he started to walk the State.

Reynolds: Okay. Because up until that time he was a blank slate...

Kiningham: That is right. I didn't know he had been an advisor to Adlai Stevenson, for example. I didn't know that. It's like you don't know that later governors had



great experience. Jim Edgar was working in the legislature at the same time and I didn't know him. I did know some people.

Reynolds: How about the Walker report on the 1968 riots? Had you picked up on that or covered that at all?

Kiningham: The irony is that Bill Miller covered all of that at the time. I had been at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City, so I covered that for the network and for WTAX. Bill Miller covered the Democratic Convention that caused so much ruckus for decades in Chicago and he did the follow-up on everything because he was the expert. As a footnote, when we get into the Walker campaign, you remember the Lieutenant Governor was a candidate for Governor and got beat by Dan Walker; that's crucial because he then went over to Sangamon State University,<sup>1</sup> founded by another Democrat, if you will, through the legislative process.

Reynolds: You're talking about Paul Simon now.

Kiningham: Yes. Paul Simon went over and started a master's degree program in reporting. And then when he was ready to go off to a...

Reynolds: Went to the Senate.

Kiningham: Well, he got elected, took off to Washington, D.C. in '74. Bill Miller wanted his job and I ended up taking Bill Miller's job. WTAX bought the network so we expanded it to serve people. The neat thing here is that we had radio competition with Illinois News Network so we were competitors. Over time—just as a footnote—I out-last-ed them.

Reynolds: Yeah. Just to close that off about Paul Simon going out to Sangamon State University, was their focus print media or did they train people for the various media: radio, TV and print?

Kiningham: Everybody had experience with the media, per se, because it was—the Public Affairs Reporting program, we should explain for anyone listening—designed to give broadcast and newspaper reporter students a master's degree in one year after extensive training in academia in the fall, and then in the spring they got to come in and actually work with the Statehouse Press Corps as interns covering the news and putting it on, in the newspaper...

Reynolds: It's a great program.

Kiningham: Right on the radio...

Reynolds: And to have Paul Simon run it was great.

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<sup>1</sup> Sangamon State University was later advanced to the top rank of State of Illinois universities as University of Illinois – Springfield, UIS.

Kiningham: Oh, it was a tremendous experience and the thing about it was, it has opened the door to better media coverage in the nation because these students, these graduates...

Reynolds: Was it a one-of-a-kind of deal out at Sangamon State?

Kiningham: At the time it was quite unique. You could get a master's degree in one year if you did all your work, and it was a lot of work. But you were hands-on, you got to meet the legislators, you got to meet Presidents, you got to cover Governors, anyone that came to Illinois to the State Capitol. Students got exposure and that was important. Bill Miller had an intern named Tom Seraphin\_who was one of the later owners of the network that I managed out of Springfield. Tom Seraphin\_who is now a political columnist for a television station in Chicago in addition to the advertising...

Reynolds: Sangamon State is a very interesting story. I started out in their internship program, too, but their initial vision and mission was really quite impressive. They had an impact; they really did.

Kiningham: What was novel and unique where state government was concerned, was that you had students dealing at the state government level involved, not just reading books about it, but actually being there on the scene where the events are occurring, and that was very important.

Reynolds: Let's get back to Walker. I'm glad we talked about Sangamon State because I'm kind of sentimental about it also. Let's talk about, you., hear that Dan Walker is running for Governor. He announces—I think it is '71—he starts this walk from the bottom of the State to the top of the State. Did you start covering that right away?

Kiningham: Yes, absolutely.

Reynolds: What were your memories of that?

Kiningham: A winner walking tall. Here is a Chicago lawyer. Here is a gentleman who, you know, here's a guy who was a Vice President and attorney for well-known Montgomery Ward, out with blue jeans and walking...

Reynolds: and a bandana...

Kiningham: What is he, six four? He's a huge man. He's a man to look up to. He may be taller. And here's a Chicago executive who starts at the southern part of the state of Illinois to take a walk. He wants to walk into the governorship. And probably, not since John F. Kennedy...

Reynolds: Nobody downstate had ever heard of him, I'm guessing.

Kiningham: That's right. Well, the irony is, you had a lot of Democrats downstate.

Reynolds: Paul Simon was...

Kiningham: Well, Paul Simon, you had a lot of people down there, Paul Powell, you had a lot of Democrats in state government from southern Illinois. But here's a man running for Governor of Illinois when most governors are from northern Illinois. You had some from central Illinois, but many southern Illinoisans were very impressed and told the media so. Most had never seen a governor visit their area. That's one of the things I recall about the Dan Walker walk.

Reynolds: So Walker starts this walk and he doesn't necessarily have a press guy or advance guy who's telling the media to cover him. People are telling the media, "You ought to cover this guy. There's a guy running for governor walking through town; maybe you ought to go out and talk to him." So is that generally how he's getting coverage?

Kiningham: He got some phenomenal existing coverage. Central Illinois TV stations are down covering it and southern Illinois TV stations are covering it. They can develop their sixteen millimeter film and get him on the nightly news and he's walking and talking. This is probably one of the most important things in his career, the people interaction he had on this walk. I think it has been documented in manuscripts of people that have interviewed Dan Walker, at the time he was touched by the issues they were dealing with. You've got to remember...

Reynolds: That he was talking to them, the people about...

Kiningham: He knew they didn't like the income tax. He also knew that Richard Ogilvie's defeat for re-election could really have been caused by a ban on leaf burning because he was a mover and a shaker in the Environmental Protection Agency move and banned tree leaf burning, statewide. Those were major factors that spilled over into this campaign.

Now you had a lot of candidates. You had Paul Simon, Lieutenant Governor under a Republican running for Governor. You had the Republican running for Governor. They had many friendships within the statehouse media that would pay dividends later, but right now Dan Walker created with that walk a magnificent amount of publicity, free publicity, attention, a Walker walking tall. He was a tall guy.

Reynolds: Were you covering him on a daily basis wherever he was?

Kiningham: Well, back in those days it was hard to get out and about. We covered him periodically and as he moved from southern Illinois in the initial outgrowth, we let him walk and talk and we didn't cover that because, one thing you find out about politicians is they like to say the same thing in a lot of places. But he met people and they influenced him. As he got closer to Chicago, the media dropped because the Chicago machine, the Democratic machine was not supportive of this candidate and because they had Paul Simon. And then, of

course, some of the Republicans respected this Democratic candidate for Governor simply because he had worked for Montgomery Ward. He was an industrial business-type.

Reynolds: So he may be appealing to independents...

Kiningham: That's right.

Reynolds: Or Republicans who are more moderate who maybe weren't as comfortable with the income tax that Ogilvie passed either.

Kiningham: That's right. And **wow**. That's the irony of the whole thing, because once elected, he couldn't talk about the income tax even though he needed it. And, ironically, most of the Democrats who supported the income tax secretly, until they voted, never really talked about it. They kind of kept it low-key until the end. Richard Ogilvie made it his first speech, the first State of the State address he did. So we're down the road three and a half years later for a campaign and this is fascinating stuff.

Reynolds: So he didn't necessarily construct a media campaign, he just did the walk and the media—the downstate media especially—started to cover it. He started talking to people and it just had sort of a momentum to it, it sounds like.

Kiningham: No one ever runs for Governor that doesn't have a program and a campaign. How it was organized, who did it, I don't know. I don't remember. But I do know that it was a hot topic; people were talking about it and you know, the coffee breaks you talk about, **Wow**, where's he at today? What's he up to? There were other news events under way. I mean, you know, he's running in an administration that's going to have an evolution of the 1970 constitution caucus or Con-Con that is making a lot of changes in state government. That heritage was amazing; this Governor, and whoever is Governor, is going to inherit some of those restrictions and expansions.

Reynolds: Do you remember much about the Paul Simon campaign in the primary? Did he just run a traditional sort of campaign and kind of probably felt the Chicago machine was going to put him over the top pretty easily?

Kiningham: I think so. Paul Simon was a well-respected law maker. And he was a friend of the media. Paul Simon was a friend of the media because remember...

Reynolds: He had a media background.

Kiningham: Well, the irony is, he may have been defeated in the '72 primary for Governor, but he had been the Lieutenant Governor. I still remember doing a story when he became Lieutenant Governor under a Republican and couldn't get an office in the area where Lieutenant Governors usually went, because of a certain very powerful Senate Republican who said, "I'm not giving up my

office.” Paul Simon could have argued for that, but he preferred use of the small office in the Capitol rather than give it up to the...

Reynolds: The Lieutenant Governor.

Kinningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: Did he have much of a role when he was Lieutenant Governor, or did he...?

Kinningham: Most Lieutenant Governors are Lieutenant Governors in name...

Reynolds: Especially when your Governor is a different party. I mean that's just...

Kinningham: Very restrictive, but he did do outreach. I didn't do a lot of research on Paul, but I remember he invented some names that live today. Right off the top of my head I can't remember, but I know he ran an office that if a voter had a concern or a citizen of Illinois had a concern he would deal with it. He had a staff that could deal with that...

Reynolds: Ombudsmanship.

Kinningham: Ombudsman was the name I'd never heard before in that era and today it's a more common name. Yeah, he created...

Reynolds: He sort of invented that role in state government.

Kinningham: He did. And today it continues; every Governor or every officer wants to be of service to the taxpayer.

Reynolds: Well, you must have been shocked when Walker won the primary. Was it very shocking and surprising to everyone when that happened? Or do you recall what people's reactions were?

Kinningham: Well, I knew there was a lot of support down state and, of course, the irony is you've got the Chicago Democratic machine pulling for Paul Simon and that didn't work. It was a bit of a major move politically to get an Independent in. But the irony is, that came back to haunt Dan Walker every day, every which way. Because when you don't have Republican support and you don't have the major Democratic support, pretty soon you're an independent governor, and when you're independent you can't wheel and deal.

Reynolds: You're fighting the establishment.

Kinningham: That is correct.

Reynolds: Right. Do you remember much about the general campaign against Ogilvie? Did he change his tactics much or?

Kiningham: He did not. I think, again the issue of the income tax. Dan Walker never really addressed that even though he knew the state needed a lot more money. The irony is when they enacted the income tax under Richard Ogilvie, to get it passed they needed, I think, a twelfth to go to cities and counties which eroded some of the income. So when Dan Walker was elected and became Governor, he had a financial crisis. He still had debt. It's called Public Aid and if you go back to Public Assistance, even today we still have Public Assistance pressures greater than ever. People need help and the population's grown and the current Governor maybe hasn't addressed that issue.

Reynolds: The thing I do remember about Ogilvie, didn't he have some sort of campaign that he said, "I don't have much charisma, but I'm a manager" sort of thing? Because he really wasn't a very charismatic sort of guy.

Kiningham: That is right. Well he came out of World War II with war injuries. He couldn't smile they said. He had ...

Reynolds: That's right. You've got the one picture of him smiling.

Kiningham: Well, he was a very happy man in an airplane, ready to take a jet airplane ride with the military. But, my point is, we're talking Dan Walker, but Richard Ogilvie was a man of many creations administratively. He did create the Bureau of the Budget, he did create the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency before the federal government did. But that came back to haunt him when you put a ban on state-wide leaf burning. Voters didn't like the ability to get rid of ...

Reynolds: Little things like that can really get out of...

Kiningham: [Voters questioned] who was making the profit or what was going to happen to those leaves? There are some people that think maybe that got him more than the federal, or the state income tax tied to the federal income tax. Those are issues that other people will be talking about, but Dan Walker inherited some financial challenges because some of the money was going to cities and counties which was a benefit for them and then you had not as much money as you'd hoped for. So Dan Walker found a novel and lasting way to raise money—the lottery—for schools.

Reynolds: We'll talk about that. Yeah. So Walker gets elected. Just to kind of set the stage again in terms of where he's at with all the different medias: from what you've said so far, it sounds like the press media which dominated the print media was dominated primarily by the Chicago papers was not much of a friend to him.

Kiningham: Absolutely.

Reynolds: But the electronic media, the radio and the emerging TV coverage actually had sort of helped him and made him...

Kiningham: Absolutely.

Reynolds: ...as a successful candidate. So he went into this thing with kind of an adversarial role with the press, but he had some allies and he had some enemies going into the thing. Could you set the stage for that a little bit more?

Kiningham: Well, as you talk to people you find out more and more. That's the beauty of sitting and talking to me and other reporters that have been there. Tom Massey was working for the press room at the time. He's the Press Secretary today, but he recalls when the Press Secretary, Shelby Vasconcelles, was fired by the Governor. His budget was cut. Dan Walker happened to go into Peoria and the reporter in Peoria found out about it and, already knew about it. The fact is that the Secretary of State found a position—I believe it was the Secretary of State—for Shelby Vasconcelles to continue as the Press Secretary to coordinate news conferences and everything for the statehouse press corps. So the Governor found out that while he abolished the job, Shelby got a job somewhere else the very same day. The Governor was taken aback by that, but here's a Governor who tried...

Reynolds: Sounds like even some of his early moves worked against him with the press.

Kiningham: Well, he came in with a tight budget, he knew he had to cut budget and he started hacking the budget anywhere he could. Well, he can't hack the budget of a Secretary of State or the other elected Constitutional...

Reynolds: Controller, Treasurer.

Kiningham: In those days we didn't have a Controller yet. Reynolds: That's right. The Treasurer, I guess was the main thing.

Kiningham: We had a lot of Democrats in office from Chicago at the time and I have a feeling Dan Walker didn't touch any of their budgets – Treasurer or Recorder.

Reynolds: Well, Walker comes in with this image as sort of the underdog, the giant killer, the big city populist, the maverick, very anti-Daley machine Democrat. Did the media sort of help him create that image? Did they feed into that, or...?

Kiningham: I think a lot of the media, if he said something about the Chicago media it got published, but then they also published back at him. Out of the Chicago area, I don't think St. Louis or the southern or central Illinois newspapers got into it that much. But it...

Reynolds: But wouldn't that make him popular downstate, this sort of image of being anti-Daley? Wouldn't the downstate people kind of emphasize that?

Kiningham: Exactly.

Reynolds: Yeah. And the Chicago end of this thing, they would take the Daley side on a lot of this stuff?

Kiningham: Oh, very much so. The machine, very powerful. And you had Daley people down here. I mean, Paul Simon, may not have been a Daley man, but he was supported by the Daley group.

Reynolds: I've listened to Walker's oral history interview, and he thinks that his image in addition to this sort of image as the maverick and anti-Daley, he sees himself as sort of the most honest guy in town. Everything he wants to do is transparent. He's sort of the idealist. But he also has this adversarial and confrontational sort of image. Did you see that in his coverage of it? Did all of those sides of him come out? For instance, did you have a sense that he was a very honest, transparent, guy, but on the one hand he also was very adversarial and confrontational and did you see all of those elements in what he was trying to...

Kiningham: What I saw was a man who had eyes that could look at you and look through you. He had a piercing look that was scary. It was not adversarial, but it put a little fear in some of us because that direct, sincere look, eyes that could see right through you physically, was a unique attribute I've never experienced with anybody else. I mean, here's a tall man looking at you and his eyes are very pointed, they're very focused and it wasn't meant...

Reynolds: Very serious guy.

Kiningham: Yeah. It was almost a psychological hit for me. I got a little nervous around him.

Reynolds: And it was probably true of the other politicians he had to deal with, too, obviously.

Kiningham: And yet you'd get him out to the Illinois State Fair or among a group of people and he could interact with them – friendly, personally. I shared with you: he tried to croak like a rooster and choked, and it made kind of a humorous bit of audio for press dinners. I don't know if we put that on the network or not. We might have just to let people know that...(??)

Reynolds: Give him a personal side.

Kiningham: Well, he was reaching out to people at the Illinois State Fair and croaked like a rooster and almost choked when he croaked and... but you know what I mean. The bottom line is he had a human side.

Reynolds: His style as Governor was a very serious straight-forward and...

Kiningham: Very formal, upright. You know, some people hunch, he was always at attention. Very, very much the official and you respected that.



- Reynolds: Was his word good? I mean was he, in terms of being honest when he told you what he thought that's what, if he made a deal with somebody, you know, they could depend on that? Did he have that sort of an image?
- Kiningham: Ironically, we come back to the news conference because he wouldn't talk to you that much outside of the Executive Office. He wanted a formal news conference, he had a good...
- Reynolds: Did he do a lot of them?
- Kiningham: He had a press secretary. Here's a Governor elected by the people who knew he had a Chicago machine and a Republican minority that was not supportive on everything he wanted to do so I think he had two conferences every month or two to go out to the citizens...
- Reynolds: Is that unusual? How often do these guys usually do that? I know the current Governor doesn't do that hardly at all.
- Kiningham: Well, that's true, but you've got... I did radio shows with Jim Thompson where they were call-in and I did shows with Jim Edgar and they could call in.
- Reynolds: But he was doing two press conferences a month.
- Kiningham: Well, they weren't press conferences. They were going out to communities and sitting down and talking to people.
- Reynolds: Okay..
- Kiningham: And he did regular press conferences, but...
- Reynolds: Did he start this sort of concept of always campaigning, not really ever governing, sort of just always out, because he had to get support from the grass roots to get stuff done? Because the politicians wouldn't cooperate.
- Kiningham: We saw a change in governmental management between Richard Ogilvie which was centralized government, very centralized. Richard Ogilvie created a Bureau of the Budget which Dan Walker inherited. Under the Ogilvie administration, I had a few directors meet me in the hall and say, "How do I get in to talk to him about my budget?" They couldn't do it because of the Bureau of the Budget. Dan Walker inherits the Bureau of the Budget, okay?
- Reynolds: Of course, he's a zero-based budgeting guy, too.
- Kiningham: That's true. This is brand new. This is one of the new concepts and I think the thing about Dan Walker is he brought in some new and independent people. He brought in a new Secretary of Transportation number two, he brought in Pat Quinn to help him do something – I'm not sure what Pat Quinn did, but obviously he's the Lieutenant Governor this week; and a very competent

attorney, Mary Lee Leahy, who looked out for people's interests. He had some true activist people on his staff that really...

Reynolds: With very competent reputations.

Kiningham: Very competent.

Reynolds: Yes. Not the political hack sort of, you know.

Kiningham: That's exactly right. While the campaign may have focused on holding the line on taxation, the state had an influx of new income dollars that he could spend to meet the needs of the prior administrations, if you will. The Public Aid costs, they still were a...

Reynolds: Let's talk about the big issues. I want to talk one more thing about his personality since you got to see him maybe at least a few times a month or maybe on a daily basis. In his interview...

Kiningham: No one ever gets to see a Governor on a daily basis especially the current Governor.

Reynolds: Right. Right. But even in his interview and when you read what's been written about him, his personality is characterized as wooden and aloof and humorless, a very serious person who said in his interview "I don't want to be buddy-buddy with these guys in the press; that's not my style." He also said in his interview with the Museum here that one of the hardest things that he had to do was to tell a joke. He did not like to tell a joke. We listened...

Kiningham: Some of us cannot...

Reynolds: the grid iron dinner, tapes together and, you know, he did a pretty good job, but you could tell that he was sort of uncomfortable doing material that had been written for him. Did you find that to be the case, that he was aloof and wooden and humorless and, what did you sense about him, his personality?

Kiningham: I think you're exactly right. The thing about Dan Walker is he had a good Public Information Officer who wrote most of the speech. The first grid iron where the media roasted him, he almost got up and walked out of the room. But he found out later...

Reynolds: Because it upset him? He didn't find it funny?

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. They were making fun of some of the things he did as they did...

Reynolds: And he was insulted?

Kiningham: But, they also made fun of the Attorney General and the Secretary of State and the Auditor and everybody else. I mean, it was a roast, it was a fundraiser for charity. And they got him to settle down and stay. Well, in 1976...

Reynolds: So, physically he was acting like he wanted to leave. I mean he got up and kind of...

Kiningham: Yeah, the first time I went. The time that he actually did get up finally to speak to the media was 1976 and I was there.

Reynolds: So up until this point he had never done his role at the dinner to kind of do his own roast of the media.

Kiningham: That's right. You didn't always have the Governor roast back. You might have the Secretary of State or the Attorney General or, depended on who might have had the biggest boo-boo or the most unique thing to get up and talk about that year. The Governor didn't always have that. I know that was a Dan Walker concern that we didn't just focus on him 24/7. That was a personal concern. But we had the Secretary of State Driver's Facilities and we had the Agriculture Department and ag issues, and if I'm a state-wide network, I've got people in Chicago who want to know about business news. I've got people who want to know about driving and what about the highway department. And so, under Richard Ogilvie when you moved to a Secretary of Transportation and a huge funding program for highways, this governor inherited a lot of those projects that were already underway. He got a good Secretary of Transportation in Langhorn Bond. I mean there are some people in this administration that really did work hard and worked with the media and talked about projects locally.

Reynolds: Do you think he had charisma?

Kiningham: I think in his own way he had a cool charisma. Obviously, in today's age of media overexposure it might be a different attitude. He might come across a little cool. But he was a man with a mission and he achieved it.

Reynolds: Could you sense this attitude that he didn't want to be buddy-buddy with the press. He wanted to stay at arms length from people in the press or?

Kiningham: I sensed that he really did...

Reynolds: the fact that he was giving that many press conferences though was I'm sure...

Kiningham: But they were formal presentations, you know. When you've got your press secretary coordinating it and you got the... See we've emerged. You've got to remember that the times have changed. The Bob Howard wasn't there anymore. Bob Howard moved on. He took a kind of retirement.

Reynolds: Did these press conferences change in terms of the print media dominating them or?

Kiningham: Well, you had John Elmer and Dave Gilbert and Neal Mailor and Frank Zahar for the *Tribune* and John Kamper and Henry Hanson was still there from the *Daily News*. Henry was getting ready to go to Chicago and do other things. Burnell Heinecke was there, Charlie Wheeler was there for the Sun Times and Ed McManus from *Today*. They knew the Chicago issues, they knew state-wide issues and they knew how to do investigative reporting, but we're seeing a change in some of the old reporters; they're getting ready to retire and you're getting a new crew in.

Reynolds: So the Woodward-Bernstein sort of effect was starting to take hold a little bit too.

Kiningham: Well, you've always had that. You always had the Chicago reporter that wanted to do the pay-offs, the kickbacks, the scandal news. You take a radio news network like I managed during the Walker era and came in to; we did daily reports where we had one, two, or three reports a day and a three and one-half minute news summary on state government activities for that day and it ran five days a week. So you had to turn out news. I was doing the stories on EPA and Conservation and hunting and fishing and all of Secretary of State; the Attorney General was busy with court cases. Dan Walker got a little jealous about some of the news in other agencies; he wasn't getting all the publicity. He actually took that kind of personally: Why would you be reporting on the Secretary of State? Why aren't you reporting on what I'm doing?

Reynolds: That's interesting. I was going to wait on this question, but I'll go ahead and ask it now. In his interview he admitted this antagonism with the press. Of course, some people said he was inept when dealing with the press and that there was a tremendous disdain for him which he sensed. But he felt like the press concentrated on covering scandals and what he did, and they didn't cover the really good things that went on in state government. He felt that they've always had sort of a reputation for going for the more glitzy stuff and not covering what DOT was doing or what Human Services were doing, or DCFS or those kind of things. Did you sense that? Was that a valid criticism?

Kiningham: I think it was a gubernatorial perspective. But I will just say, why not cover the problems that developed with Paul Powell. Why not ghost payrolls? That was a big issue. We had governors all across the years that I was a state reporter having an employee in one agency and paying them from another. You pay staff in one place and they go to work in another jurisdiction. Now, when they start doing campaign work then the Governor may end up in prison, you know, in those kinds of issues. But we had legislative battles, we had scandals, you know we try to focus on what's going on in state government but what does my radio listener want to know? They want to

know the hook and crook of the moment. They want to know what politics is going on. If the Governor's talking about an issue that's not at the top of the realm, then I'm going to get to it, but it might be a weekend feature rather than a feature of the day. The irony is, remember, we've evolved from the prior administration where the newspapers wanted one or two, one story a day, or one story every several days, and you get to the electronics media and I've got holes for three or four stories a day. Then the competition gets greater and I go to three news feeds a day, I'm turning out as many as five, six stories a day with my staff on different issues. So I could cover a Rockford story, a southern Illinois story, a state agency story.

Reynolds: Secretary of State, or

Kiningham: Absolutely.

Reynolds: Yeah. The print media, which dominated up until this point, had sort of an agenda, sort of strict sort of agenda that probably focused on the Governor, focused on the politics of the Governor and these scandals; they were doing investigative reporting.

Kiningham: Absolutely.

Reynolds: But the electronic media—radio and television—is emerging and they've got a lot more time. It's almost like the twenty-four hour coverage where we've gone today. They've got a lot more time to fill so they're doing more coverage of different kinds of things to fill that time. Have I got that right?

Kiningham: At the time, back in this era, we were evolving into radio news more and more and people cared about what was going on in state government and how it affected their pocket book, their lives. Can they rake the leaves and burn them? You know, those kinds of issues. So, yes. Dan Walker was an environmental guy, too. You know, we saw a lot of interest in what we reported on, but we also wanted to report on the hot news of the moment. So it wasn't uncommon to do the headline story in the *Sun-Times* the next day, but also I might have had it on the night before because of the immediacy of electronic media and then that also was changing the media.

Reynolds: Right. So it sounds like Walker's criticism of the media maybe was primarily directed at the Chicago print media which he thought concentrated on his confrontational adversarial relationship with the Daley machine, the scandals, that kind of thing. While the electronic media was beginning to cover a lot of different stuff, the kind of things he thought should have been covered to an extent.

Kiningham: I think that's right.

Reynolds: And you were more sympathetic, more sympathetic to him also. It's interesting to me that in this particular book, somebody like a Charlie Wheeler...

Kiningham: That's the *Dan Walker: The Glory and the Tragedy*.

Reynolds: Right. There's a quote in there from Charlie Wheeler which we talked about several times today that's a big long quote; I could read it to you, but he basically called Walker a phony and said that he's not a liberal, he's just not what he seems. There was a tremendous disdain and he was part of the Chicago print media. Did it appear to you that the Chicago print media was sort of out to get him from the beginning because of their allegiance with the Daley forces up there? The *Tribune* being a Republican paper they would be sort of anti-Walker also.

Kiningham: Well, Charlie Wheeler, of course, was active with Chicago news, with a lot of people. He's the third generation reporter. His dad was a reporter, his granddad was a reporter. I have a lot of respect for Charlie and I respect his opinion. Each reporter has a different perspective. The interesting thing about some of this is that...

Reynolds: I was kind of surprised back in those days. Now when you have these talking heads—you know who these guys are—there's a strong bias one way or the other. But he expressed a very strong bias against Walker as an objective reporter, right?

Kiningham: I have a great regard for Charles Wheeler, please understand that.

Reynolds: I'm just trying to get a sense for what was going on, the dynamics of this thing.

Kiningham: Was he inept in dealing with the press, Dan Walker? He was a bit of a media motivator with the walk, but then he got elected and things changed a little bit. He didn't have any place to walk except he had a budget crisis with the legislature every year. In his office, it was very formal.

Reynolds: His taking this stuff to the people, going to the grass roots supporters, was not necessarily working, was it?

Kiningham: Not totally because he was still a very formal Chicago kind of guy. But the irony is, you go to the State Fair and those rural events and he was still a formal man. He had problems loosening up, but he was people oriented. And, I would say, he was semi-formal in those situations.

Reynolds: He enjoyed the campaigning.

Kiningham: He tried to be friendly. Beyond the campaign, he's elected, now what's he going to do? You know. He inherited a lot of things.

- Reynolds: Let's talk about a couple of things that were covered in this book. He had a press secretary named Norton Kay.
- Kinningham: Norty Kay.
- Reynolds: There was some sort of dispute over the way the budget briefings were done. He changed the way that was done. That really upset the press. Do you remember that? What were the circumstances surrounding that?
- Kinningham: I think you're going to talk to other reporters like the Ray Serati's and others who remember those inherently. I remember going to the budget briefings where the night before the formal briefing, the formal speech, we would sit down, and probably for an hour we would go through the budget with the Governor and clear things up. I can't remember the details of Dan Walker and his budgetary process, but I know it evolved where we did that a long time until the current Governor wouldn't come to talk to us at all.
- Reynolds: So he stopped that practice?
- Kinningham: Oh, yeah. The irony is, a lot of Dan Walker traditions have re-emerged.
- Reynolds: Interesting. Well, if we continue to do these interviews we can talk about that when we get to the current Governor. Well, we probably beat the press thing to death so let's, ...
- Kinningham: I would just say that...
- Reynolds: Although that's the thing I think you're most interested in.
- Kinningham: A footnote is that the media was changing.
- Reynolds: Right. It was during this period that this dramatic change took place.
- Kinningham: Oh, yeah.
- Reynolds: He was a guy who used the media to get elected, but then when he got in he was slightly inept in using it to his advantage. But it may not have been his fault really.
- Kinningham: Well, absolutely. You've got reporters doing their job and they are reporting on the issues of the day. If there are problems in his administration, they're out to find them. They don't always find them while you are in office; sometimes it comes back to haunt you. We've seen a few Governors go to prison because of that.
- Reynolds: Yes we have. Let's talk about your memories of the big battles that went on during the Walker administration. He had trouble getting some of his cabinet appointments put in place, didn't he? Do you remember any of those? You

mentioned Mary Lee Leahy, who I believe was one of them. They went after him almost immediately. There's usually sort of a honeymoon period with a Governor and they get their initial appointments through, but he didn't have that, did he?

Kiningham: No. He had a lot of people, names you didn't know, you know? He cared about a lot of areas. Roland Burriss was the Director of the Department of General Services. That's a name that came back in the process, now called Central Management Services. I still respect Langhorn Bond who came in and ran the Department of Transportation. I think we saw great progress both from his predecessor, the first Secretary of State, Bill Cellini, who was a street commissioner in Springfield that I covered for a lot of years before he went in to the Ogilvie administration. Langhorn Bond was very impressive and very active in the aerial side of things as well as roads. So you had a lot of good administrators. The battles in the Illinois Senate on confirmations—here's where the Democratic machine in Chicago came into power.

Reynolds: Almost immediately they showed him where he was at in terms of the legislature.

Kiningham: They're sending him a message. "Look, you better work with us or we're not going to work with you." I think we had four years of not working with each other. I think that's what we're seeing here. You're going to learn more as you talk to the reporters that covered those appointments. I covered the major issues, but I wasn't covering the Senate full time back in that period, until about 1974.

Reynolds: But that certainly was not a good start. You could probably sense this guy was going to have some problems when those early appointments were challenged.

Kiningham: That's correct.

Reynolds: The lottery was another one of his big issues. Did you cover that?

Kiningham: I covered the announcement of the lottery and ironically the Federal Communications law at the time said we couldn't report a lottery, but we could report news about it. (Chuckles)

Reynolds: We had some—really federal—restrictions...

Kiningham ...in broadcast on a lottery. You couldn't broadcast lottery information, news, the numbers, the gambling part of it. But I could report on ways the state was looking to finance government; it was a big issue and it was a very active issue. That was major in the Walker...

Reynolds: How did he build the coalition to get that done? Was it something that already had some support when he came in? Had been growing or...?



Kiningham: Well, he had to campaign against the income tax to get elected so that caused some problems. He had to cut spending once he was in office to show a symbolism, but he needed more money. And the irony is, the State of Illinois needed more money, because they gave a twelfth of the income tax to cities and counties for their use; he didn't have as much. So the lottery was led in the Illinois House by a very popular Democrat from Rockford, Zeke Giorgi. E.K. "Zeke" Giorgi was a mentor to Michael Madigan. And I might just add a footnote: Michael Madigan is currently the longest serving Speaker of the Illinois House.

Reynolds: He was at the Constitutional Convention and by this time was in the House.

Kiningham: That's right. He attended Giorgi's funeral and cried. This is the Speaker—powerful Speaker today—going back to the years of Zeke Giorgi who would talk to you, who was a friend. See, you could talk to legislators about these issues. Well, the money was to be used for schools, it was a good issue. As we found out later, they diverted some of that money for other purposes, and they locked in, if you will, later in years...

Reynolds: Done later after...

Kiningham: Yes.

Reynolds: But the impression when it was passed was that it was all going to go to education.

Kiningham: Yes. What they found is, it did go to education, but then they could take the money for education and shift it off before it ever got there so it was a balance. That wasn't the intent of the initial law and so...

Reynolds: Did that happen during the Walker administration or much later?

Kiningham: I think it came later. I think you probably saw an evolution of some of that at the outset. I can't speak to the actual budget.

Reynolds: Can you remember at what point in his administration the lottery was an issue? Was it midway through or from the very beginning? I'm trying to remember now when I first saw it mentioned.

Kiningham: I don't remember when the lottery came in in his administration but it was within the four years.

Reynolds: It had to be pretty early, because I remember buying tickets in the early '70s.

Kiningham: They changed the Federal Communications law ironically to allow us to report.

Reynolds: But that must have been a real success for him to get that passed.

Kiningham: Oh. It was a success.

Reynolds: Is it a combination of downstate Democrats and Republicans?

Kiningham: It was. It was more money for everybody in the long run so...

Reynolds: So everybody got on board.

Kiningham: With a Zeke Giorgi, senior member of the Illinois House proposing it, who had a lot of friends on all sides of the aisle, it was adopted. Then it moved to the Senate and it got through the Senate and the Governor signed it. That is a legacy of this Governor. Another legacy will be the funding challenges they had for the City of Chicago, and that may have been a factor.

Reynolds: Well, that's the other one I wanted to talk about was the RTA, the CTA. Do you remember about that?

Kiningham: The Chicago Transit Authority, Regional Transit Services under a six county authority, the RTA, that was the fall session of 1973.

Kiningham: The interesting thing about it was down-staters: What are we going to get out of it? Why should we vote for sending a bunch of money into Chicago? Well, what they also found out was, it brought buses and subways or mass transit systems...

Reynolds: Downstate.

Kiningham: Well, it brought mass transit under one control wing in Chicago that allowed for financial success at the time and it was a major issue for them. I think that's one issue Chicago really wanted.

Reynolds: Walker dug his heels in on that one, didn't he? He would do it one way and one way only and they had to kind of come around to it.

Kiningham: That's where the experienced reporters on the scene, especially from Chicago, will have more flavor for you, because as a downstate reporter a lot of my listeners cared about control of transit in Chicago's six-county area, but it didn't affect them. Maybe you'll get an inkling of funding for some bus service in the capitol city and some other large towns, but you had to meet certain requirements. So that wasn't a big downstate issue; that's not something that I focused on heavily.

Reynolds: He was a zero-based budget guy and made a real attempt to make budget cuts and talked about efficiencies in government, that kind of thing. Were there a lot of big battles over budget cuts? I don't think he consolidated agencies much, but he was for streamlining agencies for the most part. What was with the zero-based budget method?

Kiningham: Well, I think vision gives you that. He had a Bureau of the Budget already because they inherited that from the prior administration. So he had a budget bureau which centralized funding. I will tell you that in the Ogilvie administration when they moved to the Bureau of the Budget and centralized budgeting—I may have mentioned it earlier—the director of the museum came and complained that one of his accounts was wiped out. And another, the conservation director caught me in the hallway and said, “Look, I need to talk to him about budget.” We’re talking about Richard Ogilvie. Well, you get to this administration and he’s using a new form of budget calculation; he’s got the Bureau of the Budget working on it. It’s already centralized for him so he’s got the control and people aren’t getting in to talk to him as much about what they want to talk about. I think that’s where you saw some changes in the Thompson administration which turned out to be more open. Ironically, some of the staff hold-overs from the first Ogilvie administration...

Reynolds: ...and there were some.

Kiningham: Bob Mandeville may still have been there in the Walker administration era in one way, shape or form. When a statehouse reporter covers the Governor and the government, it all comes down to money. Who gets what, when, where and why? We’re talking about what agencies get funded and what programs are going to be either expanded or cut. That’s the nitty-gritty and we moved—thanks to the 1970 Constitution—to annual budget making, not just every two years. So that intensified the foundation of budgeting for state government. And they could deal with crises more quickly. Frankly, if you go back into the pre-Walker administration era, they were still passing bills every year they wanted to. They weren’t emergency or anything else. It’s a “do what you want to do when you want to do it.”

Reynolds: Little bit more laid-back than today’s process.

Kiningham: Yeah. It’s more formal today. You’ve got the authority to do it.

Reynolds: Any big budget cuts that you remember being tremendously controversial that you covered? Or generally his budget cutting, his philosophy kind of set him up for conflict and...

Kiningham: You know, after covering five-plus Governors, it’s hard to remember every year.

Reynolds: Once you see these issues come back and over and over again I’m sure.

Kiningham: Public Aid was there and it’s still there.

Reynolds: They never go away, these agencies, do they? (laughing)

Kiningham: And, of course, roads: you care about roads and you still got potholes.

- Reynolds: Right. Well, let's talk about one of the big, big disputes or battles of his administration, which was over the Speaker of the House between Redmond and Choate, and all those ballots. Do you remember? That must have been a pretty interesting thing to cover.
- Kiningham: Well, it was phenomenal. The Secretary of State presides in the House. So you had a different person—I think it was Paul Powell—presiding in the House when you had a battle between Clyde Choate and the candidates...
- Reynolds: ...Redmond emerged as the guy.
- Kiningham: Yeah. It was phenomenal. They kept voting and voting and voting and voting and we weren't going anywhere during the administration. See, this is the thing the Governor was upset about.
- Reynolds: Somebody was trying to wear somebody down, right?
- Kiningham: Well, not only in this chamber, but I think—wasn't it Cecil Partee that became President of the Illinois Senate, the first African-American, President of the Illinois Senate? And he didn't get it on the first vote. He didn't get it on the second vote. The Governor presides in the Illinois Senate under the new Constitution instead of the Lieutenant Governor, so the Governor calls him up. I was there. He goes up to Cecil Partee—and of course, I got my microphone hooked-up and, of course, I don't have the tape—and he says, "What are you going to do now?" This was Dan Walker saying, "What are you going to do?" And Cecil Partee says, "Give me two hours." He came back, he was elected Senate President and the rest is history. But over in the House, vote after vote after vote after vote you saw an effort to try to elect the Speaker of the House and it went on and on and on.
- Reynolds: Now what was the period of time that this went on? Was it something that went on until late into the evening or into the next morning?
- Kiningham: Oh, yeah.
- Reynolds: Over the course of a couple of days? Is that when this went on?
- Kiningham: I forget the timeline, but you don't get so many roll call votes without some time breakage. But Clyde Choate wanted to be Speaker. And you had the other candidate for Speaker.
- Reynolds: Redmond.
- Kiningham: Bill Redmond. Ironically, you had the Republican leader, Lee Daniels, a friend of Bill Redmond. Finally, after so many votes and so much time and dispersal, you had Lee Daniels stand up and say, "I cast my vote for Bill Redmond."

- Reynolds: So it took somebody from across the aisle.
- Kiningham: You had some other members talk about the Governor trying to get Bill Redmond elected. The Governor wanted Bill Redmond, I believe.
- Reynolds: I think in the Walker interview, he had one of his few phone calls with Daley on this particular issue and...
- Kiningham: Wow.
- Reynolds: ...they decided that Redmond was going to have to be the guy; they both decided okay? After all of this was said and done on that particular issue, Daley and Walker finally agreed on it.
- Kiningham: They might have made some progress after that because one agreement leads to another.
- Reynolds: Right. Walker also talks about—in his interview—his pride in these Executive Orders related to ethics that he sort of bypassed the Legislature on (chuckles) and was maybe one of the first Governors to do that. And just said “This is the way I want to run state government and I want it to be transparent, and I want to do what I can on this pay-for-play stuff and raising money with state employees.” Do you remember that getting much coverage by either the electronic or the print media?
- Kiningham: At the time that was covered. Then you move on to other stories, because remember, you’ve got competitive news stories and this is where the Governor may have gotten down-played because of what else was going on in Illinois. In the news business, it’s what’s the top, hard story: what do people want to hear, what do they want to know? An Executive Order on certain issues could very well be a situation where some of the listeners don’t want to hear it?
- Reynolds: It’s interesting to me though that Walker saw as his major mission this anti-machine, anti-patronage; he despised patronage, despised the way the machine operated politically.
- Kiningham: That’s what he was doing there.
- Reynolds: He came in to do that and got very little attention for that. I mean, we all know how that evolved in this state and where it’s evolved and that really didn’t seem to be a very significant thing that he’s remembered for, or that he was able to make much progress on, because, obviously, they went around it. And he wasn’t able to put it into law; he just kind of took a good shot at it and that was about it.
- Kiningham: I think some of those Executive Orders were not held. You know, they didn’t...

- Reynolds: Well, you had a Supreme Court fight over one of them.
- Kiningham: And lost.
- Reynolds: Right.
- Kiningham: But he made his point. And, you know, you can do that as a Governor, you can make your issue right, wrong, or otherwise and try to get some media publicity, some public awareness about where you are, whether it's right or wrong. We've seen Governors use that technique. I think in his heart he wasn't being a technique person; he really meant what he said. I think that's the one thing about Dan Walker...
- Reynolds: These are strongly held beliefs that he had. It worked to his disadvantage as Governor actually, in a lot of ways.
- Kiningham: As an independent with a Chicago Democratic machine and a downstate Republican force and they didn't always see eye to eye, so he had a built-in mountain crest on both sides and he's down in the valley and it's hard to get up.
- Reynolds: Right. It is kind of interesting though in his criticism of the media. I think what he's trying to say is that he got very little credit for that, yet the only time they wanted to cover that is when it's a scandal. We saw that evolve in Illinois state government; that becomes a theme over time. The only time the stuff gets covered is when it's a scandal. The people in general don't seem to be that concerned about the fact that patronage is ruling the system and that the Machine is in control and operates in a certain way and that kind of thing.
- Kiningham: They want to know: how much is it going to cost me and how is it going to affect me?
- Reynolds: They're willing to overlook a lot of stuff as the way state government is being run.
- Kiningham: Part of it is, even the reporters in the state capitol cannot find all the details. You have to petition for details, you've got to know people, you've got to work hard to try to get the facts, and certain media have the ability to do that.
- Reynolds: That would be more the print media.
- Kiningham: Absolutely. Print and some television staff from Chicago have investigative units. But, if I've got a news hole that has expanded into three news holes a day to fill, I've got a lot of stories to turn.
- Reynolds: You're going to take just what's popping up, what's bubbling to the surface.

Kiningham: Or, I'm going to go out and dig up some stuff and share it with my listeners. And that's important.

Reynolds: Right. Is there anything else you want to talk about in regard to the Walker administration? Any other points you want to make or memories that you have of the Walker administration? Because the next thing I wanted to do was talk about a lot of these other people we mentioned and your impressions of them.

Kiningham: Well, I think the memories of the '76 campaign come to surface. Before we talk about other people, Dan Walker was a success in many ways. He did establish a lottery; he did care about Illinois; he did know the downstate needs unlike many other Governors before him who never, ever went down there. Certainly, you had some powerful southern Illinois Democrats, mostly Democrats, come forth who pushed southern Illinois and central Illinois issues, but the population was in Chicago; the votes were in Chicago. I think the thing that concerned me was, the '76 campaign just got out of control. We've had some campaigns for re-election get out of control in Illinois. I can think of an Adlai Stevenson campaign for another day. You had Secretary of State Michael Howlett under pressure, he was losing his candidacy, he seemingly decently administrated, he was a humorous man, he gave great speeches, but...

Reynolds: Was he pushed into running against Walker in the primary? Did he really want to run for Governor?

Kiningham: I don't think so.

Reynolds: He didn't seem... I saw him a few times at events and he looked a little disinterested.

Kiningham: Yeah, well, and the thing about it is—and this is between us—he lost it in the press room in Springfield and, in an interview with me, used profanity.

Reynolds: This is during the primary?

Kiningham: Yeah. Used profanity.

Reynolds: What question did you ask him that set him off?

Kiningham: He was just ragging on the Governor at the time, the incumbent Governor.

Reynolds: Running against him in the primary.

Kiningham: Yeah and I would not use that audio bite. I didn't believe in profanity on my radio network and even if I beeped it, I couldn't use it, but when Michael Howlett....

Reynolds: Nowadays they'd do it, wouldn't they?

- Kiningham: Well, they may, depends on what it is and what the reference is; it's very important today. The times have changed. We're back in the '70s. You know, Michael Howlett is campaigning in the city of Rockford and lets it loose. They used it, and it came back to haunt him.
- Reynolds: The local Rockford television.
- Kiningham: And it led to his demise. And of course, from there on, you had researchers in Chicago...
- Reynolds: Is this the general campaign or in the primary?
- Kiningham: I think we're talking after the primary.
- Reynolds: So the general election. How did he handle himself during the primary? And did Walker ever?
- Kiningham: No, it was pretty...
- Reynolds: Did you sense that he thought he knew he was going to lose?
- Kiningham: That's all a smoldering glimmer at this point. There may be other reporters that covered this with seriousness, but it was an important campaign and I'll just leave it at that. I think citizens will—if they have an interest in this governor—are going to want to know more about that.
- Reynolds: Well, let's talk about some of the other people you covered during this period. We kind of mentioned a lot of them, but Clyde Choate, do you have any memories of him? The person that wanted to be Speaker of the House and didn't make it?
- Kiningham: He was a moving force in politics in the Democratic controlled Illinois House of Representatives and he did make a difference. He had a faction of supporters from southern Illinois. You had Michael Howlett from Chicago supporting the Chicago candidate, you know. You had downstate you had other...
- Reynolds: Choate was from—where was his...
- Kiningham: Southern Illinois. Yeah. And you had, oh gosh, the mind is starting to fry here,
- Reynolds: Well, let's go through these names and you'll maybe pick up memories. How about Robert Blair.
- Kiningham: Robert Blair was a very strong Republican and a factor in the Illinois House activities.



Reynolds: We talked about Roland Burriss. During this period he was in the Cabinet, you mentioned. Was it then later that he ran...

Kiningham: He was Director of General Services and got to know the...

Reynolds: So had not been in elected office at all by this period, but had been a Cabinet person.

Kiningham: Right. So he moved into the executive branch and probably was slated through the Democratic party and did very well.

Reynolds: He distinguished himself on the Cabinet so that he later ran for statewide office, which is interesting. He was one of the people that came out of the Walker administration with a pretty good reputation then, I would guess.

Kiningham: Yes. He probably made a lot of friends in the process, especially when you deal with General Services. I don't know Roland's total background without looking at his biography but he was something else.

Reynolds: Was he one of the cabinet members that you remember covering or interviewing?

Kiningham: I just know that he was in the Cabinet and I probably covered him a few times.

Reynolds: Which department was it did you say?

Kiningham: It was the Department of General Services.

Reynolds: Okay, which would be like CMS now.

Kiningham: Central Management Services, John Filan and the associate director.

Reynolds: Was there any interest in Dick Daley downstate? How did you cover the mayor?

Kiningham: Richard J. Daley was famous. People knew him, they knew of him, they respected him and I didn't care where you were from.

Reynolds: Even downstate?

Kiningham: Oh, absolutely.

Reynolds: It wasn't hatred of the fact that the Chicago machine ran the Democratic party?

Kiningham: There was a difference downstate from the Windy City, but at the same time, a lot of people downstate would go up to Chicago, they'd get near the big city, they'd turn around and come back. I mean, we had an interesting divergence

of public downstate. Farmers: how do you get along in the big city? You know, I've talked to ham radio operators across the state back from that era, the '50s and '60s and '70s, and they didn't like going to Chicago. It was a big city. Today it's a lot different. Today you can go to Washington, D.C. in an hour or two, and you can get all over the nation. But in those days you got around slowly. Richard J. Daley was highly respected. He was probably like the king of Illinois when he came to the Capitol. He was treated with respect by everyone, except, I remember when he was speaking to the Illinois House on a school budget issue and it was minority school funding. It was the creation of that branch of funding in state government for schools that had a high minority population. He gave a speech that silenced the Illinois House.

Reynolds: He wasn't exactly known [for] oratorical skills I wouldn't think, but he got to the point. (Chuckles)

Kiningham: But I remember Roscoe Cunningham got up to ask a question and Roscoe had his ears pinned back by the wild and woolly mayor of Chicago. The rhetoric was a little out of control, a little off-hand, but Roscoe was asked to sit back down. And the issue passed. Obviously, with bipartisan support, I do believe. But it was an important issue...

Reynolds: So when Daley showed up at the Capitol, something was going to get done.

Kiningham: That is correct. You rarely ever saw Richard J. Daley down in Springfield, but if he did come, you figured something major was going to happen and you knew every radio, television and newspaper had a reporter there. They often got there before he did so they could be prepared, because they cared about what the Mayor of Chicago did. He was indeed a powerhouse.

Reynolds: Did you ever get some nice audio from him?

Kiningham: Oh on that particular day, not one-on-one, but that speech that day still lives on.

Reynolds: It was probably hard to get near him, wasn't it?

Kiningham: Yes. The current mayor of Chicago was a state rep. So you know you got to know him a little, [as a] state lawmaker.

Reynolds: The guy who played really a major role in the Walker administration, Vince de Grazia.

Kiningham: Victor de Grazia. Highly regarded, highly respected political advisor, mover and shaker, but very little media contact.

Reynolds: Stayed behind the scenes pretty much.

Kiningham: Yes, very much.

Reynolds: But you knew he was there doing stuff. Were there stories about him in the paper, or was he pretty much out of sight, out of mind to the press?

Kiningham: Not from the electronics media side, but the politician reporters would love to chat with him and work that. Back in those days in Springfield in the early years, every leader had a place in a pub in Springfield after hours where you could go talk to the Democratic president or the Democratic minority leader, or the house speaker. Not everybody went to a pub, but the era of the '60s and '70s was a little more social. Today people are going on walks. You will rarely ever find a lawmaker out. You might find a handful here or there. I can remember a Lieutenant Governor who went to do some twirling of a young lady in a pub one night in a dance hall. But we won't go there because that's not in this administration.

Reynolds: Right. Right. Alan Dixon: what would he have been?

Kiningham: He was Treasurer and then, I believe became Secretary of State. I don't remember the exact years, but Alan Dixon's secretary moved into the apartment building I was in. I got to know Alan Dixon. I go back to the era of the shoe boxes and reporters.

Reynolds: Paul Powell and the shoe boxes, of course.

Kiningham: Yeah. The thing that is interesting to know is that we've seen a lot. Remember I talked about five Chicago newspapers and you've got two today that cover the state government. You had the *State Journal* and the *State Register* in Springfield.

Reynolds: Two papers.

Kiningham: You had two politician reporters, now you've just got one for both and it's one paper. We had a lot of changes, a lot of newspaper challenges in those days, very good reporters. One of those went to work for Paul Powell and later Alan Dixon, Gene Callahan, was a very special reporter.

Reynolds: Yeah, I mentioned his name before.

Kiningham: You had good media relations. The one thing I learned from inside the Alan Dixon administration because of so many people I knew—and they were social with Republicans, too—when they had a bill moving through the House or the Senate, they knew where every vote was, who was on the issue, who was not, who was neutral and they watched the vote. They actually played the game. I was very impressed. Today, I'm afraid our current Governor has no idea who's going to vote for what.

Reynolds: It's a crap shoot. (both chuckle)

Kiningham: But back in this era, these people played politics, they played the game, they knew the players and they were very interactive. And remember, we had an extra fifty-nine members in the Illinois House at that time. So...

Reynolds: They had a lot to manage. Neil Hartigan.

Kiningham: Neil Hartigan, very interesting. He was a slow riser, but very respected.

Reynolds: Came out of the Chicago machine.

Kiningham: Oh, absolutely. He obviously wanted higher office quicker, but was slow to get it. But very respectable man, very easy to talk to, very honest and straightforward.

Reynolds: Ended up as Attorney General, I believe.

Kiningham: Wanted to be Governor, I think, at one time.

Reynolds: Ran a very respectable campaign against Jim Thompson, I believe once. Bill Harris.

Kiningham: Bill Harris, boy, I'm reaching back for memories and can't... It does ring a bell but I can't tell you.

Reynolds: That's alright. That's alright. We've already talked about Mike Howlett. Anything else you want to say about Howlett, as Secretary of State and his gubernatorial run.

Kiningham: Served a good lunch.

Reynolds: Served a good lunch? (chuckle)

Kiningham: Steak and french fries at news conferences. Always got good media turn out, good play. And he addressed his issues directly.

Reynolds: I will never forget, I saw him one time at an event and he was eating peanuts, he had peanuts in his pocket. Seemed a little, not exactly tuned in to the event, but yeah.

Mary Lee Leahy, we talked about.

Kiningham: Mary Lee Leahy, very active, very moving, very responsible and respectful, independent kind of appointee who cared very much about the issues she dealt with.

Reynolds: Dawn Clark Netsch.

Kiningham: Amazing person.

Reynolds: Came out of the Constitutional Convention also, I recall.

Kinningham: Not only did she come out of the Constitutional Convention, a Northwestern law professor, knew all about the Illinois Constitution. In later interviews we might talk about Dawn Clark Netsch and her differences with James Thompson, a governor of later era.

Reynolds: She ran for Governor, right? What was her role during that? Was she a strong Walker supporter?

Kinningham: I think there were a group of legislators that took the Walker issue, about seven independents, if you will, in the Illinois Senate and I think she was one of them.

Reynolds: Cecil Partee which I think we mentioned already. He became the...

Kinningham: A very good Senate President. He was very personable. I covered the Senate for over forty, oh, about thirty-five years. I got to know all of the senators, some more than others and you could talk—reporters would wait for Senate presidents and Senate minority leaders, depending on whichever party was in control—when they'd come in and out of their offices to go in and convene the session. You'd get some great news stories that way. I mean, we're talking back-hall interviews.

Reynolds: Just hanging out over at the Capitol.

Kinningham: Well, our offices are in the Capitol and so you go downstairs or upstairs. When I first started our offices were on the third floor, the same floor as the Senate and the House. They later moved them down to the mezzanine, which was between the second and the third floor on the west wing of the Capitol. Now they're talking about what do we do now? That's another issue for another day, but I will just say that staffs have expanded over the decades and people want to take over the media facilities. Some states like Arizona have in-house media facilities and Michigan and other states—Georgia—do not.

Reynolds: They've moved out.

Kinningham: Yeah. So we won't go down that road today, but I will just say a lot of these people we're talking about would come in and talk to the media, maybe one-on-one. It wasn't uncommon to see people come in. My first office in the press room was in the back of the press room. My second office—because Bill Miller helped design it—was right at the entrance to the press room and I got to see every politician come in. And, I'll tell you, it was a benefit for a radio reporter to see the Speaker of the House or the Senate President come back to talk to the *Chicago Tribune*, and if you had your microphone there you might be able to get a thirty second comment from them on an issue. It really made my day and our listeners' day when I could do that and I did it a lot. Reynolds: Cecil Partee was one of the persons that would...

Kiningham: And one of the grid iron was “Cecil, Cecil, Cecil Partee” (singing) you’d sing, yeah, he was highly regarded.

Reynolds: I’m trying to remember, did he run for statewide office? Or try? Or at least have ambitions to do that?

Kiningham: Probably every politician does.

Reynolds: Right. Lee Daniels.

Kiningham: Well, we mentioned Lee earlier because we had a Speaker of the House, a Democrat, get his vote and that moved the legislative process forward. Lee was highly regarded, I think. We saw the Republican Party get fractionalized over the decades, but at this time in his life he was a mover and shaker and worked well.

Reynolds: Did he come out of the Constitutional Convention, too?

Kiningham: I do not recall.

Reynolds: I can’t recall either. It’s certainly one of the names along with Madigan that you remember. Pat Quinn who has this unbelievable reputation for being a maverick also, and sort of a guy who’s constantly working on causes and that kind of thing. What role did he play during the Walker administration?

Kiningham: Well, I don’t know what his role was, but I know he did work in the Dan Walker administration.

Reynolds: But an administrative job, maybe a Cabinet level position?

Kiningham: I honestly don’t... I would have to research that. I didn’t do a lot of work with Pat Quinn at the time, but I will say that he was very active. I think he worked the media as much as anybody. You know, you run in to these people that come down into the press room and say “Hi” and then go on and do their thing. But you know, he had other issues; he had people issues. He was very active in human interest issues and people issues and moved in that direction.

Reynolds: He was big on the ethics issues as I recall and the cut-back amendment was, of course, his.

Kiningham: The fewer fifty-nine members in the Illinois House was a result of some of his efforts, which may have given Chicago more strength than less, ironically, and that may not have been what he wanted.

Reynolds: Right. And then lastly the two sort of giants of this period: Paul Simon, who of course lost in the primary, and Adlai Stevenson III, who at that point... was he holding elective office? I should have looked to see what his... because he

was the Treasurer. But during the Walker years I'm trying to recall what his role was. Maybe he hadn't been elected yet.

Kiningham: He was a very effective... Adlai Stevenson III was State Treasurer...

Reynolds: During the Walker years he was the Treasurer.

Kiningham: He was pre-Alan Dixon who became the fifty-seventh State Treasurer, elected in 1970.

Reynolds: So he would have bridged half of the...

Kiningham: Some of the term.

Reynolds: Yeah, right.

Kiningham: We saw a lot of changes during that period. Ray Page was the State Superintendent of Public Instruction—my old history teacher and coach who was at Springfield High School—who was replaced by Dr. Mike Bakalis.

Reynolds: Was he the principal at Springfield High?

Kiningham: No. No. He was a history teacher. He needed time to do the basketball sports and go to State. We could go down that road, but we're back really in the Ogilvie period.

Reynolds: Right, right. And, of course, Paul Simon; we already talked about his instrumental role at starting the program out at Sangamon State University.

Kiningham: He was very influential and of course that allowed students to get to know him. He motivated the students to cover state government, and who better to tell you how to cover state government? But Paul Simon was much more than that; he worked with Bill Miller and many others while he was in the legislature to get some major openness legislation passed. I think we were moving towards open meetings and not private meetings but public awareness and a lot of other things during this era. And you saw that stuff evolve and become enacted, if not immediately, later years.

Reynolds: Probably Chuck Percy was the U.S. Senator at this time, wasn't he?

Kiningham: Charles Percy was quite active. Ironically you had a lot of Democrats in the Illinois legislature and all of a sudden you've got Republicans in the U.S. Senate and I think we may have had three. Back in the '69-'70 era when Nixon and Agnew were President, we had Everett McKinley Dirksen, Charles Percy and Ralph Tyler Smith and that changed as we moved into...

Reynolds: Smith got appointed and then I think he lost to maybe Adlai Stevenson III.

Kiningham: Yeah, I think you're right, which would have opened the door.

Reynolds: So the two Senators at that point would have been Adlai Stevenson maybe toward the end of Walker and Percy.

Kiningham: I'd have to research that.

Reynolds: Yes, it does blur together. I should have made some notes on who these guys were.

Kiningham: I would say one thing about Alan Dixon, and that is, he knew what he was doing.

Reynolds: He became Senator, too.

Kiningham: Yeah. But, I still remember him when he was Secretary of State. He knew everything about the legislative process. And was quite an amazing guy. Of course, he'd been twelve years in the house and eight years in the Senate and partnered with the State Treasurer for loan coordination during some of this period and was an activist in helping state government move forward. But he cared, you know? When he was in office he played politics but he also got things done. Whether it was Treasurer or Secretary of State, he made things happen.

Reynolds: And he was a very effective senator, too, U.S. Senator for the state.

Kiningham: Yeah, exactly.

Reynolds: Well, I covered all of my questions. Anything that we didn't cover that you wanted to talk about? Especially with regard to the Walker administration? We, of course, hope to continue these interviews about each of the Governors that you've covered over the years. You've also suggested that we talk [to] some other reporters and I think we're going to try to do that.

Kiningham: I think that's important. I think sharing one reporter's view is one thing, but the perceptions, the audience goals are all different. While I had news holes to fill every day, I couldn't spend my time just covering the Governor. I had to cover all the issues to keep my listeners informed and some things they didn't care about. If the Governor was off in New York City so be it; I still had a news hole to fill. That was the difference between radio and newspapers that have a lot of reporters and could do other stories and give a reporter in Springfield time to do a ... When I took over at the State Capitol, I walked into an army of newspaper reporters that were really doing research on investigative pieces. They loved the awards, they loved the ...

Reynolds: The Pulitzer and such.

Kiningham: Well, the things that made differences and the public cared about.



Reynolds: And it was that era, the Watergate thing had happened and made reporters kind of stars and that kind of thing. So I think definitely someone from the print media we want to talk to. And we'll talk later about that. Maybe somebody from television as they're emerging would be good.

One last thing. I noticed in one of the things Walker covered in his interview, was the people around him thought he was presidential material and actually at some point were planning a presidential campaign. Now in his interview he said, "Yeah, yeah, I never really took that seriously, I wasn't..." Did you sense that there was something afoot that he might have... For instance, in '76 Carter was a complete unknown. He was a state Governor and came from nowhere to win the nomination. It just as easily could have been Dan Walker, I suppose. Did you sense that at all? Was there any coverage of that? That he had presidential ambitions and that people around him were thinking in that regard?

Kiningham: I think a lot of governors have that hidden.

Reynolds: They all think about it, huh?

Kiningham: I think they all do. And ironically, I did cover Jimmy Carter with an exclusive one-on-one interview.

Reynolds: He was here in Springfield very early on.

Kiningham: Two years into his term he got nervous and came to Springfield. I got a twelve minute interview one-on-one with him on the first day of the 444 days of hostages and I didn't know about it. And it's one of my most embarrassing moments in my news career was that I didn't know about it.

Reynolds: While he was President he came into town and you got an interview with him?

Kiningham: An exclusive, Secret Service; me and him. Just the two of us. Of course, the ABC-TV reporter was outside waiting with a crowd of people at Lincoln Land Community College. And I forgot to call CBS which was the affiliate we had or UPI or AP at the time and ask them a national question. I had made a list of questions to ask a President, but reflecting on that mistake, I've learned you want to cover all your bases. I think Dan Walker, while he may have wanted to be President and had the competence and capability at the time compared to a Jimmy Carter probably, you've got to have the right people in the right places to push you. I think we see an Illinois candidate now that may.

Reynolds: Yeah. Well Ben, this has been a real pleasure and hopefully we'll do some more interviews down the line. I really appreciate it. Thanks for spending the time to talk to us about this stuff and we'll talk to you again.

Kiningham: I will just say that there are other reporters who have things to share and maybe not even reporters, but people that knew the Governors that maybe you'll get a chance to share some of this with and it will mean a lot.

Reynolds: I appreciate it. Thanks.

(end of interview #1)

## Interview with Ben Kiningham

# ISP-A-L-2010-020

Interview # 1: April 30, 2010

Interviewer: Chris Reynolds

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Reynolds: This is April the 30th, 2010. My name is Chris Reynolds and I am a volunteer at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, part of the Statecraft program of oral histories. Today we are interviewing Ben Kiningham for the second time. Ben has been a radio reporter and bureau chief covering Illinois state government for many, many years. We did an interview with Ben several months ago on Governor Dan Walker and we're now going to do a second interview on the Thompson administration, Governor James R. Thompson. We did quite a bit of bio on Ben in the first interview. So you want to refer back to that if you are interested in his background, but I will sort of set the stage here and ask him to tell us what media related positions he held during the period when Jim Thompson ran for Governor and served as Governor for those four terms.

Kiningham: Four terms, 1977 to 1991, fourteen years. During that period I got married, I was the bureau chief not only of the Capitol Information Bureau Radio News Network but I also was the bureau chief for WGN Radio's Tribune Radio Network which had purchased CIB. There have been owners since. At the

time I was also back in 1982 elected president of the Illinois News Broadcasters Association. That's the largest radio-television news organization, one of the largest in the nation, and I've been a member of that organization since 1966. I was a member of the Illinois Legislative Correspondents Association at the state house and also serving as a captain and later a major in the U.S. Air Force 183rd Tactical Fighter Group as the public information officer. A lot occurred during those fourteen years with three children. But at the same time, JRT, Big Jim Thompson as he was known, was an amazing individual and it really made for fascinating accurate, quick radio reporting. The one thing I would like to mention is that during this period there was an era, can I just take a second for our listeners? (pause)

Reynolds: Okay. Is that the media thing or...

Kiningham: You can ask it.

Reynolds: I know that we discussed a lot of the media issues with regard to the Walker administration. So maybe a good place to start would be give us a brief reflection of the gubernatorial media conditions at this point when Thompson becomes Governor, how the media and the Governor's communications changed with the arrival of daily electronic media.

Kiningham: Let me go back to the time of Abraham Lincoln—newspapers, telegraph; and the Chautauqua conferences, where people would come in the summer times and get together. In World War II we had newspapers, telegraph and now we had radio—AM and short wave—and telephones. Telephones, you know, we didn't have that back in Abe Lincoln's time, but we did have the telegraph that helped the north win the Civil War. Now we're moving into Barack Obama's era with newspapers, radio, television, telephones, cell phones, internet, web sites, news sites, research, satellite television, Obama-vision when he was running for President, special day long media TV programming all day long on the satellite news network, the satellite distribution networks like DISH Network and satellite radio.

Evolution was changing during the World War II period into today, and James R. Thompson took the advantage of knowing Jim Skilbeck who was a radio guy from Indiana and a good friend. They learned a lesson from Dan Walker. "A winner walking tall" got a lot of media coverage in the electronics media. Now during this period back in 1974 in the Walker era, I became the first full-time broadcast network—radio network—from inside the state capitol every day. And there were other networks at the time. We ultimately, shall we say, competed with them and ended up buying them, but we grew from, like twenty stations, up to over fifty. The thing about it is James R. Thompson was media friendly. He knew with the guidance of a Jimmy Skilbeck to do talk shows, to go on WGN Radio in Chicago to do talk shows to interact with people, to take phone call-ins; that's the eve of new media. Now today we've got even more media but back in this 1977 period

with Jimmy Carter as President, Adlai Stevenson and Chuck Percy our U.S. Senators, and James R. Thompson in 1977 the Governor, we're on an eve of major communication reform.

I just wanted to share that because, you know, you can take an example, television went from black and white to 1955 color and then in later decades the 16mm film became video tape. The same thing: I used to carry a five pound tape recorder and all of a sudden you got to go to the little Dictaphone type of battery powered recorders. So with that the voices of the news makers came a lot quicker, a lot easier. We went from telephone feeds during the Thompson administration to satellite feeds and we got active with computer scripting, not the old IBM Selectric typewriters. So the James Thompson era for fourteen years saw a lot of media evolution, a lot more citizen coverage of the Governor and other issues in Illinois; that network grew to 2,000,000 listeners a day just for me. So I just share that as an aside as we get into talking about James R. Thompson.

Reynolds: When we discussed Dan Walker, we spent quite a bit of time talking about the sort of the balance between electronic and the print media. With the print media being the dominant sort of media when Walker started. By the end of the Walker term and into the Thompson term, is there sort of a balance between electronic and print?

Kiningham: When I started at the Capitol under Richard Ogilvie I couldn't ask a question for like the first fourteen, fifteen minutes because the print reporters were all in control of the press room. But electronics media had started to come in; we had two news networks, one was not in the Capitol—I was in the Capitol full time. As we grew, Dan Walker knew about media and allowed radio-television people to ask questions right at the outset. The big Chicago and St. Louis reporters would get mad at me because they'd ask one question, they'd have a big story and they'd go play golf or do what they did. Me, I had two news feeds every day, morning and evening for the listeners. So I needed a second question; they got mad at me sometimes for asking a news story. So it's interesting just to share that with you, that media changes. Now we have electronics media, satellite distribution and everything and every thing is instant. The citizens know. Back in Lincoln's time with the telegraph in the North they had it because the railroads needed it. Down in the South where they had states' rights they didn't allow telegraph except along the Mississippi River and along the ocean. So, communications has changed. The same thing happened during World War II when a guy over in Iowa, Gates Radio, did Navy radio communications for the submarines and they never lost contact anywhere in the world. Today communications is on a balance almost every where so there are new ingredients. But back in the James R. Thompson time, he was friendly with the media. Jim Skilbeck opened many doors; he was a radio guy who could go knock on the doors and actually get to know you, and open the door for his Governor. And so we got to do half hour and hour

shows, sometimes call-in; at the same we were in an era when stations still didn't want to spend a lot of money.

Reynolds: Just a follow-up on Skilbeck. You say he was in radio in Indiana?

Kiningham: He got started in Gary, Indiana, and somehow got to know James R. Thompson and was one of the guys that led that campaign in to the media business. If we get into talking about the first primary, which we will, we had a Dan Walker running for re-election and another Chicago Democrat running against him; they got into a battle and the media coverage was intense in the primary, but Michael Howlett—let's just say he had some problems within his administration because of some kick-backs or wheeling and dealing—

Reynolds: When he was Secretary of State?

Kiningham: Yes, and that came home to haunt him, and that really kind of won the election, I think factually, for James R. Thompson.

Reynolds: Let's back up a little bit. Did you have an impression or any knowledge of Jim Thompson before he ran for Governor? Had you covered him in any way?

Kiningham: Only that he was a prosecutor of Otto Kerner, who was indeed a valuable Governor for Illinois because the legacy of Otto Kerner was the restoration of the Old State Capitol, right in the foreshadow of Abraham Lincoln's Presidential Library in downtown Springfield. And another thing was, Otto Kerner was creator of the senior educational institutions across Illinois, now four year institutions—some of them like the University of Illinois Springfield<sup>2</sup> and others. Academics was a big goal of his and he achieved it, but some stock along the way and some other financial problems and the prosecutor was James R. Thompson. I didn't get to know James R. Thompson really until he kind of got on the campaign trail.

Reynolds: Would downstate reporters at all cover his prosecution of aldermanic corruption in Chicago and the fact that he was being discussed as a possible person to run for mayor? Did that ever come up in any of your coverage? I guess downstate people might not be that interested in that.

Kiningham: Folks outside of Chicago don't follow that. They care about the crops, the transportation, the bridges, the safety, family issues; politics is a back door even in the suburbs of Chicago. But you've got Chicago major media providing those stories and down in the Metro St. Louis area they do Illinois stories on occasion. But folks in Du Quoin care about things in their area and as a radio network that went up on the satellite during the Thompson years, we were able to serve all of them. So we could do a number of stories. We could do a Governor story, we could do a local lawmaker story for Rockford or Carbondale, we could cover the university stories, education, everything.

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<sup>2</sup> Originally Sangamon State University

So being a state house reporter is more than just covering a governor, but James R. Thompson made a difference.

Reynolds: Was he well known downstate when he ran in the primary?

Kiningham: He got to be known. He wasn't "a winner walking tall" because that was another guy, but at the same time he was "Big Jim Thompson." He went out and talked to people and got involved and did local radio station interviews, the call-in shows and talked issues and reached out to the people. You got to get out and touch base with people. The reason I mentioned Jim Skilbeck and some of the staff was that they knew how to do that. That was important to reach people. And the Skilbeck guy would come into your press room and say hi and get to know the news directors with the talk radio stations. Now you know, we've changed a lot. People would get up in the mornings and listen to radio news and then go home and watch television. Now you've got all of this other stuff and it's a little bit more saturated, but that's how a guy named Barack Obama helped win the Presidency. So the media coverage—we're talking '77 to 1991—and we're seeing this evolution, and Jim Thompson was right at the forefront. He knew from the Dan Walker years what to do, how to do it. He was a personable individual and a man to look up to, what, six four, six five?

Reynolds: Yep. Let's talk about that first election and the primaries, things that you remember, your impressions of that campaign. Your first impressions of Jim Thompson as a campaigner, although you've already talked a little bit about that.

Kiningham: Well, he was a former prosecutor. I think at the time when we had this eruption in the dispute between... you know Dan Walker lost the primary, Mike Howlett won the primary and then had a problem financially with some issues of campaign money and what have you. That benefitted a former prosecutor. I think citizens were looking at the time for somebody with honesty and Jim Thompson kind of filled the bill.

Reynolds: He came out of that election with the principle image of a corruption buster, a crime fighter; he had sort of a pragmatic image, a fresh face, sort of a white knight. A lot of people said he exudes a sense of candor; he's young, vigorous, and hard working. How did the media cover and help to create this image? Did the Governor-elect you covered behave consistently with that image?

Kiningham: Well, this was a candidate who had access to the media and was willing to go talk frankly with them, seemingly honestly, in the time of a growing electronic media with talk shows. They utilized those to the fullest. While you could call him a white knight or a corruption buster, I don't think that played as much as Big Jim. It's kind of like Dan Walker, a winner walking tall, they found that little thing to hang something on and this was a man to look up to.

Reynolds: The fact that he was a fresh face also probably played an important role in that.

Kiningham: And a prosecutor who fought crime within Illinois government.

Reynolds: Right. Right.

Kiningham: We're almost seeing that again with not only Rod Blagojevic, but his predecessor.

Reynolds: Right. Right. Thompson's personality has been described as gregarious, playful, informal—he was known for wearing jeans and boots probably especially downstate—a beer can kind of guy, a very laid back style, loved to socialize, wanted to be buddy-buddy with the media. What were your experiences like with the Governor in this regard? Did he have charisma?

Kiningham: He was a man to look up to, a man that could dialogue with GOP, the Republicans, he could dialogue with the Democrats: special interests in an effort to seek a solution. I still remember early on in his administration when the AFL-CIO, I believe it was, having a convention over in the Armory to complain and talk about projects with the State and everything else. Jim Thompson while very professional with the media, he was professional with everybody in terms of accessibility because I remember we got a phone call in the press room, "Thompson's going over to the AFL-CIO convention. If you want to go they announced it in the state house press corps, press room." Back in those days we had lots of newspapers, but we also had radio and television to a degree. So I grabbed the recorder, went across to the Illinois State Armory following the Governor, went in, got access, got in front of a speaker and stuck my mike up and Jim Thompson is in a... You know, this is a very Democratic body that probably supported the Democrat against Jim Thompson, but he made a speech that touched their hearts, that touched them.

Ultimately, over the years he was getting labor union endorsements. He actually could interact with people in a crisis and get them to come together, talk and agree, or try to reach a settlement. Economic times, up and down during the fourteen years of this chief executive but at the same time he accomplished a lot in terms of working together with people and you don't see the kick-backs and the under the table kinds of things that maybe you see later in administrations.

Reynolds: The idea that he wanted to be sort of a buddy to the media which was something that Dan Walker definitely was not interested in, was he sort of hanging out with people from the press? And dealing with them in a more informal fashion than other governors you had seen?

Kiningham: Richard Ogilvie had no access except at a news conference. And there were even state agency directors that would complain to me and other members of the media, We can't get in to see Richard Ogilvie and yet he was a good state

government administrator. Dan Walker had the cold glare in his eyes, a very businesslike approach always. The personality didn't seem to be there with the electronics media or newspapers. But at the same time he had access; you could get in and do interviews with him. But Jim Thompson, wow, he was accessible, no question was unfair that I can recall in the fourteen years of covering James R. Thompson. Now over the decade, if he didn't want to talk to you, he'd say Hi and smile and keep on walking. But he never ran out hidden exits at the Capitol like a later governor. He was always accessible.

Reynolds: This image of him as a guy who could dress in jeans and boots and drink beer with anybody downstate or upstate—have you got any examples of that that you saw?

Kiningham: He would sometimes come to the Capitol in blue jeans. You've got to remember, here's a guy that got to know a guy named Willie Nelson, Farm Aid. If Willie Nelson, here after twenty of these Farm Aid concerts gets on television and talks about it, how did he get the idea? He was at the Illinois State Fair with a guy named James R. Thompson, the Governor, and they sat down and talked before one of the shows and he said, "You know, farmers need fundraisers and more focus on the needs of U.S. agribusiness." Jim Thompson planted this seed with Willie Nelson, a musician and of course, they were in, you know.

When Jim Thompson was formal in the office he was always well dressed, suits, business, but you go to the Illinois State Fair, he dressed down. He took his family down the Giant Slide and rode horses and did all of this kind of stuff and got out to meet the people in blue jeans and a shirt. Of course, Dan Walker did that, too, because I had an audio of Dan Walker trying to croak like a rooster and almost choked. But you get Jim Thompson down in southern Illinois to one of those religious gatherings and he was singing along with everybody. You get him up in to Chicago and he's pretty much all business, but down with the folks in central Illinois and southern Illinois he could mesh with them a little bit. He wasn't phony. He would actually listen to what you had to say and some of the things he accomplished because of that are pretty amazing.

Reynolds: How would you say his charisma level was compared to say Walker and Ogilvie and the ones that you'd covered before? Did he notch it up a little bit? Or, in that regard?

Kiningham: Well you could always have casual access especially if you were media. And you could ask the toughest questions and if he didn't want to answer it he didn't answer it, but every governor is like that.

Reynolds: Some deliver several speeches so –

Kiningham: Oh, yeah–



Reynolds: He could really, really work a crowd.

Kiningham: He tried to work not only crowds in Illinois but I still remember going to Atlanta, Georgia, to a Democratic National Convention and in comes the Republican truth squad to the Democratic National Convention and he's working the Illinois delegation. Thompson's term Troika—referring to the three members at the time, Dukakis, Benson and Jackson—stuck. He wanted to call them the three headed monster. I mean he was aggressive politically and yet he could still sit down and work with them. It's pretty amazing, you know. I think the interesting thing about all of this is that Jim Thompson only had two years with an all-Republican House and Senate, otherwise he was working with Democratic administrations and he was able to work with them. Now I still remember one of his annual State of the State addresses when all the Democrats in the House walked out and the only people there for the broadcast that day were Republicans. But they came to an agreement before budget time.

Reynolds: What year was that? Do you remember?

Kiningham: No, I don't.

Reynolds: This is early on.

Kiningham: Oh, I'd say middle on. Early to middle on. Yeah. You know, you've got fourteen State of the State addresses. Then you've got fourteen budget addresses. And that's another factor; some of the people in his administration were awesome. You know, we mentioned Jimmy Skilbeck, but the budget director was just amazing—

Reynolds: Mandeville.

Kiningham: Bob Mandeville was one of a bunch of Jacksonville people that Jim Thompson got to meet during his campaign and the next thing you know they are all working for him.

Reynolds: Jim Reilly, I guess—

Kiningham: Jim Reilly is up in Chicago still working in the administration of governmental services, transportation. But you've got Jim Reilly and Bob Mandeville and some others. I think any governor that is successful has a good core of people and that's very important.

Reynolds: The sort of public sentiment that Thompson used throughout his fourteen years to his advantage in his campaigns and as he governed suggested that he was more civil and less confrontational. I think he played the anti-machine politics up pretty much, that he was sort of non-partisan and independent, again back to his candor and refreshing honesty, and he seemed unwilling to make promises. But also, people thought he was more into gimmicks rather

than programs, but he came off as a friend of the taxpayer. Interesting enough, he would give prompt apologies to mistakes that he made which maybe wasn't something that politicians necessarily did. Did your memories of that way he operated all ring true?

Kinningham: Well, let's roll back to anti-machine politics. He could work with the Democratic machine in Chicago. He could work with people. He was willing to negotiate with people. I think he had a willingness to work with any and all in some respect. Now, he still had his political and personal ambitions. Like I mentioned earlier, when labor unions would meet in Springfield he'd often times go to the State Armory and address them. There was one time that just blew me away. Soon after taking office, you know, we talked about the AFL-CIO convention, but crowds at the Capitol this year, April 21, 2010, were there to lobby for full funding to save jobs, but back in 1981 in June there were great numbers as the AFL-CIO opposed anti-labor initiatives in the General Assembly. Well, Thompson met with them and invited to the Executive Mansion for liquid refreshments. I mean beer. This Governor did outreach. Now, we're talking—

Reynolds: He actually got some union endorsements, didn't he?

Kinningham: Yes. Yes. I think his first three terms in office were years of cooperation and achievement. If I could make a personal observation, maybe his last two years—how would you say—the short term could have been with a little burn-out. I think he is the longest serving governor and he still worked with people, but I think we saw the budget go up. The ability to say no was hard and Jim Edgar inherited an interesting administration.

Now let me just say, I did the last interview with Jim Thompson as I've been able to do with a number of Governors in the Executive Mansion; just the two of us sitting and talking, reflecting for a half an hour—it was a radio show—on their achievements. The one thing Jim Thompson told me that I've always been curious about: "I've left a personal note to Jim Edgar upon his arrival in my office in the Executive Mansion that will be his office." I said, "What did you say in that?" He said, "That's for Jim Edgar to know." So these governors and subsequent governors occasionally would get some messages. It could have been a simple apology for some debt; it could have been areas of focus.

This Governor, Jim Thompson—let's talk about some of the things he did: Build Illinois, two billion in bonding to fix roads, airports, and sewer systems, you know. This is all record. The Martin Luther King Bridge in East St. Louis. So he did projects statewide, public-private partnerships which may have lead to problems later in gubernatorial elections as we know. In 1985 pushed for better schools. The Illinois Commerce and Community Affairs, DCCA, department created by James R. Thompson, was to better serve the global economy which also helped attract Diamond Star Motors to

Bloomington. It also gave him an opportunity to travel around the world to boost tourism, to bring in more traveler dollars not only from the U.S., but from overseas. Corridors of Opportunity, zoning, I mean, we're dealing with fourteen years of—

Reynolds: Enterprise Zones, you're probably thinking of.

Kinningham: Yes. Corridors of Opportunity that boost corporate investment. The Illinois State Fair—now he loved the fair. Many media opportunities every day he was out there got him coverage. But the PR opportunities included his daughter, Samantha, and his wife, Jayne Ann Carr Thompson. Corrections. This is kind of interesting. Overcrowded prisons led to Build Illinois funding and I don't know how many prisons, well over a dozen I think were built during his term. Then you get a Rod Blagojevich in who's got financial problems; he auctioned off the contents of some of those and they're still unoccupied. Class X, anti-crime sentencing for repeat offenders, no parole, which meant more long term prison overcrowding. Well, we hope some of those folks that were building weren't in it for political gain in terms of construction and kick-backs. In some states even the telephone lines, judges own some of the phone companies so I don't know what Illinois has. But Equal Rights: while Thompson seemed supportive—this was during GOP House Speaker George Ryan's tenure back in '81 to '83—the ERA vote, despite support from the President's wife lobbying lawmakers, failed. Thompson was taking kind of a neutral approach: If it gets to me, this was really a legislative action for Congress. Illinois kind of blocked it. We had ladies chain themselves to the Senate door on that issue, you know. This was all during this era, pro-business legislation. GOP Speaker, Lee Daniels, 1995 to 1997 was the window of opportunity for Republicans and what I found is that, when you have all political parties in office, they can't seem to agree. Everybody wants everything and they don't get hardly anything. But they got pro-business labor legislation approved, signed into law by Thompson during that period. I don't think the Democrats have been able to resolve some of it in court; they've been able to resolve some of it you know, with Democratic legislators. So a footnote was just maybe Jim Thompson, the longest serving Governor, was a little too long in office to allow some things. I know there was a productive twelve years of service and I think even the last two were financially challenging, but financially positive at the same time.

Reynolds: You just kind of went over some of the dominant issues in his administration; as you pointed out, in fourteen years there's a lot of them. Was there a way that he managed the media in terms of getting the kind of favorable coverage that he wanted on many of these issues? Or...?

Kinningham: No, he didn't manage the media at all. He was accessible. Now, did he tell us what he wanted to tell us? Yeah, but then we got to ask other questions on other issues and, you know, we cut to the bone. And where he could, he would answer them. Sometimes he would push it off, but I could do four and five

stories a day for my radio listeners, couldn't get them all on. But he was candid, and unlike other governors up to this time, he'd answer our questions. Now we've had some successor governors that wouldn't be as open as that, but this man had the capability to talk and answer and make some sense.

Reynolds: Can you think of any examples where he made some public apologies for mistakes that his administration had made which you thought was refreshing and different from previous governors you'd covered.

Kiningham: Right off the top of my head, I can't.

Reynolds: Okay. That's alright, we can move on. During the Thompson administration, the Rutan Supreme Court decision was made and found that hiring based on political affiliation was unconstitutional.<sup>3</sup> Did you cover this issue with the administration? And how serious do you think they were in enforcing that ruling? Or did they spend a lot of time trying to get around it? I guess I'm sort of showing my bias by that question, but what was your impression of the way they handled that?

Kiningham: You know, that's a big issue and I think it's one that as a bureau chief you can delegate certain things. I covered the Senate; the ladies, or interns, or other reporters that worked with me would do specialized things and that's an area I did not cover as much as everyone else. So...

Reynolds: I'm just remembering the campaign with Adlai Stevenson. He was constantly using the words "pin-stripe patronage" and of course, we all remember the continual hiring freezes that occurred which maybe weren't really hiring freezes as many state employees felt. Those weren't something you ended up covering, You think other people did?

Kiningham: You know, when you're doing up to five and six stories a day sometimes it all gets kind of meshed together and I can't come up with specifics, but I know there are other reporters like Charlie Wheeler and others that probably focused a lot on those issues.

Reynolds: Okay. We've said over and over again, he was in for four terms so that's a long time. There are many people that wrote that there was a level of extravagant behavior regarding him receiving gifts and his international travel, his use of state planes, involvement with national politics, of course, his presidential ambitions, and we spoke earlier of his sort of international travel as a salesperson on these industrial sweepstakes like Diamond Star and Saturn. Did you cover that and sense that maybe toward the end of his administration things had kind of got a little out of hand?

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<sup>3</sup> The Rutan decision basically allowed only positions involved in policy-making to be filled by appointment without the restriction, based on the need for top policy-makers to have supporting associates. See the ALPL interview in this series by Mary Lee Leahy, the attorney who took the case to the U. S. Supreme Court.

Kiningham: Well, we talked a little earlier about the fact that the same things seemed to be dying down a little bit and the economy was changing and it was hard to attract new industries after Saturn and Diamond Star, but you could keep some going. You could keep jobs in Illinois; it was tough, but DCCA, Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, that he created, did in fact bring a lot of business to Illinois during those fourteen years, and helped promote some tourism and did a lot of other things. But I think the national political conventions are lots of places we're there to cover the delegates from, Illinois for example, but we don't see the meetings that they have with huge corporations that are at these conventions. And I don't care whether it's Democrat or Republican; you still have the big corporate interests, the telephone companies, now you've got websites and all these people doing outreach to these people for certain reasons. You help me, I'll help you. I don't know if that's government or not, but if it has a benefit for the State of Illinois it might be something to follow but it's hard to know.

Reynolds: So you don't necessarily think that some of the behavior during his terms was anything different from what you saw from other governors?

Kiningham: Well, he was more open. He more interactive, he did outreach. He wasn't cold or strictly administrative. I think a lot of his department directors could get in to talk to him, but he had a chain of command that was influential. We go back to the budget director, Bob Mandeville. If you're a director of an agency Bob could answer your questions. He knew every penny going everywhere, I swear. And there's another agency that always was kind of fun to track and that was the Auditor General. It is a constitutional office created by the Illinois Constitution of 1970. As a reporter you always pay attention to what the Auditor General finds; the governor didn't always agree, shall we say, with audit findings. Sometimes those audit findings in different agencies because of cost and efficiency 40,000 to 60,000 people, some folks just aren't going to cut it. We didn't have any major crime. Occasionally, you'd find a lot of things that could save taxpayers money and you reported the heck out of that. But the Auditor General's office has been a very effective, shall we say, beacon onto every administration. Some governors just don't like the Auditor General, but their staff has done a very good job and it's not politics.

Reynolds: You've mentioned several times during the fourteen years that he was Governor he was confronted with several terms where Democrats controlled the legislative bodies.

Kiningham: Oh most of the time.

Reynolds: And I think you said maybe there was a two year period...

Kiningham: All but two years.

Reynolds: Yeah.

Kiningham: Now you did have usually a Republican Senate President, and a Democratic House Speaker, named Mike Madigan (chuckles)

Reynolds: Right.

Kiningham: Well, and you also had a guy named Bill Redmond that was amazing. I mean, his election was nothing, and you know, you had George Ryan in the House for two years and Art Telser in for two days, another Republican, because Ryan left early. But then Mike Madigan has been there almost ever since.

Reynolds: Well—

Kiningham: They were able to work together on a lot of things.

Reynolds: Clearly, we've talked about some of the accomplishments in the administration, but clearly they were able to build consensus on a lot of issues, do a lot of things in a bi-partisan manner, balance competing interests, were willing to compromise instead of confrontation. Does this have more to do with the people in the legislature that he was able to work with than him, or is it primarily his personality that made it possible to get these things done? Or probably a combination of both?

Kiningham: I think a lot of it was a combination of the staff you have to get things done. I still remember a Secretary of State tracking every inch of every piece of legislation that he had going through the House and the Senate and how it did, were the amendments going to hurt or help. Some of these folks paid close attention, but you need staff. You need political liaisons and I think Jim Thompson basically had a good staff of people to do that.

Reynolds: Like Mandeville,

Kiningham: And others.

Reynolds: Skilbeck, as you mentioned, and his agency directors, maybe he selected them.

Kiningham: Some came and went, but you know you look for some of the best people you can. And of course, the economy has a lot to do with what you can accomplish as a governor and that means federal funding as well as state.

Reynolds: How important were his personal relationships with the leaders in the House and the Senate? Did he get along with everybody, because we've just seen an example of a governor that can't seem to get along with the leaders?

Kiningham: I think you had a talking relationship and a negotiating relationship and I still remember certain issues where they would go to the Executive Mansion and meet for hours and hours and hours. And the leaders would go. They didn't just get up and walk out. Now, maybe they'd reach a point where they'd leave

and go back and talk to their caucuses, you know, the Democratic Caucus, the Republican Caucus in the House and the Senate. Then they'd go back with the, What's next? You see a lot of that. The average citizen wouldn't probably track it as well. But the door was open for discussion and Jim Thompson was able to achieve a lot as a governor when other governors couldn't because of that interaction with the legislative leaders. Now did they always like each other? No. When the Democrats walked out of one of the annual State of the State addresses or the Budget address, you knew there was a problem. And, of course, that's what you would focus on.

When a reporter covers a State of the State or a Budget address, it's not always what the governor says but what he doesn't say. What agencies didn't he talk about, what services did he not talk about that he might cut, or modify. So for fourteen years you listened for everything and then you shared responses, because if the governor said something or didn't say something I could go to the voices of the newsmakers, the lawmakers pro and con and let them talk in sixty-five or forty seconds, bam bam and get people thinking about what's going on, get a better understanding. And that's the beauty of some of the electronic media today; you get to hear the voices of the newsmakers on all the issues.

Reynolds: What was the issue when they walked out that time that you've referred to? It was a budget issue; did it have to do with taxes, or certain agencies that he was going to cut?

Kiningham: You know—

Reynolds: I can't recall either.

Kiningham: The mind is muddled.

Reynolds: Yeah, okay.

Kiningham: Some research will yield that. But they were sending a message and it may have been something on taxes but we had fluctuating taxes during this period as well, both on property, on city-county shares of the income tax which was proclaimed in the '70 constitution, I do believe. And, of course, it hadn't been implemented in the Walker administration so Thompson dealt with that issue and that's a real battle, you know. Of course, the abolition of the personal property tax versus increased income tax—changes over the decades get complicated. Then, of course, you had some surtaxes in there that meet budget times.

Reynolds: Thompson, of course, during his period had to deal with some pretty tough economic times. I think unemployment got as high as almost, I think, eleven percent by the midpoint. So he was always dealing with budgets and revenue problems and that kind of thing.

Kiningham: That's what a governor does every year.

Reynolds: Yeah, right.

Kiningham: And, of course, if you've got a staff person like Bob Mandeville, he can really help you at least understand where the money is going and where you can get financing. Now, a subsequent governor taking excess funds out of over 330 accounts that were for specific funding, I was surprised there wasn't more of an uproar over that from the citizens of Illinois that pay the funds and fees and taxes for specific funds. Well, of those 330 funds some of them probably aren't around any more.

Reynolds: This gets to the, I think, probably the first time I heard the term "smoke and mirrors." It was back during the Mandeville years and Thompson. A lot of people have remarked that he used a lot of gimmicks in this process. Did you sense that that was going on during the Thompson years since he was dealing with tough economic times and revenue problems, temporary income taxes and that kind of thing.

Kiningham: Yeah. I think you get into smoke and mirrors verbally when you're dealing with funding for every thing. They really want that highway built in their little town and then you do a radio show and the lady in the town says, But my favorite tree is going to get taken down. I think we stopped doing some of the interviews after some of those calls from the small towns of Illinois. But, yeah, they come out with the big proposals, but then you still got to have the legislative support and the legal support in the Illinois Supreme Court. Those issues would come up to the Supreme Court and Jim Thompson won a few. There was a State Senator who taught law up in Chicago that often would collar him out in the Rotunda and say, "You can't do that." And eventually there might be a legal challenge and she was right. Dawn Clark Netsch, who came in back in the early years, was quite special on those issues. It was always fun to see her collar him in public with the microphones going.

Reynolds: How important was Build Illinois to his success, sort of keeping everybody happy and trying to stimulate the state's economy and that kind of thing?

Kiningham: Long term, from a debt standpoint, I don't know how that's transpired but at the time jobs means employment, means cash flow, means taxation, means improved highways, byways.

Reynolds: It was popular with the legislature I would guess.

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. Well, if you can get some money for your district then you've got something to run for re-election on, don't you? And if you can make it safer for the citizen, that's very important. Yeah, we saw a lot of that over the decades, not just with Jim Thompson, but Jim Edgar and even George Ryan. Oh, yeah, well he would probably be dedicated as the kingmaker of deals.



Reynolds: Illinois First I think is what he called his program. Everybody's got a name for it.

Kiningham: Well, you come back to Big Jim Thompson, that's a name—Big Jim. What can Big Jim do? What can special programs do? Build Illinois, well, why not? Now there were battles over tollways versus free highways. I think Jim Thompson won that one where they wanted a tollway in Chicago and it was never built during his administration and still never been built.

Reynolds: Cross town?

Kiningham: Yeah. So you get into these issues that were probably good for the people; they didn't have to pay but the state still had to finance repairs years later because roads deteriorate. But at the time I still remember Dan Walker wanted to raise the admission at the Illinois State Fair and Bill Miller, a reporter at the Capitol at the time. Dan Walker said, "I'm not raising any fees," Bill Miller, reporter, said, But, Governor, you're raising the fee to enter the Illinois State Fair that year. He said, "If I am, I'm not going to do it." He changed his mind and Dan Walker did not raise the fee. I think that was pretty amazing and that was one of the things that Bill Miller took with him over his life. Of all of the things, you know, you interview Presidents and Governors and things, but a little thing like that is very important.

I was thinking the other day about being the number two person in North America and the world to find out about Lee Harvey Oswald being the man they arrested, because of a phone direct distance dialing in Anna-Jonesboro, Illinois. Just being a reporter, my boss direct distance dialed Dallas and got the name, fed it to UPI and it went around the world. It didn't dawn on me until just this year, or last year, that had been the case, or the fact that a Secretary of State employee said, We can't get amateur on the ham radio license plates so guess who [was] the reporter [that] said, Well ham is okay, that's what we are. I was the licensed amateur radio operator. So you come back into these little simple things in life. I think Jim Thompson might have been sensitive to that sometimes, but he didn't close a lot. I mean, we were in a time of change and challenge in every administration and if we ever—

Reynolds: He didn't seem very ideological in that sense, he was more pragmatic.

Kiningham: Yes. Pragmatic means employment sometimes and sometimes more taxes, or shall we say, fundraising opportunities.

Reynolds: He did have the courage to have temporary tax increases which seems to have eluded us for a long time here.

Kiningham: Yeah. You wonder about that but at the same time it still helped Illinois survive in an economic challenge.

Reynolds: Seems to me like he would campaign against a tax increase and then have the courage to, with his next term, take a look at the way things were going and say, "You know, we need a temporary tax increase" and he would do it.

Kinningham: Usually after an election.

Reynolds: Yeah, but then he would get re-elected.

Kinningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: Yeah, so I mean he would weather the storm.

Kinningham: Because sometimes you actually see effects of what that money went for and some people didn't lose their jobs.

Reynolds: He could make the case.

Kinningham: He was a good—shall we say—lawyer.

Reynolds: We've kind of gone over a lot of different policies that he took on during his fourteen years. Are there any ones in particular that you thought were extremely well done versus those that maybe had a bad impact and, of course, that could be under economic development, education, welfare reform, mental health, public safety. I mean there're all these different areas, even state agencies reorganizations that were helpful or not very helpful. Do you have any examples of those that you can think of?

Kinningham: Oh, gosh. Not right off hand. You know, you go through so much looking back and some of it's kind of fuzzy. (chuckles) You see some state agencies they created to help. Every governor seems to do that. You know, the legacy of the lottery, for example, from the Dan Walker era is still with us.

Reynolds: What did you think about the DCCA reorganization where they combined three agencies into one? I think it was—

Kinningham: I think that was probably beneficial initially and I think maybe—

Reynolds: Of course, every governor wants to —

Kinningham: Every governor wants to rename it—

Reynolds: [Every] candidate since then has said they want to get rid of it, but—

Kinningham: But then they use it.

Reynolds: Yeah, right.

Kinningham: Maybe not as much, but at the same time, I guess I'm not able to answer that question.

Reynolds: He seemed to be very big on historic preservation and promoting the arts. Did you notice a lot of that going on during his term? And how positive was that in your mind?

Kiningham: Well, living in the shadow of Abraham Lincoln's historic New Salem, I saw that park double in size. But at the same time, Bill Cellini's wife [Julie] who was a very active person in building buildings in Springfield, Illinois, and doing other things, including a hotel that he got a state loan for, shall we say. His wife was in charge of historic preservation and they had friends that really cared about Abraham Lincoln and the early days of that park and so they doubled the size. I think that was during the Thompson administration. And you saw the growth over the years under governors for visitor centers in some of these places.

Reynolds: Of course, you are now involved in things that go on around New Salem.

Kiningham: Yes. But at the same time that's one close to home, but he did outreach in a lot of areas, in almost every area, whether it be corrections, conservation, historic preservation, when they could.

Reynolds: Which is really, when you think about the revenue problems he had and the economy that he was dealing with, expansion of the prisons, expansion of the historic preservation, all of these things he was able to do during his fourteen years.

Kiningham: But the fourteen years were up and down, cyclical in terms of budget opportunities. And you had a democratic legislature that often times had to concur, at least in the Illinois House, except for four years so—

Reynolds: Right.

Kiningham: Now you better get it while you can.

Reynolds: Okay, sounds good. Let's move on. We pretty much talked about most of the policy areas that came up during the Thompson years and talked about many of them. I gave you a list of other, sort of political people that surrounded the Thompson administration, served in office during that period of the legislature, whatever. I'm just going to go through these names and if you've got comments about any of these people, go ahead. Let's first start with Roland Burris who I think was the Comptroller during much of the time.

Kiningham: Roland Burris was not only Comptroller from '79 to '91, but he became the Illinois Attorney General in January of '91 and it was friendly, generally very accessible, looking out for his own interests I think, but a good man.

Reynolds: Harold Washington who was, I think, the mayor during at least part of the Thompson administration.

Kiningham: Yes, Harold had been in the legislature but a lot of times when people go to great things they're low key in the Illinois House and the Senate and Harold Washington was both a rep and a senator. I didn't really get to know him that well. A few news conferences here and there and we always put stories out when they want to share an issue. It's like Jane Byrne: really didn't get to know her. She, obviously, was a Mayor of Chicago, too. But Chicago's not Springfield and, of course, they'd come down occasionally to lobby and you'd get to know them only that way.

Reynolds: Alan Dixon.

Kiningham: Quite a guy. Good Secretary of State, knew how to track legislation. He served, I think, until about 1981 and then he was off to the U.S. Senate. Alan Dixon did not hide from the media, but then maybe I had an indoor track because my neighbor was his personal secretary, JoAnn Brown. I remember when Doug Whitley back in the Edgar administration was the, shall we say, the, what was he?

Reynolds: He was Revenue, wasn't he?

Kiningham: Yeah, Revenue Director. He had to go in and ask Jim Edgar for permission to vote Democrat in the primary or his wife was going to get upset with him. That's a future interview maybe but Jim Edgar said, "Yeah, go ahead." That's a change from when I started as a reporter when people were seriously political. They got mad at the opposition party but Alan Dixon, you know, he trained and worked with many who moved on to major positions in his agency. They went on to Washington, D.C., head of the national corn growers. He did a lot and was accessible, but I still remember his staff and a guy named Gene Callahan, very pin-pointed, they tracked legislation, they knew where the votes were. It was interesting to get a little insight into just how politics at the Capitol really works sometimes.

Reynolds: Well, Alan Dixon was one of those guys who could have very easily taken a gubernatorial track rather than a senatorial track. But probably Jim Thompson's popularity made it almost impossible for him to consider a run for governor.

Kiningham: I think you're probably right.

Reynolds: Yeah. Neil Hartigan, another gubernatorial "wanna be."

Kiningham: Well, he was Lieutenant Governor '73 to '76, Attorney General '83 to 90, I think. He's a First District Appellate Judge back in December 2002, and I think he kind of likes that job. Neil was accessible, interviewable, a nice guy, but a lot of competition.

Reynolds: He comes into play with the Edgar administration more so when he runs for Governor. We've already talked about Mike Howlett a lot. Anything more you want to say about Mr. Howlett?

Kiningham: I would. You know, he was Auditor of Public Accounts from '61 to '73. The Constitution abolished that office in 1970. So that office, the Auditor of Public Accounts became the Comptroller. Mike Howlett ran for Secretary of State and actually was replaced by Alan Dixon. He was a nice guy, great Irish joke teller. From a media standpoint if he had a news conference it would probably be at the St. Nicholas Hotel with steak and French fries. A lot of reporters liked to go to his news conferences, but then he got into some problems as you know.

Reynolds: He would have succeeded Paul Powell at Secretary of State. Do I have that sequence of events right?

Kiningham: Well he was replaced by Alan Dixon.

Reynolds: Oh, Alan Dixon, that's right.

Kiningham: He was replaced by Alan.

Reynolds: Yeah, right. Mary Lee Leahy of course, had a more prominent role in the Walker administration, but with her involvement in the Rutan case, she was still very active. Did you have much exposure to her during this period?

Kiningham: Ironically, another reporter on my staff covered all of that so I didn't get involved with Mary Lee Leahy. But I had a respect for her and I know she is a very respected Springfield attorney. I think she probably still has her hand in the pie.

Reynolds: Lee Daniels who of course emerged to be quite a leader.

Kiningham: Thirty years in the General Assembly, in the House. He was speaker from January 9, 1995 to 1997. That was back under the administration of Jim Edgar, I believe, but...

Reynolds: He hadn't emerged in the leadership until the Edgar years.

Kiningham: Yeah. He was a hard-working Republican. He worked well with...

Reynolds: He's from the suburbs, as I recall.

Kiningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: Of course, Paul Simon, we could probably spend a lot of time talking about his career.

Kiningham: For years I had a picture of his daughter's corn field. She planted corn and wanted to grow it.

Reynolds: This is the daughter who's now the Lieutenant Governor candidate?

Kiningham: Yes. We're going back many decades, okay? But Paul Simon is an interesting individual simply because he did so much. You've got to remember, he was a Lieutenant Governor under a Republican and he was a Democrat. And they changed the Constitution after that to block, they wanted same party people. Otherwise if the Governor was out of town, the Democrat might have taken over.

Reynolds: He became Senator during the Thompson years, have I got that correct? I think so. He would have maybe succeeded Alan Dixon?

Kiningham: Yeah, back in about 1984 I think. I think Paul Simon might have actually, I might be mistaken, but I think he replaced Charles Percy.

Reynolds: Okay, okay.

Kiningham: I think Alan Dixon served from '81 on during the administration years.

Reynolds: Since we're talking about the senatorial people who were in and out during the Thompson years, Chuck Percy I guess would be at the very beginning but then—

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. Very accessible, very interviewable in the days of newspaper reporting, yet he'd still talk to me and we had some very good interviews for our listeners. As a matter of fact, back in that era there was a—

Reynolds: He would have been very much a Republican in the mold of Jim Thompson.

Kiningham: Oh, yeah.

Reynolds: Sort of moderate on many issues and—

Kiningham: Could work with a lot of people, didn't have the outgoing, I mean, he was the lawyer personality, very busy in terms of getting things accomplished. but you'd never see Chuck Percy in blue jeans, going around, I don't believe.

Reynolds: Pretty formal guy from Kenilworth.

Kiningham: Adlai Stevenson III was a little bit more, shall we say, easy going, but he was also very political.

Reynolds: Well, let's talk about Adlai Stevenson III who ran against Thompson twice and was probably the only guy that came close to almost beating him.

Kiningham: Oh, I was surprised he backed out. I'm surprised they didn't push that.

- Reynolds: He could have asked for a recount, in other words, and he didn't.
- Kiningham: He was State Treasurer back in '67 to, I think around 1970. So he had experience at the State Capitol and he was an easy-going guy and, of course, Adlai who was Governor of Illinois from '49 to '53—
- Reynolds: His father.
- Kiningham: Adlai E. And this is Adlai Stevenson III so, yeah, he finally just got off to the U.S. Senate.
- Reynolds: Do you remember much about that campaign when he almost beat Thompson? Was he...
- Kiningham: I remember the day-to-day reports. Of course, a lot of the analysis comes out of Chicago even though the Illinois Board of Elections is in Springfield, so you got to report a lot of the basics. But then you get into the legal aspects or the challenges and the big parties and they're going at it in Chicago. That's another arm of our reporting network at the time so I didn't have to do a lot of that.
- Reynolds: Do you recall why he didn't ask for a recount?
- Kiningham: I don't know. That's very interesting and I think a lot of people if they go back to that might have a lot of questions.
- Reynolds: Right, right. Let's see, Michael Madigan, who is still with us in a huge way. Had he emerged as Speaker during the Thompson years?
- Kiningham: Oh, yeah.
- Reynolds: I believe he had.
- Kiningham: Yes, longest serving Speaker of the Illinois House, 1971 until today. State rep, Speaker, January '83 to '85?, and 1997 until now. There were two interspersions there. We're talking 39 years as a lawmaker as we speak, going on forty. And I think he got in the legislature back in 1971 and moved quickly—
- Reynolds: Right after Con Con [Illinois Constitutional Convention in 1970].
- Kiningham: Yeah. Now there was Bill Redmond, Speaker of the Illinois House back in '77 when Jim Thompson took over and I still think Bill Redmond's election... Mike Madigan wasn't running at that time.
- Reynolds: We talked about that under Walker. That was quite an election.

- Kiningham: Anyway, Mike Madigan is the only man I've ever met who could sit, do an interview with you on tape and still peel an apple without ever touching it with knife and fork. I mean he's an amazing man with a daughter that's Illinois Attorney General [Lisa Madigan] as we speak, and his wife [Shirley Madigan], of course, was active in the Arts Council and led a lot of the arts stuff in Illinois under all Governors.
- Reynolds: How did he get along with Thompson? Was there a sense that they liked each other and got along real well or was it a-
- Kiningham: I think when you're in positions of power there's mutual respect but you don't always get along.
- Reynolds: Okay.
- Kiningham: And I think maybe there are times when you didn't see eye to eye; you don't know what went on in those executive meetings when the Governor would have meetings with the House and Senate leaders. And sometimes they don't talk about them, but there are points to be made and every issue has its positives and negatives and being of different political persuasions they did not always see eye to eye. Mike Madigan was very careful in what he would say. He never demeaned anyone, very often. On rare occasions in the 39 years I kind of hung around the Capitol when he was there, if you did a one-on-one with him he was very gentlemanly or he was no comment. So, from a gubernatorial standpoint that's an ace in your hole that what you talked about in the office isn't getting out on the street. Now there're some other lawmakers that like to leak that stuff and that always made for good stories, but point, counterpoint and Mr. Madigan is probably, I think, the longest serving Speaker.
- Reynolds: The impression of course is that Michael Madigan carries water for the Daley administration. Thompson seemed to get along real well with the Daley administrations so that you wouldn't think that there would be that serious of a conflict. It wasn't an all-out battle; usually they would work together on many things.
- Kiningham: But there are downstate issues, central Illinois issues, suburban issues and, of course, re-map issues. Every ten years they do re-map. You know, I still remember as a reporter seeing a very respected senator from Bloomington-Normal; the map came down to his farm went out around his farm and put him in a different district. Well, Mike Madigan and his crew changed that, they were having some fun with him, but they play these serious games all the time and this was Illinois politics. I think you see that on every issue when you get down to the nitty-gritty. Mike Madigan always had a good staff of people in the front with him, usually one or two persons, usually one assistant that could take it back and work it. He had some good legislative leaders in



the House that would go work the Democratic body; often times they were in the majority so Governor Thompson had to work with them.

Reynolds: Of course, all of this makes it very entertaining to cover these people.

Kiningham: Oh, yes.

Reynolds: Here's one: Dave O'Neal, who apparently became bored at being Lieutenant Governor, which I guess is understandable, but was not around very long. Do you have any impressions of him at all?

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. Nice man, always very nicely dressed, what, 1977 to 1981 when he resigned. He enjoyed the era of party pubs in the evening on occasion. I was hosting a news director from one of the biggest Chicago radio stations in Illinois history and he wanted to go out and see where lawmakers went after session. And so we went to a pub. Let's just say Dave O'Neal was having fun on the dance floor after we left and this news director was kind of upset about that. Back in those days, and still today, there are certain places legislative leaders go to have dinner. Some don't go. We've seen an evolution, away from the taverns and drinking, to restaurants for dinner or theatre and things like that. The legislature has changed.

Reynolds: Can you think of some of the watering holes that were big during the Thompson years?

Kiningham: Oh, yeah, but we won't name them, we'll just say...

Reynolds: Oh, might be interesting for people to remember them.

Kiningham: But, let's just say, there was one night club where they had a dance floor. I still remember being in there when we talked to a lot of legislators from Chicago, Republican and Democrat, but the irony is, you could go to one place and Senate President Phil Rock would be there or the Democratic Senator, you could go to another place and the minority leader would be there, you could go to another place and the House... Mike Madigan you never saw out except at a certain Italian restaurant in Springfield for dinner with his leadership.

Reynolds: I think I can guess what that is.

Kiningham: I would just say--

Reynolds: So there were certain guys had certain places that you knew they'd be there.

Kiningham: Oh yeah. I still--

Reynolds: So if you wanted to catch up with somebody on a story--

Kiningham: I still remember going to talk to a certain Paul Powell, I think maybe, or one of those administrative officials not in the legislature but—

Reynolds: State official.

Kiningham: I knocked on door of the pub to get an answer to a question. They said, “Well he’s not here.” I said, “Yes, he is.” Finally he came out and said, “What do you want”? “I just need one audio bite for my listeners.”

Reynolds: So they would be accessible at these kind of —

Kiningham: Sometimes, yes or no.

Reynolds: Depending on their mood.

Kiningham: If it’s a major story that’s going to play well on the radio the next morning you want to go. Now over the decades I was not a night person, I was not a socialite. But if you had somebody come in from a big station and they wanted to go somewhere and they were one of your master affiliates, you wanted to take them around and show them. But you get married during the Thompson administration you want to be home with your family. And I lived up in the shadow of historic Abe Lincoln’s New Salem and so I had a twenty-two mile drive. So you worked til six to nine o’clock at night preparing the stories for the next morning and you’re back at it the next morning.

Reynolds: Was there a back story on Dave O’Neal wanting to get out of the Lieutenant Governor’s office, I mean, other than the sort of rumors that he was bored.

Kiningham: I think he was just bored because a lot of the Lieutenant Governors don’t get gubernatorial funding, they’re not part of the team, they’re secondary. And yet they can become Governor as we’ve seen.

Reynolds: He kind of saw the writing on the wall that Big Jim was going to last a while, looked like.

Kiningham: Well, and he wasn’t the only one that left during some of these administrations.

Reynolds: In terms of directors and that kind of thing.

Kiningham: Well, no, I’m talking about Lieutenant Governors. We had a couple that didn’t complete their terms; Dave was one.

Reynolds: George Ryan would’ve been the second person that was Lieutenant Governor under Thompson.

Kiningham: Well, yeah and there was a lady in there some where under one of the Governors and then there was one that I think was under Edgar that...<sup>4</sup>

Reynolds: Bob Kustra maybe?

Kiningham: Yeah, went off to teach and run a college out in Kentucky.

Reynolds: So what you're saying is this happens frequently (laughs) to Lieutenant Governors.

Kiningham: And there's no replacement.

Reynolds: Yeah, right.

Kiningham: And, of course, it depends on the administration. Can they be active or not? Can they have power? What can they do? Some Governors really go after it. I still remember the Democratic Governor, Paul Simon, using a word I'd never heard before where I'll deal with your problems. Reynolds: Oh, when he was Lieutenant Governor.

Kiningham: yeah.

Reynolds: Under a Republican. And of course, our system of having these people run independently sort of feeds into that also. You get the impression that Thompson pretty much picked the people—I

Kiningham: Oh, yeah.

Reynolds: —that he wanted to be Lieutenant Governor.

Kiningham: Yeah, but you can still—

Reynolds: Pat Quinn would be an example of somebody who probably Blagojevich wouldn't have picked.

Kiningham: That is correct. Yeah.

Reynolds: So maybe our system has a lot to do with that disinterest or lack of motivation to continue to be Lieutenant Governor.

Kiningham: And on the eve of constitutional reform some people would like to abolish the office and then just let it spill on down. Reynolds: I think there is, isn't there, a bill waiting for Quinn's signature to force them to run as a team in the primary, I believe?

Kiningham: That would be interesting.

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<sup>4</sup> Corrine Wood, 1999 – 2003, Lt. Governor under George Ryan. Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Lieutenant\\_Governors\\_of\\_Illinois](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Lieutenant_Governors_of_Illinois)

- Reynolds: I think that's been discussed or whatever. Was Bill Scott still a major force during the Thompson years? He was the Attorney General, I believe.
- Kiningham: Yeah, he was in to July 29, '80, when Tyrone Fahner took over. Tyrone Fahner, I think, was an appointment of the Governor who was very, very special—
- Reynolds: Did Bill Scott leave for health reasons?
- Kiningham: I think they found out he was having parties out of state.
- Reynolds: Or there were some tax problems too, maybe.
- Kiningham: He was in there from 1969 to July 29 of 1980 and he attended a lot of news conventions. He was very friendly, he did his job, but I think some personal things caught up with him that we never knew about.
- Reynolds: He would have been the likely person to be the Republican gubernatorial nominee when Thompson left.
- Kiningham: He knew media. He would go to the radio, TV and newspaper conventions and just show up and say, "Hi." And if you wanted an interview you got one and then he got coverage.
- Reynolds: Right. Michael Bakalis who of course ran the—
- Kiningham: —State Superintendent of Public Instruction and of course our 1970 - Constitution kind of got rid of that. But it took until 1975 (chuckles) to get it out of there from the '70 Constitution.
- Reynolds: And then he ran against Thompson in his first re-election campaign. He didn't seem to be a very effective candidate. Do you recall much about the campaign?
- Kiningham: No, I don't. Pretty routine, in an era of electronic reporting and everything, you know, more newspaper-oriented and some of that is great when you can get the coverage. But if you don't get the coverage and you got a guy like Jim Thompson going out there working every media outlet he can with the help of a pro staff; that does make a difference.
- Reynolds: Yeah, he had pretty much used his office to the best advantage by the time Bakalis ran against him.
- Kiningham: Of course, when you leave the office of public instruction, you've got a record too that people can use against you, or for you, depending on what you want to focus on and that happens.

Reynolds: I put Tom Hynes down there who I guess is the father of the current Treasurer. Is he the Treasurer?

Kiningham: Well, yeah, he was Senate President for a while just before Phil Rock back '77 to '79. A good man, very straightforward, highly respected, but not super controversial, didn't get in and make those oratory speeches or anything—

Reynolds: Was more of a Chicago political figure I think—

Kiningham: Yeah, absolutely.

Reynolds: —in many ways. It came up a bit in this primary race with Dan Hynes that he was involved in the Washington wars and that kind of thing.

Kiningham: Oh, boy. Yeah, behind the scenes kind of guy.

Reynolds: Right.

Kiningham: And the family, of course, has subsequent lawmakers.

Reynolds: We've already talked about William Redmond a lot.

Kiningham: DuPage County guy.

Reynolds: Anymore you want to say about him?

Kiningham: No, I think you know the house speaker battle is something that will live on in the history of Illinois. I've provided the Lincoln Presidential Library with the audio of that debate that was probably one of the finest oratories pro and con on anything I've ever heard.

Reynolds: And that went on for several days?

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. Over a hundred votes and then finally a Republican caved in and he got to serve. I've talked to you about Chuck Percy and I think I mentioned Everett McKinley Dirksen.

Reynolds: Jerry Cossentino who was in and out of the treasurer's office and ran—

Kiningham: Two terms.

Reynolds: —and ran for Secretary of State maybe?

Kiningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: He got himself in some trouble, too, as I recall.

Kiningham: Yeah. I can't remember much about Jerry.

Reynolds: Didn't he run a trucking firm or something like that?

Kiningham: Yeah. He was always accessible when he was in office, but Treasurers don't get a lot of attention; they help pay the bills.

Reynolds: Phil Rock, of course. We've mentioned him a few times.

Kiningham: Seven terms as Senate President, very nice, would take questions to and from his office. The reporters learned that we could be out in the hall between the Senate President's office and the floor, the Senate chamber; that twenty feet got lots of stories on the radio and in the newspapers and television. It became a trend and Phil Rock was one that would stop and give you a comment and then go on. Or coming out of the chamber. But a lot of times going in he would plant a seed of news if he wanted to and that would be your next morning story.

Reynolds: He was always a good sound bite, it sounds like.

Kiningham: Yes, good sound bite, a nice man, highly respected and a lot of real news was made.

Reynolds: When did you realize that Jim Edgar was an up and coming star in the party?

Kiningham: I didn't get to know him in the Illinois House when he was a rep other than—

Reynolds: Well, he was on the staff, too, I think.

Kiningham: But Secretary of State, to be Governor, very reasonable.

Reynolds: Was he appointed to be Secretary of State? I believe he was.

Kiningham: Oh, gosh. I'd have to research that.

Reynolds: And then, of course, he won on his own in an election. But I think he was appointed.

Kiningham: I think you're right. I'd have to check that. He was an amazing man. We'll probably end up talking about him at some point.

Reynolds: Yes, we will.

Kiningham: He's probably, let me just say, —

Reynolds: I was kind of getting your impression of him during the Thompson years. Did you think that he was going to become Governor? I mean, did you see that potential in him at that point?

Kiningham: Well, you never really see these potentials until they say, "Well, I think I want to go do that." And then he became probably one of the friendliest governors

I've every known. Very personable. He's a Downstater. I will just say that while he lived in the Executive Mansion they had a log cabin built north of Springfield and he'd go out there with his wife; that was the private time.

Reynolds: Well, we'll talk about Edgar if we do an interview on him. We're going to try to do all the Governors. I was just wondering whether you had some impressions of him during the Thompson years.

Kiningham: Well, I think we're talking Secretary of State and I think maybe during that—

Reynolds: Drunk driving thing was one of his big things.

Kiningham: Yes, a lot of issues to help motorist safety. Of course, the Senate President right now is the father of the seat belt law and a number of other things for safe driving in Illinois. But that's in 2010. Jim Edgar from 1981 on during the entire—well, George Ryan didn't take over until '91, 'cause that's when Jim Edgar decided to move up to Governor—but he was accessible, he had good people, I think they even allowed a ham radio operator named Ben Kiningham to say it's okay to put ham on the license plates because we can't get amateur radio on the license plate. So today if you go down the street and see a ham radio plate it says ham radio, you're talking to the guy that was one of those who said, "Do it."

Reynolds: Well, when we talk about Jim Edgar, what will be interesting to talk about when he was slated to run for Governor over George Ryan and what was all involved in that. Pate Phillip, of course, was a major figure during that—

Kiningham: Oh, yeah.

Reynolds: And he appeared to really get along well with Thompson. Is that correct?

Kiningham: Yes.

Reynolds: Was that correct?

Kiningham: Oh, very definitely.

Reynolds: They were good buddies, as they say.

Kiningham: Pate Phillip was his own man, Senate President Pate Phillip. And he's one of those guys that we would catch in the hallway between the Senate President's office and the Chamber. Six terms, 1993 to 2003. He'd answer questions, briefly and then he was on, but if you sat down with him at a very rare news conference, he would answer your questions. You don't always have a lot of politicians—

Reynolds: He wasn't as good a sound bite as Phil Rock though, I bet.

Kiningham: No.

Reynolds: He was kind of abrupt.

Kiningham: But you could edit.

Reynolds: Yeah.

Kiningham: So you want to get the right sound out, but let's just say he gave me some sound bites that are probably historical in nature and there were also some good humorous outtakes as well for going out and doing public speaking and that kind of stuff. You know, you've got Dan Walker croaking like a chicken and choking or a rooster. You've got Pate Phillip telling some things; he was very candid, very straightforward.

Reynolds: Was the word colorful used?

Kiningham: I think colorful is a good word.

Reynolds: He would say things you wouldn't expect him to say.

Kiningham: Yes, that's right. And they'd come back, not to haunt him, but "I can't believe you said that."

Reynolds: But he seemed like the kind of guy that probably didn't care.

Kiningham: Well, I think he cared but he wanted to get on and do his business.

Reynolds: Right. Let's talk about George Ryan during the Thompson years. He seemed to get along very well with his—

Kiningham: House Speaker, 1981-83, Lieutenant Governor; '83 to '87, Secretary of State; Governor. I still remember when he was Governor—we might get in to that some day—and coming out of a Veteran's Affairs Day speech he said, "Well, you probably weren't in the military." I knew he was enlisted in the Army and I said, "Well, I'm a retired Illinois Lieutenant Colonel and a retired U.S. Air Force Major." He was surprised at that, but we got along that way. The thing about George Ryan's wife is, she's the only one that every time she'd see me, she'd kiss me. But I didn't know the family. I was not involved in their activities and I knew he was a party animal from the old House of Representatives days. We'll have times maybe to talk about him. Again, as Lieutenant Governor you never get to do anything, often times. Now maybe he had more of a footprint into the Jim Thompson administration than we know, but I don't think so. And that may be—

Reynolds: Did they use him in a legislative sense, because he had that background as a speaker?



- Kiningham: Well, I think he knew everything going on. I think when you get to some of those places and at the same time, I still remember George Ryan during that ERA debate having to come out of his card game and shut it down because they were getting a little carried away. And it never did pass.
- Reynolds: He was the major opponent of the ERA? I'm trying to recall now what he...
- Kiningham: Let's just say he didn't support it.
- Reynolds: Right. Okay. James Donnewald, who is very well remembered.
- Kiningham: That's a name that jumps out at you and you know Jim Donnewald, but what did he do? Well he was a senator from 1983-87 and then he was, well that may have been house. Anyway, senator for nine terms and...<sup>5</sup>
- Reynolds: Southern Illinois?
- Kiningham: Yeah. I can't tell you much more about him.
- Reynolds: He was the treasurer, wasn't he, for awhile? Or comptroller. He was treasurer I believe.
- Kiningham: I'd have to check my list but ...
- Reynolds: Treasurer.
- Kiningham: Yes. He was in for a couple of years before Jerry Cossentino left office and came back to office. (chuckles)
- Reynolds: Did he lose an election to Cossentino? I can't remember now either.
- Kiningham: You know, I can't remember either. Some names come out at you. He was a very nice individual as State Treasurer. You don't cover that office a lot except you want to know if they're making any earnings on investments and you also want to know if they are spending state money wisely, especially in investments and returns and stuff like that.
- Reynolds: Dawn Clark Netsch has come up a lot during this interview. Anything more you want to say about her?
- Kiningham: Highly respected. She was a good interview. You could talk to her. If she had a dispute with any governor or any other lawmaker on an issue of legal consequence dealing with the Illinois Constitution, she was ready, willing and able to lay it on you in a very gentle way. And she was a good communicator.

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<sup>5</sup>*Chicago Tribune*: In 1960, he was elected to the first of two terms in the Illinois House of Representatives for the 51st District, now the 55th. He was elected to the Illinois State Senate 1964, 1966, 1970, 1974, and 1978. In the election of 1982, he was selected Treasurer of the State of Illinois. [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-09-20/news/0909190366\\_1\\_law-student-illinois-state-treasurer-committee](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-09-20/news/0909190366_1_law-student-illinois-state-treasurer-committee).

Reynolds: Of course, we'll talk more about her because she ran for governor later on against Jim Edgar. Was she a major opponent of Jim Thompson's usually?

Kiningham: No, I wouldn't think so. I would think she was part of the Democratic... She came in as one of the Independents back in the, I think the Dan Walker years; there were about seven senators that weren't party machine people.

Reynolds: North Shore, Chicago, somewhat independent from the Daley machine.

Kiningham: Yeah, absolutely and ironically she was in the Democratic Caucus so she could voice her opinions, and high regard for her as an individual. She had to be probably a very interesting lawmaker.

Reynolds: She was a law professor, too, an academic background.

Kiningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: We've talked about Willie Nelson. Anything more you want to say about Willie Nelson in his relationship with Thompson?

Kiningham: Well, you know I was watching television the other day and Willie Nelson said, "Well, how'd you get into Farm Aid?" And he said, "Well, Jim Thompson and I got together in the trailer and we had a nice chat." Now I know Willie hid some stuff before Jim Thompson got into that trailer and we won't talk about that, but they did share a drink.

Reynolds: Shared a beer.

Kiningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: I'm sure.

Kiningham: And I think Jim Thompson respected him very much because he always seemed to end up at the Illinois State Fair while Thompson was Governor, most times depending on—

Reynolds: Pretty much every year?

Kiningham: Yeah. Almost, not every year, but of the fourteen—

Reynolds: Of course, Willie Nelson is touring all the time.

Kiningham: Yeah, still today, bless his heart.

Reynolds: That's all he does. Any particular union leaders you can remember that Thompson was, you know, real close to, or worked well with—any specific unions? 'Cause that's come up several times in our interview.

Kiningham: Well, I still remember the Illinois Education Association, downstate teachers and the Illinois Federation of Teachers didn't always see eye to eye on issues, but I remember every budget session they would come and do their wrangle-dangle, have hot dogs and have teachers come in. I talked to one of the administrators one day and I said, "Do these really have benefit?" And the executive of the American, or the Illinois Federation of Teachers said, "Well, it brings the members together, but it doesn't really shift legislative opinion and concern." Thompson could talk to almost any group and most oftentimes publicly. There private meetings that I have no insight into, but I think he was a good communicator. And I—

Reynolds: Very good one-on-one.

Kiningham: I remember all of the lobbyists, and I don't know if they all had access to him or not, but, you look at Corrections, for example, right now and he built a lot of prisons, he alleviated some of the overcrowding. He brought in employment, he helped communities. But you've got to be careful because I know in some states, judges are getting kickbacks on telephone services—

Reynolds: Using inmates.

Kiningham: Well, no, telephone services. You get to pay fourteen dollars for half an hour or something, whereas it's two ninety-five at other places. I'm just saying I'm seeing some of this surface. So you hope he alleviated overcrowding. One thing we don't see in corrections today is the ability—except for churches—to come in and help some of these inmates and—

Reynolds: That was probably one of his strongest consistent policy areas was crime prevention, making laws tougher, building prisons to house more people so that he could, you know—

Kiningham: Build more prisons (both talking).

Reynolds: Arrest people—

Kiningham: Well, you start saying— The X Felonies, I think was his, or Felony... It had to do with his, something that he brought in, I believe.

Kiningham: Yeah, you had, a, yeah, X...

Reynolds: Am I saying that correctly?

Kiningham: Well, I'm trying to...

Reynolds: It's a combination of X and something, I can't remember.

Kiningham: Yeah, it's corrections Class X.

Reynolds: Class X.

Kiningham: Anti-crime sentencing. The interesting thing here though, it's for repeat offenders, serious offenses, no parole, more long term prison overcrowding. At the same time, if they are repeat offenders it sends a message that, maybe that's where they ought to be. So that's probably a very good program. That's not warehousing for the sake of keeping businesses in a community.

Reynolds: But that just helped his image as a law and order kind of guy.

Kiningham: Oh, yeah.

Reynolds: Of course, a lot of these prisons became economic development (both talking)

Kiningham: Well, yeah.

Reynolds: I mean towns were competing for them.

Kiningham: Yeah, he took bids: who's got the best deal which benefits taxpayers of the state.

Reynolds: Several hundred every time a prison is built. It was a major sort of economic development thing.

Kiningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: Okay. We've talked about Jim Skilbeck, Jim Riley, and Robert Mandeville. Anybody else in the administration that stands out in your mind?

Kiningham: Well, it's always good public relations people, but I'm not going to go there.

Reynolds: Somebody in particular stands out.

Kiningham: Well, there're a lot of folks, but I think we'll leave that for another day.

Reynolds: Okay. We'll talk a little bit about some of the things he's done after he was Governor, but just to try to get to a final question about your assessment of him, as a reporter, sort of words again that are used about him was that he had impressive durability. He managed to avoid most scandals, which as we know, Illinois governors have not been very good at, and he seemed to have an incredible sense of timing and luck.

Kiningham: Timing and luck, very very true.

Reynolds: Which I guess is a political sense that he had, a political skill more than anything.

Kiningham: I know in the first twelve years of his fourteen years of service he touched a lot of people in positive ways; he was out among the people, he could talk to

them, interact with them. It was amazing, his post-Governor duties continued; I mean, you don't see a lot of governors coming back to the Illinois State Capitol but he was with a big law firm—

Reynolds: His lobbying type things on certain issues?

Kinningham: Well, I assume it's in for lobbying. He would never really talk to the media about why he would be there. But you kind of got the impression that he was in for lobbying. He did, of course, as post-Governor help another governor in his legal defense.

Reynolds: Did that hurt his image at all, you think?

Kinningham: I don't know that it hurt his image at all. Reynolds: He, I believe, was on the Blagojevich transition team, too, I recall.

Kinningham: Of course, the interesting thing is when you come into a gubernatorial transition team you can't testify against them—you can't—all you can do is help them. You can help the committee, the team—not dealing directly with the governor—but the team coming up with who to talk to, what issues are important. And if you are a former governor you get access to the House floor, the House Senate, you get access to other administrations and if you are a former governor who just happens to be doing some lobby work, you still want connections. It may not be that governor that's going to do it, but it might be somebody on the staff or someone else. But maybe it's also issues, where the strong points of an administration are, or need to be, and what you can do better. We won't go to the Blago efforts.

Reynolds: We may talk about that later.

Kinningham: That's another day, another time.

Reynolds: The loyalty to George Ryan I think was pretty remarkable. Was that something you sensed, that he was tremendously loyal to people that had supported him politically and would stick with them to the end, and not as they say, throw them under the bus, or whatever?

Kinningham: I don't honestly know the answer to that.

Reynolds: You didn't see any examples of that over the years that he would drop somebody or... For instance, Ty Fahner, was there something that went on with him?

Kinningham: Tyrone went on to other places.

Reynolds: He got a better job, a federal job, was it?

Kiningham: Well, Tyrone Fahner was the Attorney General for a while and I think he went on to a national job, a federal job. You had people walking through the Thompson administration that went to Washington and did a lot of things. Just like Alan Dixon's staff went on to be the head of the Corn Growers and a whole bunch of other things; now they're lobbyists out there. That's not a governorship, but people in state government in Illinois do get experience, make contacts, have interests and pursue them. Tyrone Fahner was a pretty good Attorney General in my estimation.

Reynolds: Did you cover him at all when he was on the 9-11 Commission? Get involved in any of those?

Kiningham: I did not.

Reynolds: That, I guess would probably be the last thing he's remembered for and, occasionally pops back up on the MacNeil Lehrer report or something like that. Well, you think we've covered just about everything we can say about Jim Thompson? Anything else you want to—

Kiningham: We haven't even begun, but I think we've touched the peak of the iceberg.

Reynolds: Well, I think when a person has been in for as long as he [was], four terms, it's a little hard to get into all the specifics of each of those terms, but I think we covered the overview.

Kiningham: Covering seven governors partially or full term brings out a lot of... The memory starts to dissolve after a while. And I will just say there's a lot of people that walked through the Thompson administration: Attorney General, Secretary of State, Comptroller, Treasurer, Auditor General, House and Senate, that have gone on to accomplish great things for Illinois and some haven't. But that's the interesting thing. The majority of those have touched us in a positive way and I'm very impressed.

Reynolds: And you think about the fact that not only did he serve four terms, but his protégés, Jim Edgar and George Ryan, both became governor. So his influence continued.

Kiningham: Of course, George Ryan was the Speaker of the House while he was Governor and they got some things accomplished, I do believe.

Reynolds: Well, this has been a lot of fun talking about Big Jim. I appreciate it, Ben.

Kiningham: Oh, he's a man to look up to in my mind. Of all the governors I've talked to over the years, I have a high regard for Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar especially. They were people that you could talk to and do final interviews in their terms and they were straight shooters with the reporters as far as I know. Now, there are things if you don't want to tell a reporter you don't have to, but [they were] very candid. Our citizens, I think, had a better understanding

because of their communicability about where they were going, what they wanted to achieve and they had good interactions with Democrats and Republicans and Independents.

Reynolds: Well, thank you Ben. This is the end of our second interview and hopefully we'll talk about the rest of the governors in future interviews. Thank you.

Kiningham: Okay.

(end of interview #2)

## Interview with Ben Kiningham

# ISP-A-L-2010-020

Interview # 2: July 30, 2010

Interviewer: Chris Reynolds

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Reynolds: Hello. The date is July 30th, 2010. It's about one p.m. at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. My name is Chris Reynolds. I am a volunteer at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, part of their Statecraft Oral History program. We are interviewing Ben Kiningham today. This is the third interview that I've done with Ben on past Illinois Governors and their administrations. We've already discussed the Walker administration and the Thompson administration.

Ben, of course, has been a statehouse reporter and held various positions in radio stations and TV stations throughout central and southern Illinois also. We've done a bio on Ben in the first interview so we're not going to go over too much more of that material. The subject today, of course, is the Edgar administration and so, I think the way we've started out all these interviews is to find out what media-related position Ben held during the period when Jim Edgar ran for governor and served as governor.

Kiningham: Well 1991 to 1999 was the period that Jim Edgar served his gubernatorial term. I knew him as a state rep, and I knew him as the Secretary of State. I did not have a lot of dealings Jim Edgar when he was the legislative director for Governor James R. Thompson. But at the time he was elected, as Bureau Chief of *WGN Tribune's Radio Network*, I was part of the Tribune Company. We had over fifty-five radio stations and a measured audience of about two million listeners a day. We served WGN in Chicago and KMOX down in St. Louis and a lot of stations across Illinois and on the edges. Ironically at the time we also served Wisconsin statewide because WGN had the network there as well. Later, ownership changed during that period and I would just say that the Wisconsin audience dropped out. But when I'd go to national political conventions I'd have to cover for radio stations in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri—on the edge of Missouri because KMOX was an affiliate—and also Wisconsin. [I was] past President of the Illinois News Broadcasters Association back in 1982-83, but I was a member since 1966. so that brought me through a lot of governors. In '74 I started full time at the state Capitol covering governors. Otherwise, it was part time. In the '91 to '99 period, I was a board member of the Illinois Legislative Correspondents Association, serving as their vice president. And then a Major in the U.S. Air Force in the 183rd TAC Fighter Group before my retirement. I resided in Petersburg, Illinois, at the time married, the father of three. And, so that's basically it.

Reynolds: Did you pretty much have the same position throughout the entire two Edgar terms?

Kiningham: I had the same position through five different company ownerships and through seven governors, or six governors.

Reynolds: Wow, that's a trick.

Kiningham: And when WGN couldn't sell the Cubs time one time decided to re-evaluate all their networks. They offered me a full time job, but I opted to stay with the successor owners of Illinois News Network. So that's basically the media at the time. I got to know Jim Edgar very well. Didn't get to know his wife quite as well because she was, let's just say, more private and with family. They had two children growing up in the Executive Mansion, [who] got married.

Reynolds: We'll get into some of that later I'm sure. What were your impressions; you said you didn't cover Edgar necessarily before he becomes Governor.

Kiningham: Well, let me clarify that. I covered him as Secretary of State. We'll get into that when we get down to the people that were in his administration because a lot of them emerged from the Secretary of State's office and they were good friends.

Reynolds: Well, my question was what were your impressions and knowledge of Jim Edgar before he ran for Governor. If you covered him as Secretary of State



then you were very knowledgeable about a lot of things you've worked on in that office.

Kiningham: Well, let me just say I just covered—

Reynolds: Also were you surprised that he was picked to run for governor so soon after just—I think he might have had a couple of terms as Secretary of State, didn't he—and he was appointed for a while.

Kiningham: We've seen a trend in Illinois for the historians that a lot of people found that they could move from the Secretary of State's office, either into a U.S. House, U.S. Senate or governorship race. The Secretary of State's name gets very familiar on everybody's drivers license; you've got libraries and a lot of things. I was covering mostly the Illinois Senate when Representative Jim Edgar came to Springfield. When he worked for Governor Thompson our paths crossed very little. However, I was friendly with a group of staffers in the House, the Senate of both parties and when Alan Dixon was Secretary of State, his personal secretary was a neighbor of mine who happened to date and marry a man who became Edgar's Revenue Director. We used to go out and have ice cream together. We're very close. Members of a youthful group of adults, I'd guess you'd say, who partied, socialized, did cook-outs and movies together. Ironically, a lot of those people came into the Edgar administration as governor. Dixon won a U.S. Senate seat; Jim Edgar succeeded him with many of those friendships continuing when Secretary of State Edgar re-designated the Illinois license plate.

For example, there was a problem with the new amateur ham radio operator special license plate. I'm K9IDQ, I've been a ham since the 1950s. "Amateur" would not fit on the license plate, but "ham radio" would. The Edgar Secretary of State staff said, "Can we put "ham" on there?" I said, "Sure." They talked to some lawyer ham who said, "No, amateur needs to be on there." Well, while some insisted amateur continue on the license plate, I won. Ham radio today is still in 2010 the acceptable license plate. It's a collector's item and ham operators still have those license plates and it has nothing to do with pork, governmental or any other kind.

So I got to know people in the Edgar administration from the years of Secretary of State. We were friends; we didn't do politics and news. We were just very good friends. So that's the foundation that opened many doors for me as I wanted to get news from the governor. But, ironically, this governor was extremely accessible just like Jim Thompson was, he would do radio shows with me. We tried a few with Jim Edgar, and did half hour shows, sit down in the office. He was very candid and very open.

Reynolds: Good. That gets to a question I'm going to ask in a little bit here. But let's move on. First of all, were you surprised that he ran for governor? Or did you think that that was going to happen? That he was the logical [choice]?

Kiningham: I guess I'm always surprised at who runs for governor. And, of course, I knew the opponents, too.

Reynolds: Right. So I assume that you were involved in the coverage of his campaigns. We can talk about them separately if you want, but he ran against Hartigan the first time and Dawn Clark Netsch the second time. What were your impressions of those campaigns, why do you think he was so successful in both cases, and how did he handle the media coverage of those campaigns?

Kiningham: Well, Neil Hartigan was accessible. Dawn Clark Netsch was a constitutional lawyer and actually taught Constitutional Law. I can still remember the meetings out in the hallways of the rotunda of the Capitol she'd have with Jim Thompson on "what you're doing is nasty." But what he was trying to do was to help people and push the envelope on what a governor could do. I think Jim Thompson opened a lot of doors for Jim Edgar later. Our radio network was extensively involved in covering every gubernatorial campaign, primaries and general. With the State Capitol news staff—and this is clarification—covering downstate Illinois campaign outings where we could in addition to whatever happened at the Capitol, and the Chicago reporters covering the Chicago events. So the Neil Hartigan and Dawn Clark Netsch Chicagoans, if you will, were not as well known or as well covered downstate. But they were good in answering our questions and they were available. I think we gave point, counterpoint to our voters and listeners very well. As far as campaigns go, I'm probably not the best person to talk to because in the radio business you get an interview, you get the voice of the newsmaker, and then you move on to the next story. Sometimes we were doing two or three stories a day. Now, some of those interviews with Hartigan, Netsch, Edgar and other candidates in all races would get played statewide and we tried to do point counterpoint. If they'd say something about somebody we'd go get the other response and they were always available as the electronics media grew—both radio and television. We were able to get access very well, especially when you're running a radio network that reaches all over the nation, or really the state. (coughs) So I probably can't get into too much; I could get more into the administrations when these folks came to Springfield and administrated.

Reynolds: Well, we'll talk a little bit more about his campaigns later. I always like to read through what has been written about the governors and pick out the key sort of words that are used to describe them, just to try to get your sense of whether you would agree with those characterizations. In Edgar's case, his principle image was as a credible, moderate independent. Of course, he was tremendously good looking; he was considered a straight arrow, compulsive and a non-orator. He didn't really come off as a great orator, but a disciplined candidate. Would you say that that matches your perceptions of him on the campaign trail? Any of those words fit or don't fit?

Kiningham: Straight arrow. He told it like he thought it was, he was candid, I think he was very well known; here's the key for a Jim Edgar. He was well-known in

legislative circles for both his legislative service: he was once an aid, a lawmaker, a staffer, and then Director of Legislative Relations for Governor Jim Thompson. So I believe he was respected by members of both parties. A little hard to beat him up when he'd worked with them for so many years. They knew him. Now, the voter didn't know him as well and so the outreach was really there. He was a humanistic downstater; he could talk to people, he didn't hide, he shook hands...

Reynolds: He was good one-on-one with people rather than say as a speaker who could bring an entire room to its feet, or something like that?

Kinningham: He was probably very good one-on-one. I think he was a very good general speaker to groups, whereas Dan Walker was very good at reaching out; one-on-one he was very cold, very firm and a little hard to get through to sometimes, get the answer you wanted. He was very controlling.

Reynolds: Not as gregarious as Jim Thompson.

Kinningham: Yeah. Thompson—

Reynolds: Who would wade into a crowd and just make everybody feel that they were his best friends.

Kinningham: Well, and he would do it with both parties, opponents and proponents. Jim Thompson was very good at talking and getting along with people and I think his height was a benefit because he was a guy to look up to in many of his respects. Plus he was a lawyer. You've got to remember, Jim Edgar was not a lawyer, he was a downstater, he was a man of, shall we say, governmental relations and politics.

Reynolds: The image of him being fairly moderate and independent say of the political forces in the state. Did you pick that up from him and see if he was able to —

Kinningham: I'm not sure he was moderate because as we go through the issues we're going to talk about a few things. His first term, his first budget was nothing short of amazing. I think that you'll find that when he was set on something to achieve, he worked with everyone, and that's the key, he worked with everyone. They had access. He didn't close doors, whereas some of the later governors don't always talk to everyone. We've evolved over the decades. I would say, as a reporter with over forty years of watching the statehouse in Illinois, the successors to Jim Thompson and Jim Edgar started changing the scene a little bit. And we'll get into that in future interviews. George Ryan still had access. Rod Blagojevich, no access after two months—we'll talk about that in the future—unless he had something he wanted to say. Then his successor.

Times have changed and we saw them change from Dan Walker and his predecessor from a lot of internal- to-media openness and access. Jim

Thompson opened the door and then all of a sudden Jim Edgar comes along and this thing called the internet begins, thanks to the University of Illinois. We've talked about some of that. The first state website for people during the Edgar administration; we'll get into some of that as we talk further.

Reynolds: So it sounds like the compulsive and disciplined candidate really fits not only the way he campaigned, by the way he governed, that when he got an issue that he thought was important, he would really work compulsively on that issue and was very disciplined at staying on it.

Kinningham: Very straight arrow. I think when we start talking about some of the issues and the budgets and item number seven in our questioning we're going to get into that.

Reynolds: The other set of words that I picked up from what's been written about Edgar were characterizations of his personality. Some of the words used to describe him were stubborn, tenacious, cautious, modest, stiff in public, non-flamboyant and frugal. I always ask the question, "Do you feel that he had charisma?" So do you agree with any of those characterizations? Do they all seem to fit or are there some that are off-base? And what do you think about the charisma tag?

Kinningham: Edgar, I believe, has what they call "downstate charisma."

Reynolds: Which is different from Chicago.

Kinningham: That is exactly right. He is a downstater. He always cooperated with state house media, he cooperated with legislators whether he agreed with them or not and that's a key. He didn't duck issues when reporters asked about them and that access was amazingly about to change after a few governors. But Thompson and Edgar really opened the door. I think Dan Walker lit the fuse for media access. Richard Ogilvie had directors who couldn't even get in to see him and they would complain to the media, "How do I get in to sell my issues on the budget to Richard Ogilvie?" Dan Walker I think had more access but he offended the Chicago machine, and the Republicans, you know, were in an interesting legislative arena there. So you get in to Jim Thompson and he's working with everybody. Jim Edgar inherits a debt and we'll talk about that, but he was also able to work with people and that was crucial and a key and so he had charisma with those he wanted but he was also very stern on the issues he wanted. And I think one of the keys was that he came out of a legislative position with Jim Thompson and so he was willing to discuss options and alternatives and opportunities. Personally Jim Edgar as governor—and before and after I believe—was not stiff in public necessarily. He wasn't flamboyant; fiscally frugal, yes. But he had what we might call a low key charisma with character and respect; a lot of character and respect.

Reynolds: Let's get back a little bit to the campaign here and talk about your memories about the public sentiment that Edgar may have used to his advantage in his campaigns. Did your coverage of him as a candidate suggest that he was able to distance himself from his mentor, Jim Thompson, in terms of governing styles and policies? What was the alternative that he offered voters in both of those elections that made him winnable? I put down in my notes, taxes, which seemed to be the big issue with both of those. Even though you sort of said that he kind of copied Thompson's governing styles, in some senses it seemed to me he had to kind of separate himself from Thompson.

Kiningham: Oh, he was a different man. Now, there was a surtax adopted in the Thompson administration as we get into the budget we'll talk about. In 1991 Jim Edgar inherited an unbalanced state budget after the longest serving governor was ready to leave town. This is a little tidbit of information that has always piqued my curiosity. When Jim Thompson left the Executive Mansion in Springfield—he stayed there—he left on the Governor's desk an envelope with a personal note to Jim Edgar. It would be really fun and fascinating to know what that said. Jim Edgar doesn't talk about it and Jim Thompson doesn't talk about it, but it was a personal note between an outgoing governor and an incoming governor.

Reynolds: Do you want to speculate at what you think it might have addressed?

Kiningham: I have a feeling... I don't know. No, I don't really want to go down that road. I will lay the groundwork that Jim Edgar's campaign was not in favor of hiking taxes, but the state debt he inherited from the prior administration—which did a lot and, you know, they really built things—led to making a surtax permanent. We'll talk a little bit more about that. That's not increasing a tax that's already there.

Reynolds: That was the issue in the Hartigan campaign. To my knowledge, I think he is the only person that's run for governor to say that he would make permanent an income—I mean, it wasn't a tax hike necessarily, but since it was a temporary tax it could be considered a tax increase. I don't think anybody else has tried that, except for Ogilvie who did it during his term. But he didn't probably run saying he—

Kiningham: Richard Ogilvie was the founder of the income tax in Illinois to help Illinois cope with its debt.

Reynolds: But I bet he didn't run on that when he ran for governor.

Kiningham: No absolutely. Well after he was governor.

Reynolds: Yeah, that's what I mean.

Kiningham: For re-election.

Reynolds: And I don't [think] anybody has ever run for governor saying they're going to—

Kiningham: I think Dan Walker used that issue to win, very frankly, after Paul, not Paul Powell, but Michael Howlett had some other problems in the primary campaign. Otherwise we could have had a different governor, but those are interviews past.

Reynolds: But what did you think about his stand on the tax issue in that campaign? Did you think it would be successful as it was? I can't recall: did Hartigan oppose the temporary income tax and say he would not approve it?

Kiningham: I honestly, without going back and looking at records, and that's where the newspapers will have records and some of the audio tapes that I've given the Presidential Library might have some of that debate, but I haven't gone back over that. Those campaigns... You know, when you're covering a gubernatorial campaign and a Secretary of State campaign and a Comptroller and a Treasurer campaign and U.S. Senate races, it all gets convoluted because you do it and you move on. So I'm not good at the issues of the campaigns of the past. You'll have to forgive me.

Reynolds: Do you think that he was able to separate himself from Thompson a good deal in the campaign against Hartigan?

Kiningham: I think so.

Reynolds: Do you recall how he did that? How he was able to say, "You know, I'm not Jim Thompson, I'm Jim Edgar and it's going to be different."

Kiningham: Well, Thompson was a tall northerner; Jim Edgar was a shorter downstater, but he had party support and both sides of the aisle knew him and they found him to acceptable. I think Neil Hartigan came in with a lot of power but he also had some challenges too.

Reynolds: He had some baggage also.

Kiningham: Yes.

Reynolds: He had to deal with certain segments of the electorate.

Kiningham: These things all come into play and here's the key: Jim Edgar didn't really talk about a tax increase; he opposed a tax increase. And it wasn't until we get into the budget after election that the surtax became permanent because I don't think they were talking about tax increases in the campaigns. So you get into linguistics and we'll walk down through that.

Reynolds: I'm thinking that I can remember a characterization of Jim Edgar that he was a "no surprise" kind of Governor, because as I recall back to the Thompson

years—we probably talked about this—Thompson would claim not to raise taxes and then get into office and tell the public that we've got to have a tax increase. And he would do the tax increase. So, I guess to the extent that Edgar was honest during that first campaign set him apart from Thompson in a lot of ways.

Kiningham: Let me walk down through some of this. Because of Edgar's past experience with lawmakers and involvement in state government with Governor Thompson, he met a financial challenge, much more in his first summer in office. Now we're talking 1991. Lawmakers went past the June 30 deadline for a budget. June 30 in state government is the deadline for a budget, then you need a three-fifths vote in the chambers, House and Senate. Lawmakers wanted to know how to fill a multi-million dollar budget hole that Edgar partially inherited. Now, this is important, Jim Edgar had a \$300,000,000 budget shortfall in January of 1991 on the day he took office. Now that was the legislature's giving Jim Thompson the ability to have a shortfall.

Reynolds: It was kind of the Bush recession, too, I believe.

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. Well, so Edgar has a \$300,000,000 hole in the budget when he takes office in January. That budget shortfall grew by the end of the fiscal year June 30 because the revenue sources were just not there. So, that 1991 state budget and many other issues were enacted on the eve of a state shutdown when Edgar and legislative leaders in July agreed to balance the budget with government cuts, halts to state contracts, making a temporary income tax surcharge permanent. Was it an increase or not? Yes, it was an increase, but it was a pre-existing tax if not a popular move and it probably unsettled a lot of voters.

It's the first year of a four-year term. Edgar pledged to cut \$87,000,000 from agencies. Edgar froze job vacancies, he eliminated a number of pending state contracts and those are things that taxpayers respected. Edgar slowed or abolished travel and equipment spending for most agencies. He just shut things down. Edgar had a lot of difficult decisions to make in the very first few months.

Reynolds: I remember the pain. I was a state employee at that time.

Kiningham: Well despite a fiscal 1992 state debt of \$627,000,000—that's the next fiscal year—Edgar opposed any increase in the Illinois income tax. Phil Rock, I think, once was suggesting that you really got to do it, but Edgar did work with lawmakers and by the end of his two terms in 1999 just for respected response, the budget was balanced, state bill payments were made more quickly, state spending was reduced and, where possible, there were staff positions reduced. Staffing for prison guards and caseworkers did increase. Edgar left office with almost a 1.2 billion balance, that was in June of 1998, you know, six, seven months before the next governor took office. The year

before incoming George Ryan came in and so, Jim Ryan (Edgar?), had a budget balance that's kind of pretty amazing for a governor.

Reynolds: He truly downsized state government. I was looking at the book, *Meeting the Challenge*, which is the summary of the Edgar administration. There were figures quoted in there on his reduction of jobs. He cut the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs in half. He eliminated 800 jobs at DOT, 150 jobs at IDES, 450 jobs at Revenue; these were significant downsizing events during his administration.

Kiningham: And yet, he was able to make some numerous amazing achievements during his period.

Reynolds: Well, we've kind of talked about his fiscal discipline. You want to talk about some of the other budget battles? I mean, you talked about the first one which was the grand one, the biggest one, but it continued, didn't it?

Kiningham: Well, fiscal challenges or, the budget, is the key for any governor. I don't care what party. As we talk we'll get into what happens when it's all one party—house senate and governorship—versus Democrat and Republican chambers and a governor of a different persuasion. It's amazing but they can get along when there's differences because they have to work together. I think the people of Illinois benefit when you have some divisiveness out there. Education was a pledge in the campaign primary of Jim Edgar in 1990. And within five years into office he was able to boost state funding of schools by some \$250,000,000 in a 33 billion dollar state budget. Ironically he signed that into law while recuperating from quadruple bypass surgery in 1995 up in Downers Grove Hospital. He is a survivor of heart surgery. Edgar won an enactment of allocating state funds for school improvement, he sought major initiative changes in the Chicago schools from the time he got in to office and he was able to do that with the help of Lt. Governor Bob Kustra, who is a former State Senator so he knew the legislative process—

Reynolds: Had a (unintelligible)

Kiningham: And he was an educator—

Reynolds: Right.

Kiningham: He left office to go be an educator in, I think, Kentucky or Tennessee.

Reynolds: I think it was Eastern Kentucky University.

Kiningham: Yeah. So while public school funding increased during the Edgar years, property tax-cap changes for collar counties around Chicago and Cook County may have impacted local school funding income. So you're looking at different ways. Did the lottery of a Dan Walker administration help fund schools? During the years of Thompson they specifically made sure all of the



lottery funds went to education; that's promised. And, of course, over the decades some of that's changed, but...

Reynolds: He had, of course, appointed the Ikenberry Commission, which came up with a set of recommendations very similar to what Dawn Clark Netsch had talked about in the campaign. He was never able to get that trade-off of property taxes; he kind of worked around the edges of that.

Kiningham: Oh, yeah.

Reynolds: Where did he fail on that? Of course, we can't fault him because they haven't been able to do it since. But was he close to getting that trade-off done?

Kiningham: Well, I don't think you make the trade-off if you can't get an income tax increase, which he said he wouldn't do.

Reynolds: So you don't think he was ever serious about raising the income taxes again if he had gotten a trade-off on property taxes?

Kiningham: I think he would have if he could have gotten property taxes reduced. It is a hard issue to deal with because, ironically, in that era of governorship you had Chicago with a lower property tax rate than the rest of the state. Thirty-three and a third percent is what we usually have today, but I think it was sixteen and something back in that era.

Reynolds: And the suburbs were, of course, tremendously high.

Kiningham: Yeah. And suburbs outside of Chicago had a different tax rate and, of course, Chicago funded its own public schools and had a different teachers' retirement system. We've met a lot of financial challenges and solutions in the 20 to 30 years over this period that I was a reporter. The thing about it is, these issues are important and they affect people but one branch of governorship can't do it. You've got a Supreme Court, you got a Legislature, a Constitution which was modified in 1970, but always had a lot of challenges on education funding. And so the debate continued and if you're going to run for re-election you got to walk a tightrope. So these are hard issues.

Reynolds: You think he got as much as he was going to get in terms of, I think he guaranteed a level of funding, he put caps on property taxes, he got the initial increased—

Kiningham: In some areas, yeah.

Reynolds: —tax or made the temporary one permanent. That's about as close to what he was going get probably as was possible, you think?

- Kiningham: I think so. I don't know that there is a magic solution here. We've seen some other governors come in and do some amazing things and you really question the constitutional validity, but if the challenges weren't made, they happen.
- Reynolds: Were you surprised that he gave the school system to the mayor of Chicago to run? Would the Mayor being a Democrat and him being a Republican, is that just an example of his bi-partisan sort of—
- Kiningham: He had a working relationship with Mayor Daley who had been a lawmaker, if you remember, in the state House of Representatives, ironically. Now we're not talking the father, we're talking the son. I Ironically, they were able to, this was. As I kind of reviewed some of the Edgar years, there was an airport, Meigs Field in downtown Chicago.
- Reynolds: It was the Peotone thing also.
- Kiningham: Yeah, but the irony is there was—
- Reynolds: During that period is when Midway was sort of reconstituted as a major airport?
- Kiningham: Well, —
- Reynolds: I believe?
- Kiningham: There's, somewhere I've made a note here that I thought was rather novel, unique and I'm looking for it because they did have a lot of challenges...
- Reynolds: Well, and I think there was issues regarding funding of regional transportation and...
- Kiningham: Well, we were in an era when Edgar supported the Chicago billion dollar McCormick Place expansion for convention and trade shows. And they cut a deal with Mayor Daley to keep downtown Meigs Field airport open until at least 2002. Ironically, I kind of had forgotten that there was supposed to be an agreement there.
- Reynolds: Well, Daley had wanted an airport at Lake Calumet, didn't he? And then the Peotone thing came up and, of course, we're still debating where to put a third airport.
- Kiningham: Oh, I know. That's a debate that continues and, of course, along the line—
- Reynolds: But, I guess the tension was, Edgar supported the Peotone airport and Daley had to give up on his Calumet City.

Kiningham: Yeah. Ironically, at some point, Daley just shut down that airport. But I think they came to an agreement at one point and I think he might have respected and honored that agreement for at least the Edgar years.

There's another interesting thing about education in Illinois. Computer communications evolved from the University of Illinois. They really developed the first website. –

Reynolds: It was the Plato system, I think it was called.

Kiningham: It was technology that we call today a website. (chuckles) The internet web was really an evolution of universities sharing information; all of a sudden, the University of Illinois computerologists come up with a way to make it easier to communicate and so the internet. Edgar's administration was, I think, one of the first in the nation to launch state websites to allow citizens and taxpayers to not only learn more about state government, but eventually file state income taxes, get the forms and file them quickly. And, that's the beginning of an evolution and a revolution in communications

Reynolds: PC revolution went on...

Kiningham: During the Edgar administration Bob Kustra, the Lt. Governor, was tasked with helping schools across Illinois get distance-learning networks and, today, that's the internet, for everyone. But they opened the door; that's pretty amazing.

Welfare reform in the Edgar administration: if you could work, you should work. Now that caused a lot of problems for people that could work and didn't want to work and were getting paid.

Reynolds: That was a national trend also.

Kiningham: Yeah, and so it was a major move to help the elderly and Children and Family Services. There were a lot of major changes in many areas of Illinois agency services; a lot were cut. They moved away from state mental health centers toward community care and in-home care; this was a trend, I think, actually probably started with Thompson. Efforts to reduce patient bed-care time at a facility was actually a benefit for the patients and alternatives to hospital care; those are things that you don't cover every day, but they were factors.

I think, probably one of the most amazing things was Jim Edgar's involvement in a disaster response—

Reynolds: The '93 flood.

Kiningham: —as Governor. Not only floods, there were tornadoes and earthquakes. We know about the 1993, two and one-half years into office the great flood of '93 occurred—

Reynolds: A one-hundred year flood—

Kiningham: Well, neighbors helping neighbors sandbag, rescue, they put inmates to work helping, the National Guard was called out. It was considered to be the second worst weather-related disaster of that period—that's amazing. Thirteen thousand Illinois residents left their homes. How does a governor deal with this distress? Edgar got 163 million in federal funds: federal funds to help towns like Valmeyer and Hall rebuild or move. But you've got to add to that as a governor, you had the Chicago underground flood in the loop in 1992 before 1993. And in 1996 you had tornadoes hammer Decatur, Illinois, so people weren't... You know, we were flooded, we were wind-blown. Ehhhh.

Reynolds: As I recall he mobilized just about every body in state government on these responses. Which was —

Kiningham: This was outreach—

Reynolds: —very impressive.

Kiningham: I was impressed with that. I still don't think that's one of his major achievements. But as Governor, he did offer leadership and guidance and input. I think Jim Edgar could be remembered as a fiscal achiever even though people didn't like the fact that he made a temporary tax permanent. Because he was able to balance the Illinois budget and he controlled spending.

But, and this is what I think he'll be remembered for in history many years from now, he should also be considered one of the great governors for land reclamation, preservation and recreation. If I can just take a moment to share a few thoughts. Fifteen thousand, five hundred seventy-four acres acquired for lakes, fishing, hunting, horse and walking trails today in central Illinois, then known as Site M; a power plant site that was purchased I think from Commonwealth Edison in Chicago, it's the largest state land purchase in the history of Illinois, over 15,000 acres; but, this governor got over 3,000 acres added to the Cache River down in southern Illinois; land was protected along the Rock River; focus was made to protect areas along the Illinois and the Mississippi Rivers. This Governor Edgar worked to save 19,000 acres of land near Joliet, the federal ammo plant up there that is now protected. He was very supportive of that. Now that's not state property. Edgar also won protection of a thousand acres near Danville in Vermilion County in eastern Illinois along the Little Vermilion River. A mean, that's just the sampling of what he and his staff of people in that area were able to accomplish. That's a legacy of Illinois that will preserve some of our state for future generations.

Reynolds: We've talked about all of the sort of significant issues of his administration. How did he get coverage on all of these issues? Did he have a very friendly relationship with the press? Did he openly court them on many of these issues? You've already said that he was very accessible. Did they have a

certain way that they promoted these sorts of issues and got the attention that they needed, that you thought was unique?

Kiningham: Well, we will talk about some of his staff a little bit later, but he had some very key people that had good relationships with the State House press corps. Now, you've got to remember, I was vice president of the state house press corps, the Illinois Legislative Correspondents' Association. Over 22 bureaus filing daily reports on state government with a governor who often times lived and worked in Springfield as opposed to some other governors which we'll talk about another time. He seemed comfortable with the State House press corps, that's the Illinois Legislative Correspondents Association. He was willing to give access. He was willing to answer any question. I don't think he openly courted the media, but—

Reynolds: Not Jim Thompson's style.

Kiningham: No, Jim Thompson would come up into the press room and, shall we say, have a refreshment on occasion. But Jim Edgar was willing to do the half hour radio shows with me and take live call-ins on WGN and other places and he had experienced what we call press secretaries. Now they dealt with all media but he had media aides with lots of State House experience and press room experience. And the press room, you had AP and UPI at the time, Associated Press and United Press International, chunking out stories competing. You had the *Tribune*, the *Sun-Times*, you know. We were losing St. Louis and Chicago papers but we still had a lot of news coverage rolling out of the Capitol because you had a governor there doing things in the Capitol city and so they allowed for issues to be addressed swiftly and cut to the quick if there was controversy. This is probably a governor that didn't go to Chicago as often as some of his successors.

Reynolds: During his administration he became known as "Governor No" and some of the characterizations of his administration was he had trouble mobilizing public support for many of his policies, that he really didn't use the bully pulpit very effectively. Back to that discussion about the trade-off between property taxes and the commission and he put a lot of time and effort into that and never really got that done. Was that your impression that he had trouble mobilizing public support for many of the things that he did?

Kiningham: He was in a challenging time. There's always a lot on a governor's plate in every area of government. I thought he answered questions directly, I think with brevity, and very little politicking per se when he had news conferences and met with the media. How you get the word out to the public, we were in a changing media era. You can go to the talk radio shows and do those, you can share with the listener, you can do the television talk shows, you can go to the newspapers and talk to the editors and reporters. I don't think he had a bully pulpit, I think he had a staff that did a lot of outreach and really, when push comes to shove it—

Reynolds: It kind of wasn't his style, was it?

Kiningham: That's right.

Reynolds: Preach to the public.

Kiningham: He was not a preacher. But he would listen and then his staff would take those issues to the lawmakers and see what they could accomplish. I think his legislative accomplishments which always weren't agreeable to both parties ended up with budget funding and agency priorities that were met.

Reynolds: The "Governor No" image actually probably helped him with the public at large—

Kiningham: I think there's some truth to that.

Reynolds: —who wanted some sort of a different direction from the Jim Thompson era of a guy who was out there promising all sorts of things?

Kiningham: But Jim Edgar was able to accomplish a lot, too.

Reynolds: During his two terms did your coverage suggest that there was an increasing level of scandal related to behavior regarding these gifts that were given? I know there was a laptop computer discussed and there were many gifts that were involved with contractors like MSI. There was also that tollroad authority land deal that was a fundraiser for him. Did you sense that toward the end of his term—because the money that's needed to run for governor—that this kind of activity started to increase?

Kiningham: I think reporters were looking for everything they could find; they always are in every administration. I don't care if it's the Secretary of State's office or the governorship, you're looking, looking, looking. You're always it seems going to have someone somewhere looking, looking for money, money and wheels and deals. Now I didn't believe there was an increasing level of scandal here in this administration compared to any other administration that I've covered, or other state elective offices, because when you're a State House reporter you're covering the comptroller, you're covering the Auditor General and what he's finding everywhere and you're reporting that with the listeners and the Auditor General audits all state agencies.

Reynolds: Bill Holland is a tremendously respected guy [Illinois Auditor General, William G. Holland].

Kiningham: And his predecessor was as well. They opened the doors for follow-up stories on what's going to happen here, you know. So there's always some problem; some state employee may be buying private gasoline for his own car on a state credit card. MSI was one of those cases which was a computer company; staffers I don't believe always provided maybe the service they were wheeling

and dealing on, computer support. But while the administrators... I think the staffers of MSI were trying to do their jobs, doing what they were told, because I knew at least one or two of those guys. But the administrators were guys that seemed to playing a "get more money" kind of game and that's always been an issue. Reynolds: So you think that the people that worked for MSI, except for maybe the upper level administrators were honestly trying to provide services to the state?

Kinningham: Oh I think they did. Absolutely.

Reynolds: It's just that wheeling and the dealing at the administrators' level is what caused the problem.

Kinningham: Oh, absolutely. I think MSI services were beneficial to the State. But we're talking about other kinds of deals that I'm not that familiar with, even though the case was handled in Springfield and you know, there were some penalties involved.

Reynolds: There were some people from Public Aid that went on trial. And I believe that Edgar was the first Governor in fifty years to have to testify at that trial.

Kinningham: But I think, too, that he was a Governor who felt compelled to do it. I think he was honest and straightforward to the point, ask your questions. Now he may not have wanted to do it. I don't think any governor wants to get on a stand and have them open up the door to this kind of problem.

Reynolds: I always wondered why he took that laptop computer from the MSI guys. It would seem to me the governor could have anything he wanted, you know? It's always been a little perplexing to me.

Kinningham: Yeah. Did he know them when he said he didn't know them? That's always a question.

Reynolds: I think that he was maybe not aware of the connection between that and what was going on. I don't know. I can't remember now for sure but... Do you remember anything about that toll road authority land deal that involved his close personal associate, I think his name was Hickman?

Kinningham: The irony is those are Chicago area stories and our staff in Chicago would have covered a lot of that and the State House press corps would have been kind of out of the loop on that. We could talk to people that would come down and lobby for the tollway authority and others or the administrators but they're not going to be real candid with you if they're under an investigation. But every year-

Reynolds: Probably didn't get a lot of play downstate, did it?

Kiningham: No, it's a Chicago issue and a lot of media downstate want to know what's happening in our back yards. Just like people that are in Chicago in the metro area want to know what's going on in their backyards, what kind of cooking are we doing today, and what's this and this and this and what's Springfield really doing, do we really care? I can talk to stations all over the state and as a reporter at the State House if there was something in Anna-Jonesboro or something in Rockford or something in the Quad Cities or Danville that was important to that station I would do a report, either directly for them that may not make the network, or I'd put it on the network and let everybody around the state know it if it had a statewide interest. But when you start talking about the tollway in Chicago and who's getting the concrete contracts, I would do a regional IDOT budget story for about six or seven parts of Illinois when that annual budget came out and IDOT said, "Okay, we're going to do this road here and that highway there and we're going to fix that bridge." The major projects always got reported and they were on the network; if anybody had an interest they could always take it off the closed circuit satellite feeds. But sometimes a citizen down in Cairo, Illinois doesn't care a lot about what's going on in Chicago or vice versa. So you've got to be balanced in what you report. When you're covering a governor, if it affects the entire state it's going to get out and get out right now. But if it's a regional story, the regional folks will get it but the folks in the other part of the state may never hear it.

Reynolds: During the Edgar administration's two terms, they were confronted with both Democratic and GOP controlled legislative bodies. Would your coverage suggest—you've touched on this a few times—that the administration was pretty effective at census-building and bi-partisanship and balancing competing interests and compromise rather than confrontational, although there were some pretty serious confrontations over the budget? And also how was the Governor's relationship with, especially the Republican leaders, Pate Philip and Lee Daniels who were strong personalities in their own sense? The final part of that—and I know I'm making this a complicated question—but being a downstate politician, how did that affect his performance as Governor? Did you see some affect because he was a downstater instead of a Chicagoan?

Kiningham: I found that Edgar had a staff that could work very well because of their experience. You've got to remember that Jim Edgar, even though he's a downstater, worked in the Thompson administration with lawmakers. All the lawmakers that weren't freshmen knew Jim Edgar because he'd been a House member and they had some respect for him. I think experience dictates and this is an important thing I've learned as a reporter over 40 some years. When the House, Senate and Governor are all of the same party, ironically, often very little can be accomplished because they all, every sector seems to want something and agreement among same party members cannot always be reached. However, you know I've seen it with the all-Democratic control in the early years and during the two Republican years held control of the House. When Republicans held control of the House, the Senate and Governor Edgar,



he was chief, you know, the GOP chief executive, some pro-business measures were enacted during that period, but just as Democrats in control get pro-labor legislation when they're in all control, the irony was a lot of same party stuff never got achieved. I was really surprised by that as a reporter over the decades. Now Lee Daniels was Republican House Speaker from 1995 to 1997, two years. Otherwise Mike Madigan was Democratic House Speaker before and after and Senate President James Pate Philip was in office from 1993 and beyond Governor Edgar's term. So Pate Philip had a lot of clout; he had a Republican majority and the Democrats had a lot of clout but you almost had a Jim Edgar trying to be a peacemaker. Now he wanted a lot of things.

Reynolds: Between Lee Daniels and Pate Philip?

Kinningham: Yes. Well, really between Mike Madigan and the Democratic House and the Republican Senate. Ironically, you found out they could achieve a lot because there was compromise. Same thing as—

Reynolds: So there's really only two years—

Kinningham: Yeah.—

Reynolds: —where he had Lee Daniels and Pate Philip.

Kinningham: That's correct.

Reynolds: And you're saying that during those two years you got some traditional business-type legislation passed.

Kinningham: Yes, just like the—

Reynolds: But the rest of the period he had to deal with a Pate Philip and a Mike Madigan so he was dealing with both parties.

Kinningham: And they seemed to be able to work pretty well together. They didn't always speak together but, when the budget is so important to everyone in Illinois and, of course, it can affect your tax pocketbook, but it can also take check: if you're a senior you care about services, if you're a handicapped person you care about services, if you are in prison you care about survival sometimes and services. It's a mix of everything, outreach, highways, airports. And so everybody wants something. I assume that's why you get into the legislative politics because you want to help people; ironically, some people want to help themselves. We've seen that, too.

Reynolds: Well, you want to help your constituents first of all.

Kinningham: Yeah. So it's just been an interesting observation that when you've got people of the same party, everybody wants everything and you can't get everything.

Reynolds: And they can't agree on what's important probably.

Kiningham: But ironically, as we speak there's a super majority in both House and Senate and the Governor can probably get almost anything he wants if he can have a working relationship with them, but he's a Governor who reduced the House by fifty-nine members eons ago—

Reynolds: There's some baggage there.

Kiningham: When he was an activist, you know, the Citizens Utility Board kept an eye on things and they couldn't always do what they wanted because they were out looking for citizenship, you know, protection. So there's a lot of things in evolution that come back to haunt you. Reynolds: Especially the Pate Philip-Jim Edgar sort of relationship. Pate Philip as I recall was very chummy with Jim Thompson, sort of boisterous, a little bit flamboyant, more like Jim Thompson's personality; he liked to hang out.

Kiningham: They seemed to get along together—

Reynolds: Well, Jim Edgar on the other hand was the totally opposite personality. Did that cause some clashes between those two?

Kiningham: I think you hit the nail on the head. Jim Thompson could sit and have a drink with you. If you were the Senate President who enjoyed an occasional liquid libation and you went to the Executive Mansion he'd [Jim Edgar] offer you a non-alcoholic drink. Now I was never there for that, other than some of the executive parties when everybody came and they didn't have any alcohol. Now he may have had a special bottle for Senate President James Pate Philip, or others, you know. Mike Madigan was a vegetarian who could eat an apple without ever touching it. And, there're some oddities along the way that you get to observe as a reporter but you don't really share it that much with the everyday listener. Now when we sit and talk about this, some of those things will come to pass.

Reynolds: So you didn't necessarily see examples of Pate Philip's sort of surly personality—

Kiningham: Oh, let me just say, as a reporter—

Reynolds: As a contrast to Jim Edgar who was much more restrained and, yeah —

Kiningham: —Jim Edgar was restrained. Jim Edgar said what he thought and the irony was you could catch him going into the Senate chamber or out of the Senate chamber in the hallway, the short eight foot hallway between his office and the Senate chamber and I covered the Senate for forty years, okay? So Pate Philip is coming out or into his office and if you had a question, if there was some point he wanted to make, he would make it. And sometimes very strongly to the point that you had some out-takes at the next news convention

if you were going to share a few things. Pate Philip was outspoken on issues pro or con that he supported. And if he didn't like something any Governor did or didn't do, he was willing to share it.

Reynolds: Anything more about the legislative process in the Edgar administration? You've said that the staff was very, very good at that and, of course, Edgar being a former legislative aide was pretty good at it himself. So, that seems to be one way to characterize Governors: if they come from the legislature they seem to be really good at that, and the other governors have to do it different ways, sort of. We've kind of gone over this before but I'm going to give you one last chance to talk about this. Were there some particular policy areas that the administration either had extraordinary good or bad impact on the state? We've talked about education, welfare and conservation and some of these other things. Any thing in particular you want to add? An area of policy that the Edgar administration either did very well on or didn't very well on?

Kiningham: Well, I was surprised that Edgar was seeing Amtrak funding, railroad funding for transportation declining from the federal government back in 1996. And so he crafted a multi-year Amtrak train program to help keep passenger service going from Chicago and St. Louis into downstate and upstate and that probably helped a lot of students get to the University of Illinois. It helped people get to and from Springfield and they got a pretty good rate for state workers taking the Amtrak up to Chicago for meetings and stuff like that.

We talked earlier about the McCormick Place expansion for convention and trade shows. I remember from a tourism standpoint nationally, Chicago and Illinois were losing conventions to other huge, there was a period in the '90s when the growth across the country was growing and—

Reynolds: The construction? was really beating them out—

Kiningham: —conventions were moving out of Chicago and they needed to do something. That fight with Chicago Mayor Daley to keep Meigs Field Airport open and then to know later in years that he just shut it. That's an interesting story that could use some perspective. Edgar launched a thing called the Illinois Main Street program back in 1993. That helped over 40 some communities focus on their downtown business issues. It probably gave cities an opportunity to say, "Let's put what we have on the table"; because I think Edgar did some things that were kind of interesting. The one thing I thought was kind of interesting was his work with the Lt. Governor. He really brought the Lt. Governor into the business end of things and let him spend his time going out and doing a lot of work—

Reynolds: Kustra's main assignment was education? Was it also economic development?

Kiningham: Yeah, and I had that noted in my notes because I thought it was kind of interesting and I think he –

Reynolds: Kustra, did he leave early?

Kinningham: Yes.

Reynolds: Through the second term, he left.

Kinningham: He's one of the Lt. Governor's that quit. And, of course, the Illinois Constitution doesn't allow an appointment to be made to fill the position.

Reynolds: Was it about half-way through the second term?

Kinningham: It was in there somewhere and I thought it was important to, oh, shall we say, review some of his roles giving the Lt. Governor power because we know other Lt. Governors sometimes are just in the office. I mean, I still remember Richard Ogilvie's Lt. Governor was of the opposite party and—

Reynolds: Was that Paul Simon?

Kinningham: Paul Simon. They changed the Constitution of 1970 to make you the same party, although they're finding out that sometimes the same party guys don't always agree either.

Reynolds: Well, the Pat Quinn - Blagojevich thing would be another example of that.

Kinningham: I think that is a key right there. But I think Jim Edgar had a lieutenant governor that he really gave a lot of duties to and I thought that was important. I made a note of it and it might be in my notes because, I hadn't typed it out. Bob Kustra helped reform initiatives for the Chicago Public Schools, he helped modernize and upgrade the computer technology for schools and the distance learning network which was very key. But by executive order in 1995, Kustra was appointed as the Governor's Senior Advisor for Economic Development. And that opened the door to try to bring more business and industry to Illinois. Ironically, in 1996, December, a year later, Kustra was appointed chair of the Illinois Board of Higher Education. And then he was also on the Illinois Rural Affairs Council in charge of education, health care and economic development in rural areas.

Reynolds: He became chairman of the Board of Higher Education?

Kinningham: Briefly.

Reynolds: While he was Lieutenant Governor.

Kinningham: I think so. Yes.

Reynolds: Wow.

Kiningham: In 1996. And then the Illinois Rural Bond Bank chairman helping local governments with low interest loans. Edgar also said, “Well, Bob, let’s put you to business so I’m going to make you oversee the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs and chair of the Economic Development Coordinating Council to push Illinois’ business growth. I can almost understand why maybe Bob Kustra said, “Well, you know, I’m going to do all of this, but then I’m going to shoot off and run a university. It’s time to go get a breath of fresh air.”

Reynolds: I think he allowed him to build his resume up quite a good deal.

Kiningham: Oh, wow, absolutely.

Reynolds: I’d say to make him a valuable commodity out on the market. That is interesting. So his use of the Lieutenant Governor’s office would be one of the major things that you think he did.

Kiningham: Absolutely.

Reynolds: Anything in public safety or in, of course, he did some major state agency reorganizations.

Kiningham: He had some really important people in his administration. I remember the Illinois State Police Director, Terry Gainer, from 1991 to 1998. He worked with the media, he was honest, and he was straightforward. I still see him on television escorting Presidents into the House of Representatives.

Reynolds: Is he the Sergeant of Arms, or something?

Kiningham: Yeah. You know, he’s one of the Illinoisans that went on to other good things. But we might talk about some of the staffers that Edgar had because—

Reynolds: Of course, I think in terms of historic preservation, and he was the Governor that came up with the seed money for this place where we’re in right now; I believe that kind of started the ball rolling on that.

Kiningham: Well, there are some important people in that mix, including a certain U.S. Senator.

Reynolds: Well, Mr. Durbin came up with the idea.

Kiningham: Yeah. Dick Durbin really went to the U.S. Senate after Paul Simon in 1997, but you had Susan Mogerman running [the Illinois] Historic Preservation Agency at the time. And you had Mrs. Bill Cellini running the historic, she was like the a —

Reynolds: Chairman of the —

Kiningham: Chairman of the Historic Preservation Agency—

Reynolds: Advisory Board, Julie Cellini

Kiningham: Julie was very active in trying to grow historic preservation and protection. They doubled the size of Abraham Lincoln's New Salem up at Petersburg, Illinois, for example.

Reynolds: During the Edgar years?

Kiningham: Ah, well, actually probably during the Thompson years into the Edgar years.

Reynolds: It was an expansion.

Kiningham: Yeah, and ironically, the original New Salem was given by a newspaper publisher in the 1900's to the Chautauqua Association that bought the land and, you know, the newspaper publisher—

Reynolds: Was it Hearst?

Kiningham: Yah. William Randolph Hearst came out to speak. The history of Illinois is amazing. Here's a Californian coming to Illinois and opening the door to preservation. I've worn a Lincoln hat on occasion, shall we say, but that's a whole other story here at the Presidential Library, okay? But I think Susan Mogerman and Julie Cellini really led the growth of historic preservation.

Now, Brent Manning was with the Illinois Department of Conservation and moved over to Natural Resources and they really were serious about that. Thompson, ironically, had appointed the first U.S. Air Force officer to run the Military Affairs which Jim Edgar really decided needed to be an Army guy. (chuckles) So he put two Army guys back in over the terms. The Department of Revenue, you know if we're going to start talking about agencies. Doug Whitley was the Director of Revenue and very active. Today he's, as we speak, I believe, is the President of the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce.

Reynolds: Toyed with running for Governor which I don't think he has decided?

Kiningham: Oh, no, he's not running for Governor, it's too late. But he was looking at that option. He was one of the group of guys and ladies that I used to hang around with. With Joanne Brown who married Doug Whitley who was Alan Dixon's personal secretary. The irony is when he was married to Joanne Brown, Alan Dixon's personal secretary, when he decided to run for national office. That may have been back in the Thompson era. Well, no, I guess—

Reynolds: Who are we talking about now?

Kiningham: We're talking about Doug Whitley, the Revenue Director working for Jim Edgar, had to go in and ask Edgar if he could vote Democrat in the primary for his wife.

Reynolds: (chuckles)

Kiningham: And Jim Edgar said, "Yes."

Reynolds: His wife? What did his wife run for?

Kiningham: Well, his wife worked for Alan Dixon.

Reynolds: Okay.

Kiningham: And I think Alan might have been running for the U.S. Senate.

Reynolds: I see.

Kiningham: Back in 1992, '93.

Reynolds: That brings up the whole issue of people not being able to vote in the primary their true... That's another issue.

Kiningham: Doug was honest and went and talked to the Governor and Governor Edgar to his credit said, "Go ahead. Family is important." And that's something we might get into, too. But people like Doug Whitley and Terry Gainer and Brent Manning, Susan Mogergerman. Ironically, Rosemary Bombella became Director of the Department of Human Rights. She was a reporter who worked for me, with me, not at the Capitol, but at the local radio station in Springfield, WTAX; she was on our news staff.

Reynolds: Did you see a lot of that? That's kind of a take-off issue here, but you see that an awful lot, people that work for the news media going to work for state government. Did you see a lot of that during your years of lot of the people who worked for you went to work for state government?

Kiningham: Yes. And interns coming through the Public Affairs Reporting Program of now the University of Illinois Springfield, formerly Sangamon State University. Some of them would go, not only in Illinois to work for state government or federal government; one was a White House Press Secretary for a while under a former Governor.

Reynolds: Who was that?

Kiningham: Oh...

Reynolds: Oh, I'm sorry. (chuckles) You knew I was going to ask you that.

Kiningham: The name escapes me, but she worked for the last President.<sup>6</sup>

Reynolds: Oh, yeah.

Kiningham: Ironically—

Reynolds: I can't think of her name either. I can see her though. She's been on TV a lot.

Kiningham: Anyway, you have a lot of reporters and I think when we talk about the Edgar Press Secretaries, we can talk more focused on some of these people. The Executive staff was really kind of, you know, Edgar had some very good people. One example was Kirk Dillard who was going to run for Governor.

Reynolds: He ran in the primary. Came awfully darn close as we know.

Kiningham: He was the Chief of Staff for Jim Edgar in 1991-93. Jim Riley was Thompson's former Chief of Staff, a formal lawmaker, CEO of the Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority in 1994, was a Chief of Staff. You've got Gene Reineke who for eighteen years had been in government and was Edgar's Executive Assistant, Chief of Staff in '95 for three years. Mark Mosele, 16 years affiliated with Edgar helped pass education funding reforms. Howard Peters, a former corrections director and this is an African American, was chief of Staff in '95. Al Grosboll, who was another personal friend of mine, was Edgar's top assistant at the Secretary of State's office; he advised the Governor on environment, natural resources, ag and even education, for all eight years in the Edgar administration as Governor. He was named Deputy Chief of Staff back in 1998.

Reynolds: Was it Ryan that used the super-cabinet people? And Grosboll, did he stay on during the Ryan administration?

Kiningham: I don't think so.

Reynolds: I'm trying to think.

Kiningham: I honestly don't think so.

Reynolds: Seemed like there was a structure of super cabinet people that had clusters of agencies underneath them.

Kiningham: Yeah.

Reynolds: And I think Grosboll was one of those.

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<sup>6</sup>**Dana Maria Perino** is an American political commentator for Fox News. She served as the White House Press Secretary for President George W. Bush from September 14, 2007 to January 20, 2009. Perino obtained a masters degree in public affairs reporting in 1995 from the University of Illinois-Springfield. During her time at UIS, she also worked for WCIA, a CBS affiliate, as a daily reporter covering the Illinois Capitol. *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dana\\_Perino](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dana_Perino).



Kiningham: Al Grosboll? You know, I'm not sure.

Reynolds: I kind of, it's just the—

Kiningham: Here's the Deputy Chief of Staff coming up to the Press Room to visit with me and just shoot the bull. We didn't talk politics. We just talked friendship stuff, family and stuff like that. I never sought to impeach the friendships I had to get news. I might seek their advice and consent on something, but when it came to doing the news I did the news, or my staff did. You got to understand, as the Bureau Chief, I still had a reporter and an intern almost every session and a full time reporter covered the house and many issues and so when you interview somebody that's a bureau chief, I covered the Senate and a lot of the governorship stuff. But I didn't cover every Governor because I liked to delegate the authority. We had a lot of reporters that went on to other places and one them even went to work for George Ryan, who was Jim Edgar's successor because she had a job offer at KMOX in St. Louis and George Ryan's people found out about it and hired her.

Reynolds: The string of his media people starting with, I guess, Mike Lawrence would have been the first one.

Kiningham: Before we go there, let me just mention another reporter, Rosemary Bombella. I might have mentioned her earlier. She was one of my former news reporters; she was named Director of Human Rights, one of the first Hispanics to head a state agency. She was familiar with Springfield and she was friends with a guy named Jim Skilbeck, ironically, back many, many years ago.

Reynolds: In the Thompson administration.

Kiningham: Yeah, Gilbert Ruiz was Director of Department of Financial Institutions. I didn't know him but Edgar named African Americans and Hispanics into governmental agencies. That was a trend we hadn't seen a lot. We saw Jim Thompson do some of that. We had the first woman director of Ag, EPA, Bureau of the Budget, Chief Legal counsel. Joan Walters was a name that was very powerful back from an earlier era and she actually left a job in Seattle, Washington, to return to Illinois to go to work for Jim Edgar.

Reynolds: Budget Director.

Kiningham: Yeah. And she also did some other stuff. She might have headed Public Aid back in 1997, I'm not sure.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Walters joined Governor Jim Thompson's transition team and later as a legislative liaison. In 1981, she was selected by then Secretary of State Jim Edgar to be his Chief of Staff, serving in this capacity until 1986. In 1991 she became Governor Edgar's Budget Director at a time when the state struggled to fill a \$1 billion deficit. After succeeding in that, she later became the Director of Public Aid.

Reynolds: Just to put the minority thing into context. Back to the discussing the campaign with Neal Hartigan, Edgar got tremendous support from the black and Hispanic communities because of problems Neal Hartigan had with those communities. So he probably felt indebted to them to a large degree.

Kiningham: Oh, I think so.

Reynolds: Because of their help in getting him elected.

Kiningham: Well, we can move on now to the Press Secretaries.

Reynolds: You wanted to talk about the Press Secretaries. There was a string of them and some of them are tremendously well known, like Mike Lawrence.

Kiningham: Oh, wow, he's still writing. I still think he's probably one of the best writers. He was a competitor since I'm a radio guy. I always had a station in the Quad Cities and that was Lee Enterprises was a newspaper that he—

Reynolds: Was he a Chicago area reporter or?—

Kiningham: Oh, no he was a Quad Cities kind of guy. Well, Mike Lawrence actually did Lee Enterprises for a long, long time. And then went to the *Chicago Sun Times* as a reporter and left the media in '87 to become Edgar's Secretary, State Public Information Officer. So Mike, I think, was with Edgar for like six and one-half years. And I have a great respect for him. As a matter of fact, he even got me down to speak to his class at the Paul Simon Institute at SIU years ago before he left that. He's back in the Springfield area. Mike Lawrence. Tom Hardy succeeded Mike; he was with the *Chicago Tribune* for like twenty years and was the chief political writer and he took over for Mike back in 1997. You've got press guys that knew the media in Springfield, not how to manipulate us but how to get the word out. They knew the doors to open, Dan Egler, thirteen years of statehouse bureau chief in Springfield, twenty-one years with the *Chicago Tribune*, Gary Mack radio-TV electronics media guy from the Illinois Information Service. He'd been the Secretary of State PIO and Deputy Press Secretary for Governor Edgar. And, as we speak, has just recently lost his wife, but he's still active. You know, here's a radio-TV guy that had good relations with the electronics industry, radio television, through the Illinois News Broadcasters Association; highly respected. Eric Robinson who is kind of a lobbyist these days as we speak, had been with WAND television. He was the State Capitol Bureau Chief for awhile and they seem to have lots of those in the TV industry. He joined the staff, I think back in about 1994 and was press secretary in the final months of the Edgar administration. John Weber was a very good political writer over at the *Quincy Herald Whig* and in 1996 he was the speech writer; but you've got some other people that had contacts and influence. Bill Roberts was Governors Chief Legal Officer back in 1995. He was a good chili cook and I used to do Chili Cook-offs. My dad was the co-founder of the state event.

Reynolds: He was the States Attorney here in Sangamon County.

Kiningham: Yeah. He was a former Sangamon County States Attorney and a former U.S. Attorney in the U.S. Central District of Illinois which was southern Illinois. But you had other people from Springfield. You had Janis Cellini, Personnel and Labor, and Bill Cellini was highly regarded at that time for his lobby work. And this was a family member. George Fleischli of Natural Resources, Ken Zehnder, Government Appointments. Those are some names that jump out. These were people that you ran into, you said “hi” to; you might have a question once in a while, but you didn’t work with them every day. But, you know, if you’re out —

Reynolds: Did they have the freedom to answer questions?

Kiningham: Oh, yeah. They didn’t have the restrictions of later administrations. And, a lot of times, they had respect for the administration. So, if there was something they weren’t going to tell you, they weren’t going to tell you. But as a reporter working around thousands of people, you get to know your contacts and you know how to find out answers often.

Reynolds: Getting close to the end of my questions here, and there’s one big question I wanted to ask you about. A lot of times you read about Edgar and people are amazed at his knack for timing, his luck. Of course, during his administration even though he came in with a financial crisis, the national economy boomed during his administrations. He got appointed to the Secretary of State’s Office, one of the most prized political positions in the State, he had tremendous mentors in Jim Thompson and Russell Arrington, and Robert Blair when he worked in the legislature. When you look at his entire political career, was he a tremendously lucky guy who just knew the right time to do things, and take advantage of opportunities?

Kiningham: I think timing was important. His experience was very beneficial because he knew the system, he knew the people in the system and they knew him. He was honest, accessible, generally, even whether he agreed or disagreed, I think. He was friendly, knowledgeable, had a very good staff, as we’ve talked about. You know, as a former Governor, after he left office, Jim Edgar came to a news convention, Illinois News Broadcasters Association convention, unbeknown to me. He was a keynote speaker, but he came up to the news convention in Starved Rock and I’m up there with my family. You know I had two sisters-in-law that were reporters in television; this was a number of years ago. But he was present after his speech; he stayed for dinner and then there was an evening charity auction. This is what’s unique about Jim Edgar. They wanted me to dance this little dance I used to do at news conventions occasionally after evening speakers, called the Prairie Chicken and it goes back to a story I did on the plight of the prairie chicken in Illinois. I don’t think we’ve talked about that but it’s something I’d done with past keynote speakers, national reporters and everything else. You get through with dinner

and you go maybe for an evening of chit chat and libation. I once had video, actually played a video, or a 16 millimeter film back in the late '60s, early '70s, of a prairie chicken dancing and I tried to dance it and my engineer was on the floor rolling in laughter. So the Chief Illiniwek one time did a dance at Champaign-Urbana and I said, "Oh, that's nothing." And I'm afraid the prairie chicken came to linger. So I said I—

Reynolds: You came to accept it as something you'd be asked to do on a regular basis.

Kiningham: I think you'll find that even Walter Cronkite did some interesting things at national conventions, okay? They wanted to raise some money for charity and they were willing to pay me to dance. And I said, "No." But I said if U of I Public Affairs Reporting professor Charles Wheeler, who's a former Chicago newspaper statehouse reporter bureau chief and Governor Edgar would demonstrate the dance with me if I could teach them to dance it, would they do it, if we could raise enough money. And they bid it up to over four hundred dollars for charity for a student scholarship and the Governor said, "Yeah, I'll do it." And Charlie said, "Yeah, I'll do it." So we danced the prairie chicken. And I will just say frankly, it was a special moment in my life. It was probably an embarrassing moment for Jim Edgar, but at the same time it benefitted students and somebody got some of the money for a scholarship to go on and do better things.

Reynolds: I'm trying to envision Charlie Wheeler dancing the prairie chicken too.

Kiningham: Charlie Wheeler is an awesome man. I did a mutual radio evening anchor one night at a convention and he started talking about the plight of the prairie chicken on national radio later, a couple of months later, so we actually benefitted. Illinois in its early history was full of prairie chickens; the hunters would go out and have fun shooting them and, of course, they'd bring them home and some of them would eat them. But we kind of abolished with the plow the heritage of the prairie chicken. Now that's more than you need to know; it's an important piece of Illinois history back in the 1800s and Lincoln's era, but you don't hear much about it today. We still have some prairie chickens in southeastern Illinois and it was a good story. But the laughing engineer and then the many years of entertainment later through radio-TV people from Chicago to St. Louis to New York City and California was nothing short of amazing. And to get a Governor to help raise money for charity, a former Governor at this point, and man of the year later twice with the News Broadcasters Association for the work he's done, is pretty amazing.

Reynolds: If you ran in to Jim Edgar today would he want you to mention the prairie chicken?

Kiningham: Well, actually, I've never... I think I may have hinted that I might have a picture available because it was on display in a recent anniversary of the convention. I think he just smiled. Because we were at the State Fair one time

and he was having some watermelon and my brother-in-law was running the stand and let's just say I'm holding a watermelon sign over his head with my wife and there was a nice picture. And the Lincoln Presidential Library has all of these pictures except for maybe the prairie chicken dance. But the one question you haven't asked me is why not a third term for Jim Edgar.

Reynolds: That was going to be my final, although before we do that —

Kiningham: Okay, we're going to keep everybody listening.

Reynolds: I'd like to ask you, which we've done every time, to kind of talk about your assessment of this governor compared to the other governors that you've covered. We've already talked about him as retired, but how would you compare him to Walker, Thompson and, of course, Ryan and Blagojevich, and Ogilvie also which you covered somewhat, where would you put him, rank against those others?

Kiningham: Top drawer. Very accessible, very honest, didn't play a lot of politics, and if there was something that he wasn't going to tell you, he wasn't going to tell you, but he was always very candid. He was accessible. Otto Kerner, I didn't really get to know, but I did get to know his successor and he didn't do any media to speak of.

Reynolds: Sam Shapiro?

Kiningham: Sam Shapiro. You'd see him out on the streets walking Springfield without security or anything and you'd say, "Hi, Sam." "Hi." You know, he didn't really know me either back in those days. So I really kind of got into it with the coverage with Richard Ogilvie. And, of course, I was also the Supreme Court reporter for our network. So I did a lot of judges stuff. Ironically I was married in the Illinois Supreme Court, but that's another story for another time. I will just say, Richard Ogilvie was very inaccessible to the media unless he had a news conference planned. He had some very professional newspaper guys helping him, and he would answer your questions very friendly but business. He did a lot for the infrastructure of Illinois government. There are a lot of benefits that still continue today. Then you get in to his successor, Dan Walker. Dan had a lot of problems but he opened the door of media coverage to get elected. He walked the state. He was not a winner walking.

Reynolds: Sort of the first media-savvy governor.

Kiningham: Yeah, that's right. He really clicked. They were having some fun with the campaign. He was very stern and thorough in his interviews. Not super-personable, okay? But I got my answers. Then you move on to Jim Thompson and he was very media conscious; he knew how to answer short. He was an experienced attorney; he'd handled lots of cases, he'd actually prosecuted Otto Kerner so, he came back in to the system and he knew what to say when he wanted to say it—

- Reynolds: Probably used the media more than any of these. Walker did a lot.
- Kiningham: Walker didn't have the professionalism that Jim Thompson brought in with some of his media guys. I think maybe Jim Thompson may have won the election thanks to the fellow I mentioned earlier...
- Reynolds: Skillbeck?
- Kiningham: Jimmy Skillbeck who never wore suits, was an easy going guy, did his own thing—
- Reynolds: Did he last all four terms? Was he with Thompson throughout?
- Kiningham: Yes. And he did pass away later, but he would always come to the news conventions and work with the media and interact and have a good time. He was the person that probably helped Jim Thompson cope with the electronics media of the day. That was important. While we're talking about Jim Edgar, he had a good newspaper man who knew the ropes in Chicago. And he had some other very good people that knew the doors of the media and we've mentioned those names. You get down to—
- Reynolds: Sounds like it has a lot to do with the staff of these Governors, the people they bring in to their administrations.
- Kiningham: Oh, absolutely.
- Reynolds: In terms of how the media gets to relate with the administration.
- Kiningham: I will just say that as we talk about successor governors, the doors closed on media access. One of my reporters did go to work for Jim Edgar's successor and we'll talk about that in a future interview.
- Reynolds: You know, the thought occurred to me that there seemed to be a development of these very professional experienced people during the Thompson years that spilled in to the Edgar years. Because the Republicans had held the office for so long and it just built sort of minor leagues of these guys coming up into the major leagues and that had a lot to do with the success of the Edgar administration and of the Thompson administration.
- Kiningham: As you saw, the irony was Jim Thompson actually recruited some very key people right out of Jacksonville, Illinois, and one of the universities.
- Reynolds: Riley?
- Kiningham: Oh, Riley and the budget director and some others.
- Reynolds: Was Walters from...No, Mandeville.

Kiningham: Bob Mandeville was amazing and just some very good people. He was able to be on a campaign stop, meet these people and the next thing you know they're working for him. I don't think they were necessarily political activists, but they knew how to do things and do it right. They had a good interaction with the media. When George Ryan became Governor, the door closed on some of the things for budget. I mean, you always got the budget, but they never came and talked to you about it before the actual state of the state or budget address and things like that. We started to see the door close and then Rod Blagojevich came in and there was no door.

Reynolds: Yeah. Ee talk about the lists and lists of really professional people that worked in state government during these administrations and you compare that to the public's image of state government where everybody is a political hack and you realize that that's not really very accurate.

Kiningham: Well, there're committees in the legislature for everything. And their legislative committees paid a little extra money to focus on communications, on telecommunications, on conservation, on agriculture and everything else. And if you've got the good people that know what they're doing... Some of the people that worked for Jim Edgar back in Secretary of State days and governor days are in Washington now doing big jobs, one of them went on to head of the Corn Growers Association nationally for a while. It's just amazing some of the people, some of the ag directors that went on to be U.S. Secretary of Ag.

Reynolds: Block, I believe.

Kiningham: Yeah, John Block and these others over the administrations. Illinois is a good training ground for people that want to move on. But I must say right now with the size of the deficit we have, a lot of people would like for Jim Thompson to come back but—

Reynolds: Or Jim Edgar?

Kiningham: Jim Edgar. But health and family kept him from a third term.

Reynolds: Okay.

Kiningham: We haven't really talked about.

Reynolds: That was my final question because I can recall sitting in a room with a lot of agency people watching his announcement. When he announced that he wasn't running again there were a lot of disappointed people who had quite a stake in him running again.

Kiningham: A lot at stake because, you know, Governor Edgar and his wife, Brenda, I believe, wanted time with their grandchildren. She wanted time with her husband. George Ryan wanted to be Governor. The state—

Reynolds: His age meant that he was waiting and needed to do it.

Kiningham: And that 1995 quadruple bypass probably was one of the major factors, health. Would another term of Governor really stress you out? And we were learning about quadruple bypasses and bypasses and this is 1995. We've come a million miles in medical technology and education since then. But he had successive concerns and some medical challenges. The state was in good financial health and who knew what the future might bring. Do you want to leave on the pinnacle of achievement or do you want another term where you might crash? So why not leave on a high note? I think health and family were key factors and the fact that he wanted to leave on a high note. And I think it's been beneficial to him. He got to go play horses, he got to own a horse or two, he got to do family things in Colorado with the family out there. Those are things that I'm not personally involved with him but ....this thing I think has stopped or something. [Referring to recording device.]

Reynolds: No, it's still going.

Kiningham: It just made a noise. Maybe I —

Reynolds: It's still counting.

Kiningham: It's making interesting noises all of a sudden.

Reynolds: Hopefully, we're all alright. We're almost to the end here so

Kiningham: Well, anyway—

Reynolds: Follow up to that he was seriously considering running for the Senate instead of running for re-election as Governor. Same reasons he probably didn't do that, or?

Kiningham: I think health and family.

Reynolds: Or would the idea of being a Senator since his real talent was as an administrator, I think more than anything else just didn't suit him. DC and all that.

Kiningham: Then you go there to be a freshman.

Reynolds: Yeah.

Kiningham: And, those are big issues because the one thing we haven't talked about are, you had Dick Durbin out there and then you had Carol Moseley Braun briefly and then Peter Fitzgerald did get in in 1999. But it—

Reynolds: Had he run for the Senate that year, he would have run against Peter Fitzgerald in the primary, is that what—



Kiningham: Well, he could have. Fitzgerald might not have run.

Reynolds: Yeah. Certainly if he'd announced.

Kiningham: We don't know what would have happened but I think—

Reynolds: No Peter Fitzgerald, then you wouldn't had the guy that's the prosecutor up in Chicago and think of all the things that have happened.

Kiningham: Well, the prosecutor in Chicago is a different person.

Reynolds: Right. But he appointed him. That's the point I was trying to make. And all the things that had followed from that. It's interesting to think about: if this had happened, this wouldn't have happened and so on and so forth. Okay. Well, anything else, anything we haven't talked about that you want to talk about, or any last comments. This appears to be working so I think we're in good shape.

Kiningham: I think circuit breaker eligibility increased, electronic filing of taxes when it was first enacted under the Edgar administration brought in five hundred thousand people payer filers, phone filing first allowed. I went back and looked at some of the Edgar achievements, the opening of the door into telecommunications and computers and especially getting—

Reynolds: He was right there when all that stuff was happening—

Kiningham: Yeah, and I think he had a staff that maybe did help him. I don't know about MSI and its role in a couple of things. But the overall picture of computerization of Illinois government probably launched with Edgar. It started under Jim Thompson but the first websites—

Reynolds: That's a good point about MSI - at that point state government hadn't been using those types of contractors so the first time around you can find some rough waters with using this type of —

Kiningham: I think there're a lot of contractors doing a lot of things at the time, not just one.

Reynolds: IBM dominated the State of Illinois for years and years and years.

Kiningham: With the big old computers and I still remember the story about a young man in Europe getting a phone call to come back to the state because the computer wasn't working in a particular agency; he came back and he pushed the button Reset and then went back to Europe. I mean there are stories like that that you run across periodically but no one else knew how to do it. And delegation of authority, its teamwork can make a difference and I think we saw Thompson bring in teamwork; I think we saw Jim Edgar make it work. And then we saw

his successor, George Ryan, do a good job in many areas, but there were challenges.

Reynolds: We'll talk about him later. Well, this has been great. Ben, again, we get through an entire administration and we got just a couple more to talk about but I appreciate this and we'll talk again.

Kiningham: Let me just leave a footnote. After seven governors times were a changing and it was time to retire and we'll talk about that soon.

Reynolds: Good deal.

(end of interview #3)